

## The Virgin Mary's Intercessory Aversion of the Divine Wrath: Ante-Chalcedonian Foundations of Medieval Piety<sup>189</sup>

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### Abstract

During the medieval era, one of the most prevalent motifs concerning the mediation of the Virgin Mary was the conviction that she is able to turn away or appease the just anger of God by her maternal intercession. Unfortunately, to date no theologians or scholars have adequately traced this motif's historical origins prior to the late patristic period. To remedy such a shortcoming, this study presents testimonies from eight patristic authors prior to the Council of Chalcedon (451) who hold that the saints in heaven can avert the divine wrath by their prayers. The passages considered are taken from Origen's *Contra Celsum* and *Commentariorum series in Matthaeum*, Ephrem the Syrian's *Carmina Nisibena*, Nectarius of Constantinople's *Sermo de festo S. Theodori*, John Chrysostom's *Orationes adversus Iudaeos* and *Homilia contra ludos et theatra*, Prudentius' *Peristefanon*, Augustine's *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum*, Valerian of Cimiez's *Homiliae de bono martyrii*, and Rabbula of Edessa's *Supplicationes*. These texts, some of which have never before been translated into English, demonstrate that at first, the early Christians believed that the saints, and especially the martyrs, are able to avert the wrath of God. During the fifth century, however, this confidence also began to be referred by some Eastern Christians to the intercession of Mary in particular, as seen in Rabbula's *Supplicationes*.

### Introduction

Those who are even a little versed in modern Mariology know that there is no shortage of treatments of our Lady's immediate moral cooperation within the subjective redemption by means of her maternal intercession or prayer. Prior to Vatican Council II, neo-scholastic theologians produced innumerable monographs, journal articles, and

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<sup>189</sup> All translations of Latin and Greek patristic texts in this study are entirely my own. All translations of Syriac patristic texts are also mine, although I would like to thank Fr. Michael Shami, a newly ordained priest of the Syriac Maronite Church who is laboring towards a doctorate in liturgy from Pontificio Istituto Orientale, for kindly providing some stylistic recommendations concerning them, and for discovering a single inadvertent translation error.

sections of manuals dedicated to various aspects of Mary's intercessory mediation, including its exact nature, extent, efficacy, and basis in divine revelation, as well as the definability of the Virgin's *officium* as the "dispenser of all graces."<sup>190</sup> In recent years, these discussions have been reignited with much fervor by some contemporary Marian theologians.<sup>191</sup> However, one aspect of Marian mediation which has not yet been adequately addressed by Mariologists is the popular medieval (and in some cases, even modern) motif that our Lady's maternal intercession not only obtains graces or favors for the human race, but is also capable of averting or appeasing the divine wrath on behalf of sinners.<sup>192</sup> Even

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<sup>190</sup> To avoid listing all such works, I direct the reader to the excellent bibliographies of B.H. Merkelbach, *Mariologia: tractatus de beatissima Virgine Maria matre Dei* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1939), 309–311, and G.M. Roschini, *Mariologia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 2/1, *Summa Mariologiae: de singulari missione B. Mariae V.* (Rome: A. Belardetti, 1947), 231–233, 394.

<sup>191</sup> Salient works published in English, French, Spanish, Italian, and Latin since 1990 are enumerated by A.I. Apollonio, "Mary Mediatrix of All Graces," in *Mariology: A Guide for Priests, Deacons, Seminarians, and Consecrated Persons*, ed. M.I. Miravalle (Goleta, CA: Queenship Publishing, 2007), 411–412.

<sup>192</sup> Many orators and theologians of the medieval West adhered to this pious belief, e.g., Ambrose Autpert, *Sermo de adsumptione sanctae Mariae* 11, in R. Weber, ed., *Corpus Christianorum: continuatio mediaevalis*, vol. 27B, *Ambrosii Autperti opera, pars III* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1979), 1034–1035; Anselm of Canterbury, *Orationes* 6, in F.S. Schmitt, ed., *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi opera omnia*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1946), 15; Eadmer of Canterbury, *De excellentia Virginis Mariae* 12, in J.P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia cursus completus: series latina* (Paris: Imprimerie Catholique, 1844–1864) [henceforth *PL*], vol. 159, 579–580; Herman of Tournai, *De incarnatione Christi* 11, in *PL* 180.37; Adam of St. Victor, *In assumptione beatae Mariae Virginis* 19–21, in C. Blume and H.M. Bannister, eds., *Liturgische Prosen des Übergangsstiles und der zweiten Epoche: insbesondere die dem Adam von Sanct Victor* (Leipzig: O.R. Reisland, 1915), 327; Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermo in dominica infra octavam assumptionis beatae Mariae Virginis* 1–2, in J. Leclercq and H. Rochais, eds., *S. Bernardi Claraevallensis opera omnia*, vol. 5, *Sermones II* (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1968), 262–263; Aelred of Rievaulx, *Sermo in annuntiatione dominica*, in C.H. Talbot, ed., *Sermones inediti B. Aelredi abbatis Rievallensis* (Rome: Curia Generalis Sacri Ordinis Cisterciensis, 1952), 81–82; Ekbert of Schönau, *Homilia in nativitate beatae Mariae Virginis*, in *PL* 95.1515; Nicholas of Clairvaux, *Sermo in nativitate beatissimae Mariae*, in *PL* 144.740; Philip of Harvengt, *In Cantica Cantorum* 4.5, in *PL* 203.360; Richard of St. Laurence, *De laudibus beatae*

those pre-conciliar Mariological manuals which most detailedly discuss the Mother of God's intercession are seemingly silent concerning this matter.<sup>193</sup> The theological upheavals of the mid-twentieth century brought about by *ressourcement* likewise failed to justly shed light upon this motif; the few figures of *la nouvelle théologie* who even address it unfortunately regard it as a novel and superstitious excess which arose only in the very late patristic East before proliferating in the medieval Latin West.<sup>194</sup>

The failure to explicate how this motif ought to be properly understood within the wider framework of dogmatic theology, as well as to more intensely trace its historical origins, has arguably caused an aperture not only in discussions concerning Mary's mediation among Catholic theologians, but also in how Catholic beliefs concerning the Virgin are perceived by the Church's separated sons and daughters within Protestant communities. A number of contemporary English-speaking Protestant authors, especially of a Reformed persuasion, have taken issue with pious prayers wherein the Mother of

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*Mariae Virginis* 2.5.3, in A. Borgnet and E. Borgnet, eds., *B. Alberti Magni opera omnia*, vol. 36, *De laudibus B. Mariae Virginis libri XII* (Paris: L. Vivès, 1898), 109; Bonaventure, *Sermones de assumptione beatae Mariae Virginis* 3.8, in J.G. Bougerol, ed., *Saint Bonaventure: Sermons de diversis*, vol. 2 (Paris: Éditions Franciscaines, 1993), 666; Conrad of Saxony, *Speculum beatae Mariae Virginis* 7, in Fathers of the College of St. Bonaventure, eds., *Bibliotheca Franciscana ascetica medii aevi*, vol. 2, *Speculum beatae Mariae Virginis Fr. Conradi de Saxoniam* (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1904), 105; Bernardine of Siena, *Sermo de salutatione angelica* 3.3, in Fathers of the College of St. Bonaventure, eds., *S. Bernardini Senensis opera omnia*, vol. 2, *Quadragesimale de Christiana religione: sermones XLI–LXVI* (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1950), 162. Even the humanist Erasmus, in a *sequentia* which he composed for a mass of our Lady of Loretto in 1523, asks her, *Averte iram Dei, ne feriat fulmine noxios*; see C. Reedijk, ed., *The Poems of Desiderius Erasmus* (Leiden: Brill, 1956), 390.

<sup>193</sup> Perhaps the most prominent example is Merkelbach, *Mariologia*, 345–381. He dedicates three *articuli* (consisting of twenty-one *sectiones*) to meticulously explaining, with copious citation of patristic and medieval sources, the Virgin's intercessory cooperation within the subjective redemption, but nowhere treats of this motif.

<sup>194</sup> For a specimen, see H.U. von Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, vol. 2/2, *Die Personen des Spiels: Die Personen in Christus* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1978), 288.

Jesus is said to currently appease or turn away the anger of God.<sup>195</sup> In most cases, their Catholic interlocutors have addressed neither how such language should be rightly interpreted, nor whether it is simply a product of medieval superstition, or rather an ancient motif with a noteworthy patristic background.

In light of the theologian's duty to accurately explain popular Christian piety, especially in our age wherein Catholic practices and beliefs are widely misunderstood, two tasks seem to be of paramount importance. The first is to formulate a hypothesis as to how the Blessed Virgin may be said to appease or avert the anger of God within the subjective redemption; this undoubtedly includes revisiting the anthropopathism of God's "wrath" in relation to His impassibility, the Scriptural texts which describe holy men on earth as averting said wrath,<sup>196</sup> the New Testament texts which teach that Christ propitiates (ἰλάσκειται) God by the merits of His Passion<sup>197</sup> and delivers believers from divine wrath,<sup>198</sup> the distinction between the immediate intercession

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<sup>195</sup> A text to which several Protestant writers have objected is from the third of three *preces in honorem B. Virginis Mariae a perpetuo succursu* which Pope Pius IX indulgenced in 1866: "For if you bring aid to me, nothing will be fearful to me: indeed, not from my faults, because you will obtain for me the pardon of them; nor from the devil, because you are more powerful than the entire host of hell; nor, lastly, from my very Judge, Christ Jesus, because by you entreating, if even one time, He is appeased" (*Acta Sanctae Sedis*, vol. 2 [Rome: Officina S.C. de Propaganda Fidei, 1867], 367: *Si enim mihi opem feres nihil mihi metuendum erit: non quidem a culpis meis, quia tu earum mihi veniam impetrabis; non a diabolo, quia universo inferorum agmine tu potentior es; non denique ab ipso meo Iudice Christo Iesu, quia is te vel semel rogante placatur*). Since it is by no means my intention to become entangled in popular Catholic-Protestant polemics, but rather to provide theologians with an instance of a text with which other Christians struggle, I here abstain from naming such Protestant writers.

<sup>196</sup> Ps 106.23; Ex 32.9–14; Num 11.1–2; 14.11–20; Deut 9.13–20; Job 42.7–10; cf. Gen 18.22–32; Jer 18.20; Ezek 22.30.

<sup>197</sup> Rom 3.25; Heb 2.17; 1 Jn 2.2; 4.10.

<sup>198</sup> Rom 5.9; 1 Thess 1.10; cf. Rom 8.1.

of Christ and the secondary intercession of Mary and the other saints,<sup>199</sup> etc. The second task, on the other hand, is to carefully examine the historical record to discover the exact roots of the motif in question, and to subsequently publish the findings in an appropriate scholarly forum.

In this present study, I shall forego the former task and instead pursue the latter. I shall accomplish this by briefly surveying patristic texts prior to the Council of Chalcedon (451), some of which have never before been rendered into English, which demonstrate that the common medieval motif of our Lady averting God's wrath ultimately has its origins in the third, fourth, and fifth centuries. The first patristic writer whose testimony I shall adduce is the influential Origen, followed by seven other Fathers, namely, Ephrem the Syrian, Nectarius of Constantinople, John Chrysostom, Prudentius, Augustine, Valerian of Cimiez, and Rabbula of Edessa.<sup>200</sup> As the historical data demonstrate, Christians initially believed that the other saints departed, and especially the holy martyrs, are capable of appeasing the Lord by their intercession. During the fifth century, which ushered in the development of a distinct cult of Mary, this belief began to be transferred to the Virgin in particular among some Eastern Christians.

### Origen (ca. 185–254)

Since Origen is arguably the most important figure in the development of ante-Nicene Christianity, it is unsurprising that he is an early explicit proponent of the doctrine of the intercession of the saints. He frequently asserts throughout his works, whether preserved in the

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<sup>199</sup> The seminal late scholastic treatment of this distinction is Robert Bellarmine, *De ecclesia triumphante* 1.17, in J. Fèvre, ed., *Ven. Cardinalis Roberti Bellarmini Politiani S.J. opera omnia*, vol. 3 (Paris: L. Vivès, 1870), 178–179. Francisco Suárez also discusses it on several occasions, e.g., *De oratione, devotione, et horis canonicis* 1.10, in C. Berton, ed., *R.P. Francisci Suarez e Societate Jesu opera omnia*, vol. 14 (Paris: L. Vivès, 1859), 39; *De incarnatione* 26.1, in vol. 18 (Paris: L. Vivès, 1860), 665–666; *De mysteriis vitae Christi* 23.3 (38.4), in vol. 19 (Paris: L. Vivès, 1860), 334.

<sup>200</sup> Only passingly and in separate discussions of the individual patristic works have scholars acknowledged even a few of the passages from these Fathers as teaching that Mary or the other saints are able to avert God's wrath. Moreover, the relevance of most of the texts presented in this study seems to have not yet been explored by scholars, but was instead inadvertently discovered by myself. In any case, I am unaware of any previous attempt to make a connection between these diverse patristic passages, or to gather them together in one place. It is therefore possible that, unbeknownst to me, additional pertinent testimonies from before Chalcedon exist.

original Greek or in Latin translation, that the souls of departed believers continue to pray for the living. For example, in a homily on Jos 13, translated into Latin by Rufinus of Aquileia (ca. 345–411), he expressly states, “I thus believe that all those fathers who have fallen asleep before us fight with us, and assist us by their prayers.”<sup>201</sup> And in his commentary on the Song of Songs, also preserved for us by Rufinus, he similarly remarks, “But if all the saints who have departed this life, still having charity towards those who are in this world, are said to have care for their salvation, and to assist them by their prayers and intervention before God, it will not be unsuitable. For it is thus written in the books of the Maccabees: ‘This is Jeremiah, the prophet of God, who always prays for the people’ [2 Mac 15.14].”<sup>202</sup>

In addition to such passages which speak of the prayers of departed saints more generally, there are also two places where Origen seems to teach that the saints are even capable of appeasing or turning away the anger of the Lord. The first is from his famed treatise against the anti-Christian philosopher Celsus, which he composed in 248.<sup>203</sup> In its final book, when speaking of “all His [God’s] friends—angels, souls, and spirits” (πάντας τοὺς ἐκείνου φίλους ἀγγέλους καὶ ψυχὰς καὶ πνεύματα), he asserts: “For they sense those who are worthy of God’s favor, and they not only become well-disposed to the worthy, but they also lend aid to those who wish to serve the God who is above all, *and they propitiate Him, and with them they pray to and supplicate Him.*”<sup>204</sup> That by “angels,

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<sup>201</sup> Origen, *Homiliae in Iesum Nave* 16.5, in A. Jaubert, ed., *Origène: Homélie sur Josué* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1960), 366–368: *Ego sic arbitror quod omnes illi, qui dormierunt ante nos patres, pugnent nobiscum et adiuvent nos orationibus suis.* See also idem, *Homiliae in Numeros* 26.6.2, in L. Doutreleau, ed., *Origène: Homélie sur les Nombres*, vol. 3 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2001), 258.

<sup>202</sup> Idem, *In Canticum Canticorum* 3.7.30, in L. Brésard et al., eds., *Origène: Commentaire sur le Cantique des Cantiques*, vol. 2 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1992), 564: *Sed et omnes sancti qui de hac vita discesserunt, habentes adhuc caritatem erga eos qui in hoc mundo sunt, si dicantur curam gerere salutis eorum et iuvare eos precibus atque interventu suo apud Deum, non erit inconueniens. Scriptum namque est Machabaeorum libris ita: Hic est Hieremias propheta Dei, qui semper orat pro populo.*

<sup>203</sup> See P. Koetschau, ed., *Origenes Werke*, vol. 1, *Die Schrift vom Martyrium; Buch I–IV gegen Celsus* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1899), xxii–xxiv.

<sup>204</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum* 8.64, in M. Borret, ed., *Origène: Contre Celse*, vol. 4 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1969), 320, emphasis mine: *Συναίσθονται γὰρ τῶν ἀξίων τοῦ παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ εὐμενισμοῦ, καὶ οὐ μόνον καὶ αὐτοὶ εὐμενεῖς τοῖς*

souls, and spirits,” Origen means both angels and deceased saints, is manifest from a parallel text in *De oratione*, where he similarly says, “But not only does the High Priest pray with those who pray sincerely, but also the angels in heaven who rejoice more over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who have no need of repentance [cf. Lk. 15.7, 10], and also the souls of the saints who have fallen asleep before us.”<sup>205</sup> His statement that such beings, when praying to and supplicating God the Father with humans on earth, also ἐξευμενίζονται or “propitiate” Him, is tantamount to an assertion that they placate Him, since ἐξευμενίζω denotes the act of appeasing God or other deities so as to regain His or their favor.<sup>206</sup> Accordingly, we possess in this passage what seems to be the earliest written record of a belief that the saints departed can mollify God on behalf of those on earth.

A second, even clearer text is able to be furnished from Origen’s commentary on Matthew’s Gospel, or, to be more precise, from the greater portion of it which has “survived in an anonymous Latin translation of the late fifth (or early sixth century).”<sup>207</sup> When spiritually interpreting Christ’s words in Mt 24.1–2, Origen makes the following, peculiar remark: “The disciples and other saints, not only then, but also now . . . intercede before the sight of Christ and call upon Christ, so that He might not forsake the human race on account of their sins, but that His wondrous works might move Him more towards forgiveness than their iniquities do towards indignation.”<sup>208</sup> Unlike in *Contra Celsum*, where

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ἀξίους γίνονται ἀλλὰ καὶ συμπράττουσι τοῖς βουλομένοις τὸν ἐπὶ πᾶσι θεὸν θεραπεύειν καὶ ἐξευμενίζονται καὶ συνεύχονται καὶ συναξιούσιν.

<sup>205</sup> Idem, *De oratione* 11.1, in Koetschau, ed., *Origenes Werke*, vol. 2, *Buch V–VIII gegen Celsus; Die Schrift vom Gebet* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1899), 321: Οὐ μόνος δὲ ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς τοῖς γνησίως εὐχομένοις συνεύχεται ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ ἐν οὐρανῷ χαίροντες ἄγγελοι ἐπὶ ἐνὶ ἁμαρτωλῶ μετανοοῦντι ἢ ἐπὶ ἐννήκοντα ἑννέα δικαίοις, οἳ οὐ χρεῖαν ἔχουσι μετανοίας, αἱ τε τῶν προκεκοιμημένων ἁγίων ψυχαί.

<sup>206</sup> See the instances cited in H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon, with a Revised Supplement*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 592.

<sup>207</sup> J.A. McGuckin, “The Scholarly Works of Origen,” in *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, ed. J.A. McGuckin (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 30.

<sup>208</sup> Origen, *Commentariorum series in Matthaëum* 30, in E. Klostermann, ed., *Origenes Werke*, vol. 11, *Origenes Matthäuserklärung II* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1933), 56: *Discipuli ceterique sancti, non solum tunc, sed etiam modo . . . ante conspectum Christi intercedunt et provocant Christum, ut ne deserat genus humanum propter peccata ipsorum, sed magis moveant eum ad indulgentiam opera eius miranda quam ad iracundiam iniquitates eorum.*

“the God who is above all,” viz., the Father, is propitiated, in this passage, the Son is the one whose anger is averted, namely when He is reminded of the *opera miranda* which He performed for sinners while on earth. Although our Lord’s *discipuli* are presented as the primary agents in preventing His indignation even now, Origen expressly allows *ceteri sancti* to perform the same function. Hence, while he nowhere speaks of the Virgin as interceding for sinners or turning away the divine wrath, such later developments do not seem to be contrary to, but rather congruous with, his sentiments.

### **Ephrem the Syrian (ca. 306–373)**

Ephrem, the deacon and poet-theologian of Edessa, is undoubtedly the most significant figure of the entire Syriac patristic tradition, with all Syriac-speaking churches claiming theological descent from him. A theme which recurs throughout several of his genuine hymns is the belief that the resurrected saints will intervene on his behalf at the Last Judgment.<sup>209</sup> Some of these texts speak of the glorified saints in general, such as his seventh hymn on paradise, where he states, “May all the sons of light implore for me there, that our Lord might grant them the gift of one soul.”<sup>210</sup> In other texts, however, he mentions the intercession of certain saints in particular. At the close of one of his hymns on Nisibis, for example, while speaking of three deceased bishops of the city, he remarks, “And I the sinner, who strove to be a pupil of the three: when they will see the Third One [Christ], that He has

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<sup>209</sup> The intercession of the saints not only at the Last Judgment, but also at present, is taught in some of the *Hymni de Abraham Qidunaia* and *Hymni de Juliano Saba* ascribed to Ephrem. The eminent Benedictine orientalist E. Beck doubts whether they are genuine, but concedes that they must have been written either by one of Ephrem’s disciples, or by a disciple of one of his disciples; see Beck, ed., *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrsers Hymnen auf Abraham Kidunaya und Julianos Saba*, vol. 2 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1972), v–xv, esp. viii–x, xiv–xv. The Jesuit I. Ortiz de Urbina, Beck’s contemporary, is more willing to accept them as authentic, since in his opinion, *spernenda videntur dubia circa genuinitatem hymnorum*; see Ortiz de Urbina, *Patrologia syriaca*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1965), 68.

<sup>210</sup> Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymni de paradiso* 7.25, in Beck, ed., *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrsers Hymnen de Paradiso und Contra Julianum*, vol. 1 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1957), 31. See also *ibid.* 6.19, in Beck, 23.



closed the door of His wedding-chamber, may the three implore for me, that He might open His door to me a little!"<sup>211</sup>

Ephrem is likewise convinced that the saints, by praying for him on the Last Day, will appease the Lord's justice. While speaking of those saints whose relics were at Nisibis, he passingly but explicitly asserts, "For my advocates are good and bold, articulate and many, and in court they are able to calm the Plaintiff, and save the guilty one."<sup>212</sup> That he does not refer this hope of being spared from condemnation to only some saints, but rather to them all, is evident from the close of another Nisibene hymn: "Blessed is he who is mindful of that hour, in which there will be trembling and quivering, in which the pains of wrath will strike at the wicked. May all the righteous ones implore for me in that moment!"<sup>213</sup> Although our Lady is not mentioned by name,<sup>214</sup> she is undoubtedly included among all the saints of whom Ephrem speaks, especially since he elsewhere extols her very loftily as the sinless Mother of God's Son.<sup>215</sup> Later developments in the Syriac tradition concerning the ability of the Virgin in particular to obtain the deliverance of sinners from God's wrath,

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<sup>211</sup> Idem, *Carmina Nisibena* 14.25, in Beck, ed., *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Carmina Nisibena (Erster Teil)*, vol. 1 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1961), 40.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid. 43.10, in Beck, ed., *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Carmina Nisibena (Zweiter Teil)*, vol. 1 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1963), 42–43.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid. 49.17, in Beck, 68.

<sup>214</sup> There are a few Syriac texts attributed to Ephrem which teach that Mary in particular will also pray for believers. One is *Paraeneses ad poenitentiam* 34, in G.S. Assemani, ed., *Sancti patris nostri Ephraem Syri opera omnia*, vol. 3 (Rome: Typographia Pontificia Vaticana, 1743), 487, where the author asks God to receive the worship of believers and to have mercy "by the prayer of Your Mother and all Your saints." Another is *Sedra de probis et iustis*, in T.J. Lamy, ed., *Sancti Ephraem Syri hymni et sermones*, vol. 3 (Mechelen: H. Dessain, 1889), 236; its author, when enumerating those saints from Scripture with whom he wishes to stand at the Resurrection, concludes his list with "Mary, the Mother of Christ, who bore the unblemished fruit: by her prayer may souls be guarded from injuries." However, such passages are of doubtful authenticity and still await adequate scholarly attention.

<sup>215</sup> For one of the best critical treatments of Ephrem's genuine Mariology, including his belief in Mary's divine maternity, perpetual virginity, role as the New Eve, and immunity from sin, see Ortiz de Urbina, "La Virgine nella teologia di S. Efreem," in *Orientalia Christiana analecta*, vol. 197, *Symposium syriacum 1972* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1974), 65–104. A brief summary of much of the same material may also be found in idem, *Patrologia syriaca*, 80–81.

as seen in the fifth-century liturgical hymns of Rabbula of Edessa, may therefore be rightly viewed as having some continuity with the great Syrian Doctor's teaching.

### Nectarius of Constantinople (d. 397)

Nectarius served as the archbishop of Constantinople from 381 to 397, between the reigns of Gregory Nazianzen and John Chrysostom. Despite having presided over the First Council of Constantinople (381), he, unlike his illustrious predecessor and successor, was not a prolific homilist or writer. In fact, only one Greek work survives from him, namely, a sermon on the feast of the martyr Theodore Tyro,<sup>216</sup> of which there unfortunately exists neither a critical edition nor an English translation. This obscure and oft-neglected text is relevant, however, to the matter of the saints appeasing the Lord by their prayers, since at the end of the sermon, Nectarius exhorts his congregation to thus invoke Theodore with him:

O glory of martyrs and adornment of saints, O gift of God indeed, O guard and most unbreakable champion of believers, may you not forget our destitution and low estate! But interceding for us forever, may you not grow weary, O all-wonderful one; neither may you look away while we are assailed every day by the spiritual Julian of our souls [viz., Satan], the enemy who both then and now is the author of evil, O all-honored one. For we have believed you to live even after death, as the Lord said: "He who believes in Me, even if he dies, will live" [Jn 11.25]. But you, not simply having believed, but also having died for Him, O martyr worthy of praise, live an ageless and unending life in God. Therefore, as if living in Christ, and more closely standing by Him, *by prayers make Him propitious to your servants*, so that having been rescued from calamities here through you, we might also attain good things there, by the grace and benevolence of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . .<sup>217</sup>

<sup>216</sup> See O. Bardenhewer, *Geschichte der altkirchlichen Literatur*, vol. 3, *Das vierte Jahrhundert mit Ausschluss der Schriftsteller syrischer Zunge* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1923), 361.

<sup>217</sup> Nectarius of Constantinople, *Sermo de festo S. Theodori* 23, in J.P. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae cursus completus: series graeca* (Paris: Imprimerie Catholique, 1857–1866) [henceforth *PG*], vol. 39, 1837–1840, emphasis mine: Ὁ μαρτύρων ἀγλαΐσμα καὶ ἀγίων ὠραΐσμος, ὃ Θεοῦ δῶρον ὡς ἀληθῶς, ὃ φύλαξ καὶ πρόμαχε πιστῶν ἀρράγεστατε, τῆς ἡμῶν μὴ ἐπιλάβῃ πτωχείας καὶ

In this text, Nectarius envisions Theodore as standing at Jesus' side to perpetually intercede for the faithful; this is similar to a remark made by Gregory of Nyssa in a sermon which he also delivered on Theodore's feast in the 380s, where he relates that Christians "present a petition to the martyr to intercede, invoking him as a bodyguard of God, as one who, when called upon, receives gifts and grants them whenever he wishes."<sup>218</sup> This passage is also the first in which a Father refers to believers as the δούλοι, i.e., "servants" or "slaves," of a particular saint, though similar language is soon after used by Paulinus of Nola (ca. 353/354–431) to describe the supplicants of the martyr Felix.<sup>219</sup> Most peculiar, however, is Nectarius' final petition, namely, "By prayers make Him propitious to your servants" (ἴλεων τοῦτον ταῖς λιταῖς τοῖς δούλοις σου ποιήσον). It follows from these words that it is Theodore's prayers

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ταπεινώσεως! Ἄλλ' εἰσαιε ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν πρεσβεύων μὴ ἀποκάμης πανθαύμαστε· μηδὲ τῆς καθ' ἐκάστην ὑπὸ τοῦ νοητοῦ τῶν ψυχῶν ἡμῶν Ἰουλιανοῦ, τοῦ καὶ τότε καὶ νῦν ἀρχεκάκου ἐχθροῦ, πολεμουμένης παραβλέψη, παγγέραστε. Ζῆν γάρ σε καὶ μετὰ θάνατον πεπιστεύκαμεν, ὡς ὁ Κύριος ἔφησεν· Ὁ εἰς ἐμὲ, λέγων, πιστεύων, κἂν ἀποθάνῃ, ζήσεται. Αὐτὸς δὲ οὐχ ἀπλῶς πιστεύσας, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ θανῶν, ἀξιούμνητε μάρτυς, ζῆς ἐν Θεῷ ζῶν ἁγίῳ καὶ ἀτελεύτητον. Ὡς οὖν ἐν Χριστῷ ζῶν, καὶ αὐτῷ πλησιέστερον παριστάμενος, ἴλεων τοῦτον ταῖς λιταῖς τοῖς δούλοις σου ποιήσον, ὡς ἂν διὰ σοῦ τῶν ἐνθένδε ἀπαλλαγέντες ἀνιάρῶν, καὶ τῶν ἐκεῖθεν ἀγαθῶν ἐπιτύχωμεν, χάριτι καὶ φιλανθρωπίᾳ τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. . . .

<sup>218</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Sermo de S. Theodoro*, in G. Heil et al., eds., *Gregorii Nysseni opera*, vol. 10/1, *Gregorii Nysseni sermones, pars II* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 63–64: . . . τῷ μάρτυρι τὴν τοῦ πρεσβεύειν ἰκεσίαν προσάγουσιν, ὡς δορυφόρον τοῦ θεοῦ παρακαλοῦντες, ὡς λαμβάνοντα τὰς δωρεὰς καὶ ταύτας παρέχοντα ὅταν ἐθέλῃ επικαλούμενος.

<sup>219</sup> See Paulinus of Nola, *Natalicia* 1.10–14, in F. Dolveck, ed., *Corpus Christianorum: series latina* [henceforth *CCSL*], vol. 21, *Paulini Nolani carmina* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 293; *ibid.* 2.5–7, in Dolveck, 296. References to the faithful as the "servants" or "slaves" of the Virgin Mary begin to appear during the fifth and early sixth centuries, as evidenced by Rabbula of Edessa (see the quotation corresponding to footnote 83 below) and Romanus the Melodist, the latter of whom addresses Mary by saying: "Hail, the hope of your servants; hail, protection of the orthodox" (*Cantica* 13.13, in J. Grosdidier de Matons, ed., *Romanos le Mélode: Hymnes*, vol. 2, *Nouveau Testament (IX–XX)* [Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1965], 146: Χαῖρε, ἡ ἐλπὶς τῶν οἰκετῶν σου· χαῖρε, προστασία ὀρθοδόξων; cf. T. Koehler, "Servitude (saint esclavage)," in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique*, vol. 14, *Sabbatini–System* [Paris: Beauchesne, 1990], 730).

which propitiate or placate Christ, which, in turn, results in believers being rescued from calamities through him. When one also considers that the phrase “make propitious” is often used to denote the appeasement of wrath,<sup>220</sup> it seems likely that Nectarius here intends to convey that the martyr is able to accomplish the latter.

### John Chrysostom (ca. 347–407)

The Jesuit patrologist and historian D. Pétau, when discussing the patristic evidence for the Catholic doctrine that the saints currently intercede for those on earth, notes that “Chrysostom frequently produced innumerable and clear testimonies of the same mediation of the saints.”<sup>221</sup> The famed archbishop of Constantinople, who composed more extant works and exercised more posthumous influence than any other individual Greek Father, speaks of the faithful being aided by the martyrs’ prayers (εὐχαί),<sup>222</sup> of the martyrs intervening before the King of heaven to obtain blessings for the living,<sup>223</sup> of the martyrs and other saints being “partakers of prayers” (κοινωνοί τῶν εὐχῶν),<sup>224</sup> and of even the emperor supplicating the saints “to be his patrons before God” (αὐτοῦ προστῆναι παρὰ τῷ Θεῷ).<sup>225</sup> Chrysostom’s confidence in the postmortem intercession of the saints is most strongly expressed at the conclusion of

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<sup>220</sup> See the instances below from John Chrysostom, in footnotes 45 and 47.

<sup>221</sup> D. Pétau, *De incarnatione* 14.10, in J.B. Fournials, ed., *Dogmata theologica Dionysii Petavii e Societate Jesu*, vol. 7 (Paris: L. Vivès, 1867), 100: *Chrysostomus innumera, et praeclara ejusdem sanctorum μεσστείας testimonia passim edidit*. During the late fourth and early fifth centuries, belief in the postmortem, pre-resurrection intercession of the saints (especially the martyrs) was nearly ubiquitous among both the Greeks and Latins, as evidenced by the works of Cyril of Jerusalem, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory Nazianzen, Ambrose, Gregory of Nyssa, Rufinus of Aquileia, Asterius of Amasea, Jerome, Sulpicius Severus, Augustine, Paulinus of Nola, Prudentius, Gaudentius of Brescia, Maximus of Turin, Theodoret of Cyrrhus, Leo the Great, etc. Pétau, 97–109 remains one of the best surveys of the patristic testimonies.

<sup>222</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilia de S. Pelagia virgine et martyre* 4, in PG 50.584; idem, *Homilia in S. Ignatium martyrem* 5, in PG 50.596; idem, *Homiliae de Maccabeis* 2.2, in PG 50.626.

<sup>223</sup> Idem, *Homilia in SS. Iuveninum et Maximum martyres* 3, in PG 50.576.

<sup>224</sup> Idem, *Homilia de S. Meletio* 3, in PG 50.520; idem, *Homilia dicta postquam reliquiae martyrum* 3, in PG 63.472.

<sup>225</sup> Idem, *Homiliae in epistulam secundam ad Corinthios* 26.5, in PG 61.582.

his homily on the feast of the martyrs Domnina, Bernice, and Prosdoce, which he delivered while a priest at Antioch in April 391:<sup>226</sup>

Perhaps much longing for these saints has come to pass in you; with this ardor, let us therefore prostrate ourselves before their relics, let us embrace their tombs. For even the tombs of the martyrs have much power, just as the bones of the martyrs have much strength. And not only on the day of this feast, but on other days also, let us frequent them, let us invoke them, let us ask them to become our patrons. For they have much boldness of speech, not only while alive, but also while deceased, and much more while deceased. For now they bear the marks of Christ; displaying these marks, they are able to persuade the King of anything.<sup>227</sup>

There are, moreover, two passages in John's works where he manifests a belief that the saints' mediation is even capable of averting the wrath of God. The first is found in his eighth oration against the Jews, which he delivered in September 387 at Antioch<sup>228</sup> for the purpose of preventing Christians from associating with, and hence being potentially converted by, the Jews of that city.<sup>229</sup> In it, he warns those afflicted by

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<sup>226</sup> As to this homily's dating, see G. Rauschen, *Jahrbücher der christlichen Kirche unter dem Kaiser Theodosius dem Grossen* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1897), 525.

<sup>227</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilia de SS. Bernice et Prosdoce martyribus* 7, in *PG* 50.640: Τάχα πολὺς ὑμῖν ἐγένετο πόθος τῶν ἁγίων ἐκείνων· μετὰ τούτου τοίνυν τοῦ πυρὸς προσπέσωμεν αὐτῶν τοῖς λειψάνοις· συμπλακῶμεν αὐτῶν ταῖς θήκαις· δύνανται γὰρ καὶ θῆκαι μαρτύρων πολλὴν ἔχειν δύναμιν, ὥσπερ οὖν καὶ τὰ ὀστᾶ τῶν μαρτύρων πολλὴν ἔχει τὴν ἰσχύν. Καὶ μὴ μόνον ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῆς ἑορτῆς ταύτης, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν ἑτέραις ἡμέραις προσεδρεύωμεν αὐταῖς, παρακαλῶμεν αὐτὰς, ἀξιῶμεν γενέσθαι προστάτιδας ἡμῶν· πολλὴν γὰρ ἔχουσι παρῤησίαν οὐχὶ ζῶσαι μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τελευτήσασαι· καὶ πολλῶ μᾶλλον τελευτήσασαι. Νῦν γὰρ τὰ στίγματα φέρουσι τοῦ Χριστοῦ· τὰ δὲ στίγματα ἐπιδεικνύμεναι ταῦτα, πάντα δύνανται πείσαι τὸν βασιλέα.

<sup>228</sup> See W. Pradels et al., "The Sequence and Dating of the Series of John Chrysostom's Eight Discourses *Adversus Iudaeos*," *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 6/1 (2002): 106.

<sup>229</sup> It should go without saying that the antisemitic sentiments expressed by Chrysostom, which arose in a specific historical context, are altogether repudiated by both myself and the modern Magisterium; see Vatican Council II, *Nostra Aetate* 4, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, vol. 58 (Rome: Typi Polyglotti Vaticani, 1966), 742–743.

illness to not run off to synagogues and seek cures from Jewish doctors, but instead to seek the assistance of the martyrs: “And so, whenever you perceive God punishing you, do not have recourse to His enemies, the Jews, lest you should provoke Him more, but to His friends, the martyrs, the saints, who are well-pleasing to Him and have much boldness of speech before Him.”<sup>230</sup> The martyrs’ “boldness of speech” (παρρησία) of which Chrysostom speaks is a term frequently used by the Greek Fathers to denote the influence which the martyrs and other saints enjoy in God’s presence, and which they can employ to impetrate favors for those on earth.<sup>231</sup> It follows from the parallel structure of this text that the martyrs, using such παρρησία, are thereby able to put an end to the punishment of God; that is, if having recourse to His enemies provokes Him more, then having recourse to the holy martyrs, who are His well-pleasing and influential friends, must have the opposite effect, namely, of placating Him.

The second relevant text is from his *Homilia contra ludos et theatra*, which he delivered while the archbishop of Constantinople in July 399.<sup>232</sup> The occasion of the homily is a recent devastating storm and

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<sup>230</sup> John Chrysostom, *Orationes adversus Iudaeos* 8.7, in PG 48.937: Καὶ σὺ τοίνυν, ὅταν ἴδῃς τὸν Θεὸν σε κολάζοντα, μὴ πρὸς τοὺς ἐχθροὺς αὐτοῦ καταφύγῃς τοὺς Ἰουδαίους, ἵνα μὴ μᾶλλον αὐτὸν παροξύνῃς, ἀλλὰ πρὸς τοὺς φίλους αὐτοῦ, τοὺς μάρτυρας, τοὺς ἁγίους, καὶ εὐηρεστικώτας αὐτῷ καὶ πολλὴν ἔχοντα πρὸς αὐτὸν παρρησίαν.

<sup>231</sup> For instances in Chrysostom’s own writings, see some of the places mentioned above, to wit, *Homilia de S. Meletio* 3, in PG 50.520; *Homilia in SS. Iuveninum et Maximum martyres* 3, in PG 50.576; *Homilia de SS. Bernice et Prosdoce martyribus* 7, in PG 50.640. For salient examples in other Greek works from the late fourth and fifth centuries, see Gregory of Nyssa, *Sermo de S. Theodoro*, in G. Heil and et al., eds., *Gregorii Nysseni opera*, vol. 10/1, *Gregorii Nysseni sermones, pars II* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 70–71; Asterius of Amasea, *Homiliae* 10.4, in C. Datema, ed., *Asterius of Amasea: Homilies I–XIV* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 137; Theodoret of Cyrillus, *Historia religiosa* 8.15, in P. Cavinet and A. Leroy-Molinghen, eds., *Théodoret de Cyr: Histoire des moines de Syrie*, vol. 1 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1977), 402–404; *ibid.* 18.4, in vol. 2 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1979), 56; Ephraem Graecus, *Encomium in martyres*, in K.G. Phrantzoles, ed., *Ὅσιον Ἐγραμὶ τοῦ Σύρον ἔργα*, vol. 7 (Thessalonica: To Perivoli tis Panagias, 1998), 181.

<sup>232</sup> See J. Pargoire, “Les homélies de saint Jean Chrysostome en juillet 399,” *Échos d’Orient* 3/3 (1900): 155–157; W. Mayer, “‘Les homélies de s. Jean Chrysostome en juillet 399’: A Second Look at Pargoire’s Sequence and the Chronology of the *Novae Homiliae* (CPG 4441),” *Byzantinoslavica* 60/2 (1999): 273–303, esp. 279–284, 286–287, 290, 296, 302.

flood which occurred after the city's inhabitants dared to attend theatres and hippodrome games on a feast day. Chrysostom interprets the former disaster to be an outpouring of God's wrath in retribution for the latter offense, saying, "How shall we be able to make God propitious from now on? How shall we reconcile with Him who is angry? Three days earlier, a deluge and rain fell down, sweeping away everything, snatching the food of laborers from their very mouth (so to speak), flattening crops as hair, but ruining all things by an abundance of water."<sup>233</sup> However, John then subjoins the solution, stating that God's wrath was put to an end after the city had recourse to the patronage of the apostles: "There were litanies and petitions, and our entire city rushed like a torrent into the places of the apostles, and *we took as advocates holy Peter and blessed Andrew, the pair of the apostles, and Paul and Timothy*. After these things, *when the wrath was ended*, we, having both crossed the sea and dared the waves, rushed upon the princes, Peter the foundation of the faith and Paul the vessel of election, celebrating a spiritual festival."<sup>234</sup> The import of this passage is clearly that it was the apostles, invoked as the city's "advocates" (συνηγόροι), who caused an end to God's wrath, in thanksgiving for which the people held a festival honoring Peter and Paul across the Bosphorus.<sup>235</sup> Hence, although the Virgin Mary is nowhere

<sup>233</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilia contra ludos et theatra* 1, in PG 56.265: Πῶς δυνησόμεθα τὸν Θεὸν λοιπὸν ἴλεω ποιῆσαι; πῶς καταλλάξαι ὀργιζόμενον; Πρὸ τριῶν ἡμερῶν ἐπομβρία καὶ ὑετὸς κατεβῆγγυτο πάντα παρασύρων, ἀπ' αὐτοῦ τοῦ στόματος, ὡς εἰπεῖν, τὴν τράπεζαν τῶν γηπόνων ἀφαρπάζων, στάχνας κομῶντας κατακλίνων, τὰ ἄλλα ἅπαντα τῇ πλεονεξίᾳ τῆς ὑγρᾶς κατασῆπὼν οὐσίας.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis mine: Λιτανεῖαι καὶ ἱκετηρῖαι, καὶ πᾶσα ἡμῶν ἡ πόλις ὡσπερ χεῖμαρῶρος ἐπὶ τοὺς τόπους τῶν ἀποστόλων ἔτρεχε, καὶ συνηγόρους ἐλαμβάνομεν τὸν ἅγιον Πέτρον καὶ τὸν μακάριον Ἀνδρέαν, τὴν ξυνωρίδα τῶν ἀποστόλων, Παῦλον καὶ Τιμόθεον. Μετ' ἐκεῖνα, τῆς ὀργῆς λυθείσης, καὶ πέλαγος περάσαντες, καὶ κυμάτων κατατολμήσαντες, ἐπὶ τοὺς κορυφαίους ἐτρέχομεν, τὸν Πέτρον τὴν κρηπίδα τῆς πίστεως, τὸν Παῦλον τὸ σκεῦος τῆς ἐκλογῆς, πανήγυριν ἐπιτελοῦντες πνευματικῆν.

<sup>235</sup> It is worth noting that in *Homilia in martyres Aegyptios* 1, in PG 50.694–695, Chrysostom even asserts that the mere presence of the martyrs' relics can avert God's wrath: "But should the common Master be angry at us on account of the multitude of our sins, we shall be able, by bringing forth these bodies, to immediately make Him propitious to the city" (ἀλλὰ κἂν ὁ κοινὸς ἡμῶν ὀργιζῆται Δεσπότης διὰ τὸ πλῆθος τῶν ἀμαρτημάτων, δυνησόμεθα ταῦτα προβαλλόμενοι τὰ σώματα, ταχέως αὐτὸν ἴλεω ποιῆσαι τῇ πόλει). He credits this to "their [the martyrs'] boldness of speech before God" (αὐτῶν τὴν πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν παρρησίαν).

formally mentioned by Chrysostom as someone who can avert the anger of the Lord as an advocate, his predicating such a motif of other saints, i.e., martyrs and apostles, indicates that later developments within the Virgin's cult are *virtually* in agreement with his beliefs.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Although rare, references to Mary's intercession are not altogether absent from texts composed at Constantinople during Chrysostom's lifetime. Gregory Nazianzen, in an oration which he delivered on the martyr Cyprian in 379, relates that when the still unconverted Cyprian attempted to seduce a Christian virgin named Justina, she reacted thusly: "Supplicating the Virgin Mary to aid a virgin in danger, she proposes to herself the remedy of fasting and sleeping on the ground" (*Orationes* 24.11, in J. Mossay and G. Lafontaine, eds., *Grégoire de Nazianze: Discours 24–26* [Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1981], 60: Τὴν Παρθένω Μαρίαν ἰκετεύουσα βοηθῆσαι παρθένω κινδυνευούσῃ, τὸ τῆς νηστείας καὶ χαμευνίας προβάλλεται φάρμακον). Moreover, Severian of Gabala, in a homily which he delivered at the Church of the Apostles in July 400, when an army of Arian Gothic *foederati* was threatening the city, tells his congregation: "A multitude of barbarians is there, a phalanx of angels is here. The angelic army, the choir of prophets, the power of apostles, and the intercessions of martyrs fight for the godly. Do not think that martyrs alone intercede for us; rather, angels also supplicate God in our tribulations . . . . We also have Mary, the holy Virgin and God-bearer, interceding for us. For if an everyday woman [viz., Deborah and Jael in Jgs 4] conquered, how much more does the Mother of Christ confound the enemies of the truth? . . . . We have our Lady, holy Mary the God-bearer; but there is also need of apostles. Let us say to Paul, just as they said then: 'Having passed over into Macedonia, help us' [Acts 16.9] . . . . And what I said before, I also say again: let us invoke Mary, the holy, glorious Virgin and God-bearer; let us invoke the holy and glorious apostles; let us invoke the holy martyrs" (*Homilia de legislatore* 6–7, in *PG* 56.407, 409–410: Ἐκεῖ βαρβάρων πλῆθος, ὧδε ἀγγέλων φάλαγξ. Τῶν εὐσεβῶν ὑπερμαχεῖ ἀγγελικὸς στρατός, προφητῶν χορός, ἀποστόλων δύναμις, μαρτύρων πρεσβεῖαι. Μὴ νομίσης, ὅτι μάρτυρες μόνον πρεσβεύουσιν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν· ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀγγελοι ἐν ταῖς θλίψεσιν ἰκετεύουσι τὸν Θεόν . . . . Ἐχομεν καὶ ἡμεῖς τὴν ἁγίαν Παρθένω καὶ Θεοτόκω Μαρίαν πρεσβεύουσαν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν. Εἰ γὰρ ἡ τυχοῦσα γυνὴ ἐνίκησε, πόσω μᾶλλον ἢ τοῦ Χριστοῦ μήτηρ κατασχνύει τοὺς ἐχθροὺς τῆς ἀληθείας; . . . . Ἐχομεν τὴν δέσποιναν ἡμῶν τὴν ἁγίαν Μαρίαν τὴν Θεοτόκω· ἀλλὰ χρεια καὶ ἀποστόλων. Εἴπωμεν Παύλῳ, καθὼς εἶπον οἱ τότε: Διαβὰς εἰς Μακεδονίαν βοήθησον ἡμῖν . . . . Καὶ ἤδη εἶπον, καὶ πάλιν λέγω· Παρακαλέσωμεν τὴν ἁγίαν ἔνδοξον Παρθένω καὶ Θεοτόκω Μαρίαν· παρακαλέσωμεν τοὺς ἁγίους καὶ ἐνδόξους ἀποστόλους· παρακαλέσωμεν τοὺς ἁγίους μάρτυρας). For this homily's dating, see R.E. Carter, "The Chronology of Twenty Homilies of Severian of Gabala," *Traditio* 55 (2000): 5–6, 17.



**Prudentius (ca. 348–after 405)**

The influential Latin Christian poet Prudentius is an anomaly among the Fathers, in that he was not an ordained cleric of the Church, but rather a lay bureaucrat of the Roman Empire. Around the year 400, he composed *Peristefanon*, a collection of fourteen hymns in honor of martyrs whose shrines he had visited in his native Spain and during a pilgrimage to Rome.<sup>237</sup> These hymns record for us the popular beliefs of the Christian faithful surrounding the cult of the martyrs, and frequently refer to and invoke the martyrs' intercession and patronage for the living. Prudentius variously asserts that the martyrs are patrons whose supplicants always receive their requests,<sup>238</sup> that they see and lend support to their devotees,<sup>239</sup> that they pray for the pardon of our sins,<sup>240</sup> that they are patrons by whose protection whole regions are supported,<sup>241</sup> that they hear all prayers and render those which they deem acceptable,<sup>242</sup> that they have power from Christ to grant what anyone asks,<sup>243</sup> that they bestow gifts from heaven as kind patrons,<sup>244</sup> that they guard and protect both the citizens and visitors of cities,<sup>245</sup> etc.<sup>246</sup> One of the most forceful passages concerning the martyrs' mediation, however, is found near the close of the fifth hymn, where Prudentius thus implores the martyr Vincent:

Be present now, and perceive the suppliant voices of petitioners, you effectual pleader of our guilt before the throne of the Father! . . . Have pity on our prayers, so that Christ, *appeased*, might incline a propitious ear, and not impute all offenses to His own [people]. If we duly venerate the solemn day by mouth and heart, if we are prostrated beneath the joy of your relics, descend to this

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<sup>237</sup> For further information concerning Prudentius' life and the dating of his poetry, see A.M. Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), esp. 6–31.

<sup>238</sup> Prudentius, *Peristefanon* 1.10–23, in M.P. Cunningham, ed., *CCSL* 126, *Aurelii Prudentii Clementis carmina* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1966), 251–252; *ibid.* 2.561–584, in Cunningham, 276–277.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.* 3.211–215, in Cunningham, 285.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.* 4.189–192, in Cunningham, 293.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.* 6.145–147, in Cunningham, 319.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.* 9.95–98, in Cunningham, 329.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.* 11.175–182, in Cunningham, 376.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.* 13.105–106, in Cunningham, 385.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.* 14.1–6, in Cunningham, 386.

<sup>246</sup> See also *ibid.* 10.1–15, in Cunningham, 330; *ibid.* 14.124–133, in Cunningham, 389.

place for a brief time, bearing Christ's favor, so that weighed-down senses might feel an alleviation of forgiveness.<sup>247</sup>

Prudentius here entreats Vincent to listen to and have pity upon the petitions of his supplicants, reminding him of his function as the one who pleads on behalf of sinners before the throne of God (*nostris reatus efficax orator ad thronum Patris*). This exceeds what he states in the fourth hymn, where he presents the eighteen martyrs of Saragossa as a "crowd" (*turba*) which "prays for pardon for our faults" (*lapsibus nostris veniam precatur*).<sup>248</sup> In this instance, Prudentius employs forensic imagery, portraying Vincent as a lawyer who intervenes for believers'

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid. 5.545–548, 557–568, in Cunningham, 312–313, emphasis mine: *Adesto nunc et percipe / voces precantum supplices, / nostri reatus efficax / orator ad thronum Patris! . . . Miserere nostrarum precum, / placatus ut Christus suis / inclinet aurem prosperam / noxas nec omnes inputet. / Si rite sollemnem diem / veneramur ore et pectore, / si sub tuorum gaudio / vestigiorum sternimur, / paulisper huc inlabere / Christi favorem deferens, / sensus gravati ut sentiant / levamen indulgentiae.*

<sup>248</sup> Ibid. 4.189–192, in Cunningham, 293. Several other Fathers contemporaneous with Prudentius similarly assert that the saints pray for the forgiveness of believers' sins, e.g., Ambrose, *De viduis* 9.55, in F. Gori, ed., *Tutte le opere di Sant' Ambrogio*, vol. 14/1, *Opere morali II/1: Verginità e vedovanza* (Milan: Biblioteca Ambrosiana, 1989), 292; Gregory of Nyssa, *Oratio funebris in Meletium*, in G. Heil et al., eds., *Gregorii Nysseni opera*, vol. 9, *Gregorii Nysseni sermones, pars I* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 454; Jerome, *Epistulae* 39.7, in I. Hilberg, ed., *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum* [henceforth CSEL], vol. 54, *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi epistulae, pars I* (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1910), 308.

“guilt,” or more literally, “charge” (*reatus*), in the divine courtroom.<sup>249</sup> As a result of such mediation, Prudentius hopes that Christ will not hold His people accountable for their offenses, but instead be “appeased” or “placated” (*placatus*). Vincent, in turn, will carry a token of Christ’s “forgiveness” (*indulgentia*) to the faithful, provided that they rightly celebrate his feast day. This passage, therefore, is a straightforward testimony for a belief in the ability of the martyrs to placate our Lord. As with the other works surveyed thus far, the fact that the Virgin Mary is not mentioned is of little consequence; if some Latin Christians who flourished at the turn of the fifth century held that other saints can appease God, then surely there is but an accidental novelty in later Christians asserting the same about the Mother of the Savior.

### Augustine (354–430)

The most illustrious of all the Latin Fathers, Augustine never makes reference to the intercession of the Virgin Mary in any of his extant genuine works,<sup>250</sup> though he very frequently teaches that the martyrs currently aid the faithful by their postmortem prayers. On only one occasion does he state that the martyrs “intercede” (*interpellant*) for humans on earth, namely in his sermon on Ps 86 (85 LXX): “Our Lord

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<sup>249</sup> Prudentius elsewhere expects that the martyr Romanus of Antioch will pray for him at the Last Judgment, and thereby rescue him from damnation: “This is the book in the heavenly records, preserving memorials of imperishable praise, to be recited one day by the everlasting Judge, who with equal balance will compare the weights of misdeeds and the abundances of rewards. I wish that I, among the flocks of goats to the left as I shall be, might be picked out from afar, and that by him [Romanus] praying, the most good King might say: ‘Romanus prays. Bring this goat over to Me; may he be a lamb to the right, dressed in wool’” (*Peristefanon* 10.1131–1140, in Cunningham, 369: *Hic in regestis est liber caelestibus / monumenta servans laudis indelebilis / relegendus olim sempiterno iudici, / libramine aequo qui malorum pondera / et praemiorum comparabit copias. / Vellem sinister inter haedorum greges / ut sum futurus, eminus dinoscerer / atque hoc precante diceret rex optimus: / “Romanus orat, transfer hunc haedum mihi; / sit dexter agnus, induatur vellere”*).

<sup>250</sup> All of the works once attributed to Augustine which contain references to the Virgin’s intercession are in fact by later authors. For example, the *Sermo de assumptione sanctae Mariae*, which enjoyed widespread medieval popularity and is printed among Augustine’s *spuria* in *PL* 39.2129–2134, is actually a production of Ambrose Autpert, an eighth-century Frankish Benedictine; a critical edition of the sermon may be found in R. Weber, ed., *Corpus Christianorum: continuatio mediaevalis*, vol. 27B, *Ambrosii Autperti opera III* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1979), 1027–1036.

Jesus Christ still intercedes for us; all the martyrs who are with Him intercede for us. Their intercessions do not pass away, except when our groaning will have passed away.”<sup>251</sup> In all of his other works, Augustine instead prefers to say that the martyrs “pray” (*orant*) for the living, and refers to their present suffrages as “prayers” (*orationes*). For example, when commenting on Jn 15.13, he states concerning the martyrs: “Indeed, therefore, we do not so commemorate them at that table as we do others who rest in peace, that we might also pray for them, but rather, that they might for us, so that we might cleave to their footsteps.”<sup>252</sup> And in his treatise on baptism against the Donatists, when speaking of the martyr Cyprian of Carthage, he says, “May he therefore by his prayers assist us, who labor in the mortality of this flesh as if in a dark cloud, so that by the Lord granting it, we might imitate his good qualities as far as we are able.”<sup>253</sup>

Other places where Augustine expressly speaks of the assistance afforded by the martyrs’ postmortem *orationes* may be greatly

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<sup>251</sup> Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 85.24, in E. Dekkers and J. Fraipont, eds., *CCSL* 39, *Sancti Aurelii Augustini enarrationes in Psalmos LI–C* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1956), 1196: *Dominus enim noster Iesus Christus adhuc interpellat pro nobis; omnes martyres qui cum illo sunt, interpellant pro nobis. Non transeunt interpellationes ipsorum, nisi cum transierit gemitus noster.*

<sup>252</sup> Idem, *In Iohannis evangelium tractatus* 84.1, in R. Willems, ed., *CCSL* 36, *Sancti Aurelii Augustini in Iohannis evangelium tractatus CXXIV* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954), 537: *Ideo quippe ad ipsam mensam non sic eos commemoramus, quemadmodum alios qui in pace requiescunt, ut etiam pro eis oremus, sed magis ut ipsi pro nobis, ut eorum vestigiis adhaereamus.*

<sup>253</sup> Idem, *De baptismo contra Donatistas* 7.1.1, in M. Petschenig, ed., *CSEL* 51, *Sancti Aurelii Augustini scriptorum contra Donatistas pars I* (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1908), 342: *Adiuvet itaque nos orationibus suis in istius carnis mortalitate tamquam in caliginosa nube laborantes, ut donante Domino bona eius quantum possumus imitemur.*

multiplied,<sup>254</sup> but one in particular is pertinent to the concept that the saints can appease the Lord's anger. It is found in his *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum*, a commentary on the first seven books of the Old Testament which he composed around 419.<sup>255</sup> When explaining the typological importance of God's commands to Moses concerning the curtains of the tabernacle's tent in Ex 26.7–14, he states, "He thereafter commands that those curtains be covered over with rams' skins dyed red. But a ram dyed red: to whom does Christ, bloodstained by the passion, not come to mind? Also signified by them are the holy martyrs, *by whose prayers God is propitiated for the sins of His people.*"<sup>256</sup> Although this remark is made *obiter* and is not elaborated upon further by Augustine, it reveals a belief that the present prayers of the martyrs are somehow able to make satisfaction for the sins of Christians, and thereby propitiate God.

### Valerian of Cimiez (d. ca. 460)

Valerian is a less conspicuous Latin Father who served as the bishop of Cemenelum (modern Cimiez) in the mid-fifth century, attended regional synods in southern Gaul during that period, and had likely been a member of the monastery at Lerinum (modern Lérins) prior to his

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<sup>254</sup> See idem, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 88.2.14, in Dekkers and Fraipont, 1244; idem, *De civitate Dei* 22.8, in B. Dombart and A. Kalb, eds., *CCSL* 48, *Sancti Aurelii Augustini de civitate Dei libri XI–XXII* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1955), 815–816, 821; idem, *Contra Faustum* 20.21, in J. Zycha, ed., *CSEL* 25/1, *Sancti Aurelii Augustini de utilitate credendi; de duabus animabus; contra Fortunatum; contra Adimantum; contra epistolam fundamenti; contra Faustum* (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1891), 562; idem, *Sermones* 159.1, in *PL* 38.868; *ibid.* 280.6, in *PL* 38.1283; *ibid.* 284.5, in *PL* 38.1291; *ibid.* 285.5, in *PL* 38.1295–1296; *ibid.* 297.3, in *PL* 38.1360; *ibid.* 312.1, in *PL* 38.1420; *ibid.* 316.5, in *PL* 38.1434; *ibid.* 319.6, in *PL* 38.1441–1442; *ibid.* 320, in *PL* 38.1442; *ibid.* 324, in *PL* 38.1447; *ibid.* 325.1, in *PL* 38.1447; idem, *Sermo de S. Ioanne Baptista* 2, in *PL* 46.996.

<sup>255</sup> For this dating, see J. Fraipont and D. de Bruyne, eds., *CCSL* 33, *Sancti Aurelii Augustini quaestionum in Heptateuchum libri VII; locutionum in Heptateuchum libri VII; de octo quaestionibus ex veteri testamento* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1958), vii.

<sup>256</sup> Augustine, *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum* 2.108, in Fraipont and de Bruyne, 123: *Deinde iubet ea vela cooperiri pellibus arietinis rubricatis. Aries autem rubricatus cui non occurrat Christus passione cruentatus? Significantur his etiam martyres sancti, quorum orationibus propitiatur Deus peccatis populi sui.*

episcopacy.<sup>257</sup> In 1612, the Jesuit J. Sirmond published twenty of Valerian's extant homilies,<sup>258</sup> three of which regard the subject of martyrdom and were delivered on the feast of an unnamed local martyr. These are replete with testimonies concerning the cult of the martyrs which flourished in Gaul during Valerian's lifetime, frequently mentioning the veneration of their relics and confidence in their intercession before God. For example, in the third martyr-homily, he thus exhorts his congregation:

It is therefore proper, in the first place, that we should recommend ourselves to this patron by frequent offices, in order that he might watch for us as a peculiar intercessor before the Lord, and commend our life by the favor of his dignity. There is nothing that a man is unable to obtain, in whatever necessity he is placed, if he ceases not to supplicate the friends of the Highest Ruler.<sup>259</sup>

In the first homily on the martyr's feast, Valerian also posits that the martyrs are patrons who can mollify the anger of God. He begins the relevant pericope by telling the faithful, "Therefore, if anyone of you, most beloved, eagerly seeks the consolation of Christ, let him by almsgivings restrain the sorrows of strangers, and commend his own tears to this patron, in whose honor we meet."<sup>260</sup> He proceeds to emphasize the importance of invoking the martyr, and rhetorically asks, with words which negatively assert what he later positively states in the third homily, "But what opportunity for pardon will there be before the righteous Judge, if you do not know how to supplicate the friends of the King?"<sup>261</sup> He

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<sup>257</sup> See Bardenhewer, *Geschichte der altkirchlichen Literatur*, vol. 4, *Das fünfte Jahrhundert mit Einschluss der syrischen Literatur des vierten Jahrhunderts* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1924), 572–573.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 573.

<sup>259</sup> Valerian of Cimiez, *Homiliae de bono martyrii* 3.3, in *PL* 52.744–745: *Oportet itaque, primo loco, ut nos huic patrono frequentibus insinuemus officiiis; quatenus pro nobis apud Dominum peculiaris intercessor invigilet, et vitam nostram dignationis suae favore commendet. Nihil autem est quod non possit homo in qualibet necessitate positus obtinere, si amicis summi imperatoris non desinat supplicare.*

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.* 1.3, in *PL* 52.739: *Si quis itaque vestrum, dilectissimi, studiose Christi consolationem requirit, alienos dolores eleemosynis resecat, ac studiose lacrymas suas huic in cuius honore convenimus, patrono commendet.*

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*: *Quis autem apud iustum iudicem locus erit veniae, si amicis regis nescias supplicare?*

accordingly advises his congregation: “The suffrages of patrons are to be eagerly sought after indeed, *to whom alone it is given to know how to calm the mind and temper the indignation of the angered Lord.*”<sup>262</sup> Though no such belief regarding Mary’s patronage had yet to crop up in the West, where a distinct cult of the Virgin would begin to considerably flourish only in the early medieval monasteries, it is difficult to envision how one could impute blame to later Latin authors without also finding fault in those Fathers, such as Valerian, who speak similarly about the martyrs.

### **Rabbula of Edessa (d. ca. 436)**

An ally of Cyril of Alexandria, Rabbula occupied the episcopal seat of Edessa from around 412 until 436,<sup>263</sup> and was one of the fiercest opponents of the Nestorians in the Syriac-speaking church.<sup>264</sup> Among his surviving works are several dozen supplications<sup>265</sup> intended to serve as

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid. 1.4, in PL 52.740, emphasis mine: *Studiosè profecto expetenda sunt suffragia patronorum, quibus solis datum est irascentis Domini animos nosse mollire, et iracundiam temperare.*

<sup>263</sup> For the dating of Rabbula’s episcopal election and death, see G.G. Blum, *Rabbula von Edessa: Der Christ, der Bischof, der Theologe* (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1969), 7–8, 39.

<sup>264</sup> For his role in the Nestorian controversy, see *ibid.*, 152–195.

<sup>265</sup> These are printed in two separate non-critical editions from the nineteenth century, namely, J.J. Overbeck, ed., *S. Ephraemi Syri, Rabulae episcopi Edesseni, Balaei aliorumque opera selecta* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1865), and Dominican Apostolic Missionaries of Mosul, eds., *Breviarium juxta ritum ecclesiae Antiochenae syrorum*, vol. 1, *Pars communis* (Mosul: Typi Fratrum Praedicatorum, 1886). The Dominicans’ edition is more complete than Overbeck’s, since the latter includes only three of the eight *ordines* of Rabbula’s hymns. When the same hymn appears in both editions, there is often some textual variation, although such variants do not alter the meaning of any of the hymns actually quoted in this present study.

liturgical hymns.<sup>266</sup> Many of these, following the trajectory of earlier patristic works, mention or invoke the postmortem intercession of the martyrs and apostles.<sup>267</sup> However, there are also several hymns which Rabbula composed in praise of Mary, whom he calls the “God-bearer” and “Mother of God.”<sup>268</sup> These texts merit closer attention from Mariologists, since in them, Rabbula displays a robust devotion to the Virgin and belief in her maternal mediation.<sup>269</sup> He frequently asks that

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<sup>266</sup> While a few orientalist and patrologists have expressed hesitancy concerning the authenticity of these hymns, such as Blum, 205–207, the only study devoted solely to the question has convincingly argued for the reliability of their ascription to Rabbula. See P. Bruns, “Bischof Rabbulas von Edessa—Dichter und Theologe,” in *Orientalia Christiana analecta*, vol. 256, *Symposium syriacum VII*, ed. R. Lavenant (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1998), 195–202, esp. his conclusion, 202: *Zusammenfassend läßt sich sagen: Die unter dem Namen des Rabbula von Edessa überlieferten Hymnen spiegeln in inhaltlich-theologischer Hinsicht, besonders im Hinblick auf die mariologischen und eucharistischen Partien, die typischen Kontroversen der dreißiger Jahre des 5. Jh. wider. Sie weisen zahlreiche Parallelen zu den übrigen Werken des edessenischen Bischofs, den Predigten, den Kanones und der Vita, auf, so daß die übervorsichtige Zurückhaltung mancher Forscher hinsichtlich der literarischen Echtheit ihre Berechtigung verliert.*

<sup>267</sup> Rabbula of Edessa, *Supplicationes ordinis primi*, in Dominicans, 79, 80; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis secundi*, in Dominicans, 82, 84; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis tertii*, in Dominicans, 90; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis quarti*, in Overbeck, 362–363; Dominicans, 94, 97–98; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis quinti*, in Dominicans, 103; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis sexti*, in Dominicans, 105, 109; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis septimi*, in Overbeck, 370–371, 373; Dominicans, 111, 115; idem, *Supplicationes ordini octavi*, in Dominicans, 119, 122, 123. The Dominicans’ edition uses Eastern Arabic numerals for its pagination; I here provide the equivalent page numbers in Western Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, etc.) for the ease of the reader.

<sup>268</sup> For places where such titles occur, see idem, *Supplicationes ordinis primi*, in Overbeck, 245; Dominicans, 77, 80; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis secundi*, in Dominicans, 84; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis tertii*, in Dominicans, 88, 90, 93; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis quarti*, in Overbeck, 366; Dominicans, 97; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis quinti*, in Dominicans, 98, 102; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis octavi*, in Dominicans, 117, 123.

<sup>269</sup> Some orientalist have acknowledged the existence of Marian devotion within the *Supplicationes*, but to the best of my knowledge, the only contemporary study to explore this matter at any length, and which first brought these hymns to my attention, is C. Horn, “Ancient Syriac Sources on Mary’s Role as Intercessor,” in *Presbeia Theotokou: The Intercessory Role of Mary*



Mary might intercede for those who have recourse to her,<sup>270</sup> such as when he remarks: “Virgin God-bearer, full of blessings, intercede and supplicate your Only-Begotten Son on behalf of us, namely, your servants, that He might rescue us all from all faults which we have committed, and also free us, that we might not do anything in which there is harm. Our Lady, do not look away.”<sup>271</sup> In another passage, he likewise beseeches her by saying, “Shelter us under the wings of your prayers, God-bearer, from all harm. You who are our refuge, and our great hope, and the pillar of us all: abate and extinguish the adversaries among us, who quarrel with us by means of our wrongdoing. Lead us towards your own blessed perfection.”<sup>272</sup>

Rabbula’s supplications are also exceedingly relevant to the more specific matter of whether the saints not only intercede for sinners, but are thereby even able to turn away the divine anger. Like several of the other Fathers already discussed in this study, he expressly holds that the martyrs can do so: “Peace be to you, blessed pillars, who support the earth that it might not collapse on account of the iniquity of its inhabitants. And behold, the holy Church and her children celebrate the day of your feasts. *By your prayers may the souls of us all be delivered*

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*across Times and Places in Byzantium (4<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> Century)*, ed. L.M. Peltomaa et al. (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2015), 171–175.

<sup>270</sup> Rabbula of Edessa, *Supplicationes ordinis primi*, in *Dominicans*, 80; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis secundi*, in *Dominicans*, 82, 83, 84; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis tertii*, in *Dominicans*, 89–90, 93; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis quarti*, in Overbeck, 362, 364; *Dominicans*, 93–94, 97; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis quinti*, in *Dominicans*, 102–103, 104; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis sexti*, in *Dominicans*, 107–108, 108–109, 109–110; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis septimi*, in Overbeck, 370, 372–373; *Dominicans*, 111, 114–115; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis octavi*, in *Dominicans*, 117, 123.

<sup>271</sup> Idem, *Supplicationes ordinis tertii*, in *Dominicans*, 93. The phrase meaning “our Lady” may also be rendered as “our Mistress,” and connotes ownership over her supplicants. The regal dignity of Mary due to her divine maternity is even more clearly seen in one of the *Supplicationes ordinis quarti*, in Overbeck, 366: “For in glory do you rule over all in creation, as you held the Creator in your womb.”

<sup>272</sup> Idem, *Supplicationes ordinis quarti*, in *Dominicans*, 97. It may be worthwhile for some Mariologist to tease out what relation, if any, these hymns (especially this text’s reference to the Virgin as “the pillar of us all” on account of her prayers) might have to the development of the doctrine of Mary’s universal mediation of grace.

from wrath."<sup>273</sup> Yet for the seemingly first time in extant patristic literature, Rabbula also asserts that Mary in particular can avert God's wrath,<sup>274</sup> such as when he says, "Who is able to speak about your conception, and about your child who was a marvel, pure and holy Virgin? The living fire dwelt in the womb of flesh, and by it it was not consumed. Intercede for us all, *that by your prayers and your petitions the souls of us all might be delivered from wrath.*"<sup>275</sup> And in another Marian hymn, after a doxology to the Trinity, he similarly asks her, "And therefore, Virgin God-bearer, supplicate your Only-Begotten Son, *that the souls of us all might be delivered from wrath.*"<sup>276</sup>

These passages from Rabbula's liturgical hymns are consequently indicative of a transitional period within Eastern Christianity with regard to the cult of the saints. The martyrs had been the focal point of this cult since the mid-fourth century, and it was naturally their intercession which Fathers such as Chrysostom, Prudentius, Augustine, and Valerian believed can propitiate, appease, or turn away the anger of the Lord. During the fifth century, however, especially in the wake of the Nestorian controversy, belief in the distinct mediation of the Mother of God began to develop alongside the preexisting emphasis upon the intercession of the martyrs. This resulted in Rabbula and other writers beginning to affirm that Mary, too, is able to avert God's indignation. In the succeeding centuries, this conviction only intensified among Eastern Christians—as witnessed by Maximus the Confessor, Andrew of Crete, Germanus of Constantinople, Pseudo-Damascene, Ephraem Graecus,

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<sup>273</sup> Idem, *Supplicationes ordinis quarti*, in *Dominicans*, 94, emphasis mine. The same hymn is printed with some textual variation in Overbeck, 363. For a similar text, see the immediately preceding hymn in Overbeck, 362–363.

<sup>274</sup> Horn, 172–173, 175, passingly notes that some of the *Supplicationes* beseech Mary and other saints to obtain the deliverance of believers from God's wrath, but she does not place much emphasis upon this.

<sup>275</sup> Rabbula of Edessa, *Supplicationes ordinis quarti*, in Overbeck, 364, emphasis mine.

<sup>276</sup> Idem, *Supplicationes ordinis octavi*, in *Dominicans*, 117, emphasis mine. See also idem, *Supplicationes ordinis quarti*, in Overbeck, 362; *Dominicans*, 93–94; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis sexti*, in *Dominicans*, 108–109.

Joseph the Hymnographer, etc.<sup>277</sup>—before becoming a dominant theme of medieval Latin piety as well.<sup>278</sup>

## Conclusion

In this study, I have endeavored to briefly trace the ante-Chalcedonian origins of the concept that the Blessed Virgin is capable of appeasing or turning away the wrath of the Lord by her maternal prayers, which enjoyed far-reaching popularity in the medieval West. As the historical record demonstrates, the first Father to have seemingly adhered to a nascent form of this motif is the third-century theologian Origen, who posits that the angels and holy souls propitiate God the Father, and that the disciples and other saints currently intercede to prevent Jesus from forsaking mankind in His indignation towards sin. Ephrem the Syrian similarly hopes that all the saints will pray for him during the hour of wrath, and that the saints buried at Nisibis will calm the divine justice as his advocates. Once the cult of the martyrs became firmly established in the decades following Nicaea, such Fathers as Nectarius of Constantinople, John Chrysostom, Prudentius, Augustine, and Valerian of Cimiez propose that the holy martyrs in particular are able to propitiate, appease, or mollify God or Christ. Finally, in the fifth century, during which time a markedly distinct Marian cult began to emerge in the East, Rabbula of Edessa invokes not only the

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<sup>277</sup> See Maximus the Confessor, *Vita beatae Virginis* 130, in M.J. van Esbroeck, ed., *Maxime le Confesseur: Vie de la Vierge* (Louvain: Peeters, 1986), vol. 1, 170–171 [Georgian] and vol. 2, 116–117 [French transl.]; idem, *Epistulae* 1, in *PG* 91.392; Andrew of Crete, *Canon paracliticus ad sanctissimam Deiparam* 4, in E. Follieri, ed., *Un Theotocarion marciano del sec. XIV* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1961), 200; *ibid.* 8, in Follieri, 204–206; Germanus of Constantinople, *Oratio secunda in dormitionem sanctissimae Deiparae*, in *PG* 98.352; Pseudo-Damascene, *Sermo in annuntiationem Mariae*, in *PG* 96.660; Ephraem Graecus, *Precationes ad Dei matrem* 8, in K.G. Phrantzoles, ed., *Όσίου Έφραιμ του Σύρου έργα*, vol. 6 (Thessalonica: To Perivoli tis Panagias, 1995), 395; *ibid.* 11, in Phrantzoles, 413; Joseph the Hymnographer, *Triodium*, in *PG* 87.3844, 3884.

<sup>278</sup> For a recent and outstanding English treatment of belief in the Virgin's intercession in the late patristic East and medieval West, see B.K. Reynolds, *Gateway to Heaven: Marian Doctrine and Devotion, Image and Typology in the Patristic and Medieval Periods*, vol. 1, *Doctrine and Devotion* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012), 168–245; the author provides an abundance of quotations from the historical sources and traces how several Byzantine Marian motifs, including the one currently under consideration, came to influence Latin-speaking circles.

martyrs, but also the Virgin Mary, to obtain the deliverance of Christians from wrath.

That only the last of these eight patristic authors expressly states that our Lady in particular can avert God's anger is of merely accidental significance. For the one seeking to demonstrate the reasonableness of medieval Marian piety, it is evident that if the prayers of the martyrs and other saints can placate the Lord or avert His anger, then surely it is only logical to deduce that the intercession of the Mother of God is able to do the same. Conversely, those who wish to criticize medieval piety, whether they be Catholic or Protestant, are faced with a daunting dilemma: if medieval Latin authors are to be accused of idolatry, superstition, or distrust in God's mercy for their beliefs concerning Mary, then Origen, Ephrem, Chrysostom, Augustine, etc. must be accused of similar charges with regard to the other saints.

It is my ardent desire that as a result of my findings, other Catholic theologians will develop an interest in this subject matter, and articulate a more precise hypothesis regarding how it may be rightly said that the Virgin and the other blessed in heaven can propitiate or appease God's anger by their prayers, especially in light of Jesus Christ's propitiatory intercession as the High Priest of the New Covenant, and His love and mercy towards sinners. I suspect that many theologians have recoiled from this question for fear that the motif under consideration is merely an example of medieval excess. It is perhaps time, however, to scrutinize older, outdated understandings of doctrinal development, since many of the motifs regarding Marian mediation that are typically associated with only the late patristic and medieval periods seemingly possess precedence in the cult of the saints from earlier centuries.<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> Another example is the popular medieval belief that Mary is *omnipotentia supplex*, i.e., that her maternal petitions infallibly obtain whatever she requests of her divine Son. This belief is often viewed as a novelty or excess which originated in eighth-century Byzantium, such as by von Balthasar, 287–288. However, a closer examination of the patristic record reveals that equally strong language had already been used of the martyrs' intercession during the late fourth and early fifth centuries; see John Chrysostom, *Homilia in SS. Iuveninum et Maximum martyres* 3, in *PG* 50.576; idem, *Homilia de SS. Bernice et Prosdoce martyribus* 7, in *PG* 50.640; Prudentius, *Peristefanon* 1.10–23, in Cunningham, 251–252; Ephrem the Syrian (dubious), *Hymni de sanctis martyribus* 18.1–4, in Lamy, 3.733–735.