



## Ecclesio-Mariological Interpretation of Rev 12:1–6 in Early Christian Writings

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**Abstract:** Early Christian literature contains numerous commentaries on the books of the Holy Scripture, including the Revelation of St. John. Among the many symbols it contains, we can find an intriguing theme related to the sign of a Woman clothed with the sun (cf. Rev 12:1–6). Nowadays, the above-mentioned passage is most often interpreted in the Mariological spirit. An ecclesiological explanation is provided frequently too. It turns out that in the writings of the early Church authors, the reference to the Church was decidedly the dominant one, while the interpretation favoring Mary was almost marginal. A mixed interpretation was formulated too, for example, by Quodvultdeus. It features three images: ecclesial, Christological, and Mariological. This paper will present the statements made by early Christian authors, representing both the Eastern and the Western Church, on the meaning of the sign of the Woman in the Revelation, and on the ways they interpreted it in commentaries on this book of the Bible.

**Keywords:** Church, Mary, Revelation, Church Fathers, sign, Rev 12:1–6

The Revelation of St. John, which is the final book of the New Testament, is strongly influenced by the Judeo-Christian tradition, which caused it to be held in high esteem among Jewish followers of Christ.<sup>1</sup> However, this cannot be said about the whole of the Christian world, which was sometimes reluctant to recognize it as a canonical book. The little-known Junilius of Africa,<sup>2</sup> author of a short book titled *The Principles of Divine Law (Instituta regularia divinae legis)*, which has the character of an isagoge, mentions the Revelation of St. John among the prophetic books and states that “doubt is expressed among the peoples of the East about John’s Revelation” (*de Iohannis Apocalypsi apud orientales admodum dubitatur*).<sup>3</sup> This statement does not imply that the book is to be excluded from the canon, however, it is not included among the *perfectam*, books but among the *mediam auctoritatem*<sup>4</sup> books.

The first early Christian author to expressly confirm that St. John was the author of the Revelation was St. Justin (c.a. 165 AD). He wrote: “[...], further, a man among

1 Tobias Nicklas (“The Early Text of Revelation,” 225–238) addresses historical issues related to the transmission of the text of the Revelation through various manuscripts.

2 Junilius lived in the 6th century and was a layman initiated into the Scripture and Church literature. During the reign of Emperor Justinian (527–565), he held the responsible function of *quaestor sacri palatii* in Constantinople. For more information about him see Czyżewski, *Księgi Pisma Świętego*, 6–16.

3 Iunilius Africanus, *Instituta* I 4 (PL 68, 18).

4 Cf. Iunilius Africanus, *Instituta* I 7.

us named John, one of the apostles of Christ, prophesied in a Revelation made to him that they who have believed our Christ will spend a thousand years in Jerusalem, and that afterwards the universal, and, in one word, eternal resurrection of all at once, will take place, and also the judgment.”<sup>5</sup>

This is an important testimony to the fact that the Revelation was used by proponents of millenarianism to support the belief in a kingdom of Christ that would last a thousand years between the first and the second resurrection.<sup>6</sup> An opponent of the millenarists, Origen (c.a. 254 AD) also recognized the Book of Revelation. It was reported by Eusebius of Caesarea (339 AD), who quoted an unknown passage from the Commentary on the Gospel of St. John. Mentioning the authorship of the fourth Gospel, Origen was to add about John that “he wrote also the Apocalypse.”<sup>7</sup>

The Revelation was certainly highly controversial in the Church of the early centuries, especially in the Eastern circles. Since the end of the second century, there has been no unanimity regarding this book, as was the case with the Epistles to the Hebrews, St. James, the Second Epistle of St. Peter, the Second and Third Epistle of St. John, and the Epistle of Jude. St. Cyril of Jerusalem (386 AD) did not include the Revelation in the New Testament canon. The same was done by St. Gregory of Nazianzus (390 AD), while Amphilochus, bishop of Iconium (after 394 AD) stated in his *Iambs* (lines 316–318) that most rejected it as apocryphal. The Syrian Church did likewise until the 6th century.<sup>8</sup> Until the middle of the 5th century, the Church of Antioch and the Churches of Asia Minor had doubts about recognizing the Revelation as a canonical book. This is why St. John Chrysostom (407 AD), originating from the Antiochian community, did not use it in his works. Meanwhile, Eusebius of Caesarea included a catalog of New Testament books in his *Ecclesiastical History* and wrote “As to the Apocalypse, the opinion of the majority is still to this day divided one way or the other.”<sup>9</sup> However, he made a reservation that it “is to be placed, if it really seem proper, the Apocalypse of John”<sup>10</sup> as a widely known book. Yet, this did not prevent him from placing this book among writings that he called “inauthentic,” adding for the second time: “the Apocalypse of John, if it seem proper, which some, as I said, reject, but which others class with the accepted books.”<sup>11</sup> Information about the doubts that were raised in the Church with regard to that book, was drawn by Eusebius of Caesarea from bishop Dionysius of Alexandria (264 AD).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Iustinus, *Dialogus cum Iudaeo Tryphone* 81, 4 (Williams, 173).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Pietras, “Starożytny spory wokół Apokalipsy,” 36.

<sup>7</sup> Eusebius Caesariensis, *Historia ecclesiastica* VI, 25, 9 (Lawlor – Oulton, 198).

<sup>8</sup> Chorepiscopus Polycarpus translated the New Testament at the request of the Monophysite bishop of Mabbug, Philoxenus (523 AD). The translation contained all books of the New Testament and the Deuterocanonical books, including the Apocalypse.

<sup>9</sup> Eusebius Caesariensis, *Historia ecclesiastica* III, 24, 18 (Lawlor – Oulton, 86).

<sup>10</sup> Eusebius Caesariensis, *Historia ecclesiastica* III, 25, 2 (Lawlor – Oulton, 86).

<sup>11</sup> Eusebius Caesariensis, *Historia ecclesiastica* III, 25, 4 (Lawlor – Oulton, 87).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Eusebius Caesariensis, *Historia ecclesiastica* VII, 25.

The canonicity of the Revelation was commented on by St. Jerome (419 AD). In his view, while the Latin part of the Church hesitated to recognize the Letter to the Hebrews, the Greek part had problems recognizing the Revelation.<sup>13</sup> The Alexandrians were an exception in the Eastern Church, as they did not deny its belonging to the New Testament. Certainly, the reason for the divergence between the Church of Alexandria and the Church of Antioch with regard to the Revelation was biblical exegesis. The Alexandrians looked at it from the allegorical point of view (Origen, St. Athanasius, Didymus of Alexandria, St. Cyril of Alexandria). The above-mentioned Dionysius of Alexandria, who expressed some doubts with regard to the authorship of the book, was an exception. Meanwhile, the circles associated with the school of Antioch (especially Diodorus of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, St. John Chrysostom, and Theodoret of Cyrrhus) were attached to the adherence to the literal meaning of the Biblical Scriptures and failed to explain the end times described in the Revelation. For this reason, between the 4th and 6th centuries, some members of the Eastern Church rejected the book, others approached it with reserve, while still others were timidly silent about its existence, as was the case with the Cappadocian Fathers.<sup>14</sup>

Despite some difficulties with the reception of the Revelation, we can find commentaries on this book of the Bible in early Christian literature and references to it in other writings of the Church Fathers. It is fair to say, however, that commentaries on the Revelation as such were rare in antiquity.<sup>15</sup>

Church writers of the patristic era provided an interesting interpretation of the perhaps most popular passage referring to the sign of the Woman and the Dragon. The text in question is Rev 12:1-6

And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered. And there appeared another

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Hieronymus Stridonensis, *Epistula* 129, 3.

<sup>14</sup> For a broader discussion of different positions concerning the Revelation, cf. Pietras, "Starożytny spory wokół Apokalipsy," 36-41. In the comprehensive monograph (*The Johannine Corpus*), Charles E. Hill examined many sources, including patristic ones, dating especially from the 2nd century, and demonstrated that the Church of that time was relatively quick to adopt the Gospel of St. John, which was denied in numerous studies. They pointed out that it was used, above all, by heretical Christian groups, especially the Gnostics. Hill considered this view to be an "orthodox paradigm of Johnophobia" (*ibidem*, 11) and decided to refute it (*ibidem*, 11-72). In his opinion, the orthodox Christians of the 2nd century included the Gospel of St. John in the canon with the other Gospels. This was the case in the Churches of Syria, Asia, Rome, and Gaul. The important thing for our subject is that although Hill focuses primarily on the Gospel of John, he also mentions his three letters and the Revelation which, in his opinion, were approached holistically and regarded as canonical (*ibidem*, 447-463). A similar thesis was developed by T. Scott Manor. In his text *Epiphanius' Alogi and the Johannine Controversy* he maintained that the Church has once tried to dismiss St. John's Gospel and the Revelation as heretical forgeries. Based on the examined early Christian testimonies, he arrived at similar conclusions to those reached by Hill; namely, that the Revelation, at least in some circles, was regarded as a canonical book, as were St. John's Gospel and his three letters.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Kimsza, "Cezarego z Arles," 48.

wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days.<sup>16</sup>

Contemporary exegetes interpret the sign of the Woman in the Mariological or ecclesiological vein.<sup>17</sup> Choosing a Mariological explanation, they point to the Johannine tradition, where Mary is referred to with the word Woman (cf. wedding at Cana in Galilee, John 2:4; last will at the cross, John 19:26).<sup>18</sup> There is also an ecclesial vein, where the sign of the Woman is interpreted collectively and applied to the Church. The Woman who escapes from the Dragon to the desert is not an individual but a symbol of the Church in collective terms. On the one hand, she resembles the Israelites who escaped to the desert when chased by the Pharaoh and his troops; on the other hand, she stands for the Church; the offspring of the Woman, persecuted by Satan.<sup>19</sup>

This gives rise to the question of the patristic interpretation of this apocalyptic passage. Did early Christian writers also recognize this double (Mariological and ecclesial) interpretation? Which one is dominant in their commentaries? How do they justify their choices?

## 1. Ecclesiological Interpretation of Rev 12:1–6

The earliest writer to refer to the Woman clothed with the sun from the Revelation of St. John is Hippolytus of Rome (3rd century AD).<sup>20</sup> It should be noted at once that his

<sup>16</sup> NKJV, version 2021.

<sup>17</sup> Ludwik Stefaniak (“Mulier amicta sole,” 262–283), writing from the biblical point of view, is trying to answer the question of who or what is personified by the Woman clothed with the sun in the Revelation of St. John. For a more recent study of this theme, though in a similar vein, cf. Bednarz, “Niewiasta obleczona w Słońce,” 23–42. The reading of the apocalyptic sign of the dragon from the biblical point of view was undertaken by Marek Karczewski in “Dynamika symbolu,” 203–223.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Podeszwa, *Paschalna pamięć o Jezusie*, 311–312.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Bednarz, “Niewiasta obleczona w Słońce,” 41. The Mariological and ecclesiological reading of Rev 12:1–6 by contemporary exegetes is also mentioned by Augustyn Jankowski in *Apokalipsa św. Jana*, 205.

<sup>20</sup> St. Jerome, listing the works by Hippolytus in *De viris illustribus* (61), mentions, among others, the title *De Apocalypsi*. Therefore, on this basis, he was for a long time believed to be the author of such a text. Contemporary research points to a different, more plausible idea, namely, that Hippolytus wrote an apologetic work that was probably titled *In Defense of the Gospel of St. John and the Revelation* (the same title was placed on the pedestal of the “Statue of Hippolytus”). However, we are unable to fully confirm

work is not a commentary but rather a defense of the above-mentioned book against accusations formulated by a certain Caius, who doubted its canonicity and denied St. John's authorship.<sup>21</sup> In the work, which is titled *Heads against Caius* we read that the Woman mentioned in Rev 12:1 is "the figure of the Church."<sup>22</sup>

An interpretation of the passage that is of interest to us is to be found in the text by Hippolytus titled *On Christ and Antichrist*. Explaining individual verses of Rev 12:1–6, the author writes: "By the woman then clothed with the sun, he meant most manifestly the Church, endued with the Father's word, whose brightness is above the sun. And by the moon under her feet he referred to her being adorned, like the moon, with heavenly glory. And the words, upon her head a crown of twelve stars, refer to the twelve apostles by whom the Church was founded."<sup>23</sup>

It is clear from the above statement that Hippolytus, while speaking of the Church, associates it with the person of Christ and the Disciples. The Christological character of ecclesiology can be seen in still further explanations provided by Hippolytus. When he refers to the words of the Revelation that the Woman was pregnant and crying out in the pain and agony of giving birth (Rev 12:2), he states that they mean the Church "will not cease to bear from her heart the Word that is persecuted by the unbelieving in the world."<sup>24</sup> The theme of the Church giving birth to Christ recurs in yet another passage where Hippolytus interprets the meaning of the verse: "She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations" (Rev 12:5). He says that the above is "always bringing forth Christ, the perfect man-child of God, who is declared to be God and man, becomes the instructor of all the nations."<sup>25</sup> Yet, Hippolytus does not end his discourse on the Church giving birth to Christ here. The Christological-ecclesial aspect also appears in the author's explanation of the sentence: "her child was caught up to God and to His throne" (Rev 12:5). It means "that he who is always born of her is a heavenly king, and not an earthly."<sup>26</sup>

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the originality of this title, especially as there is another name for this text, namely *Heads against Caius*. This may not necessarily be the original title; it may constitute a part of the whole treatise in which Hippolytus defends the Revelation and the Gospel of St. John against the accusations formulated by Caius. Meanwhile, Jerome provided an abbreviated title of the work in question. Research on the topic was conducted by: Prigent, "Hippolyte, commentateur de l'Apocalypse," 391–412; Prigent – Stehly, "Les fragments," 313–333; Camplani – Prinzivali, "Sul significato dei nuovi frammenti," 49–82; Cerrato, *Hippolytus Between East and West*; Naumowicz, "Pierwsze interpretacje Apokalipsy," 30–35.

21 Eusebius of Caesarea calls Caius an ecclesiastic who lived under Pope Zephyrinus (cf. *Historia ecclesiastica* II, 25,6) and attributes to him the authorship of a work titled *Dissertation*, in which he argued that a certain Cerinthus, founder of a new heresy, was to write the Revelation modeled on the epiphanies of the great disciple (cf. *Historia ecclesiastica* III, 28,1–2).

22 Hippolytus Romanus, "Fragmente," passage 8 to Rev 12:1 (GCS 1, 232).

23 Hippolytus Romanus, *De Christo et Antichristo* 61 (ANF 5, 534).

24 Hippolytus Romanus, *De Christo et Antichristo* 61 (ANF 5, 534).

25 Hippolytus Romanus, *De Christo et Antichristo* 61 (ANF 5, 534).

26 Hippolytus Romanus, *De Christo et Antichristo* 61 (ANF 5, 534).

Thus, in Hippolytus, we only find an ecclesiological explanation of the passage of the Revelation of St. John that is of interest to us, with no reference to Mary. We can also find Christological allusions in his work, however, he always associates the person of Christ with the Church. Giving birth to Christ by the Church, mentioned three times by Hippolytus, occurs by means of proclaiming the word of God.

Meanwhile, Victorinus of Pettau (Poetovium) (304 AD),<sup>27</sup> who is regarded as the first Latin exegete,<sup>28</sup> is the author of the oldest preserved (though not in its entirety) commentary on the Revelation.<sup>29</sup> Analyzing the passage referring to the Woman clothed with the sun, Victorinus writes that “is the ancient Church of fathers, and prophets, and saints, and apostles, which had the groans and torments of its longing until it saw that Christ, the fruit of its people according to the flesh long promised to it, had taken flesh out of the selfsame people.”<sup>30</sup>

Victorinus also sees the image of the Church in the two wings of the eagle, mentioned in later verses, when the apocalyptic Woman is recalled (cf. Rev 12:14). At first, he refers them to the prophet Elijah and to the one who will be a prophet with him, while they represent “that Catholic Church (*ecclesiam omnem catholicam*), whence in the last times a hundred and forty-four thousands of men should believe on the preaching of Elias.”<sup>31</sup> Similarly to Hippolytus of Rome, Victorinus makes no Mariological allusions in the description of the Woman clothed with the sun. The Woman personifies the ancient Church on the one hand and the unity of patriarchs and prophets with the Disciples on the other. Victorinus also uses the juxtaposition of Old and New Testament figures while interpreting the moon under the Woman’s feet. He says that it symbolizes the bodies of Old and New Testament saints.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>27</sup> The name of the city, which is situated in north-eastern Slovenia, where Victorinus was bishop, has many versions, i.a. Petovium, Petavium, Poetovio. Today, it is called Ptuj. For more on this topic, cf. Šalamun, “Ptuj. Krajepisno-zgodovinska črtica,” 308.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Altaner – Stuiber, *Patrologie*, 269; Quasten, *Initiation aux Pères de l’Église*, II, 487. A general account of some of the Latin commentaries on the Revelation is provided by Roger Gryson in “Les commentaires patristiques (à suivre),” 305–337 and “Les commentaires patristiques (suite et fin),” 484–502.

<sup>29</sup> Until 1916, the commentary on the Revelation by Victorinus (discovered in the Codex Ottobonian latinus 3288A) was known only in St. Jerome’s version (review of the *Commentary on the Apocalypse* by Victorinus of Pettau), who cleared it of millenarian accents and redrafted it (cf. Quasten, *Initiation aux Pères de l’Église*, II, 488). More on this subject was written by Martine Dulaey in “Jérôme « éditeur »,” 199–236. In the introduction to his review, Jerome writes that he would like to remove *quod in eorum commentariis de mille anni regnorum repperi* (Prologus) from the commentary by Victorinus. Jerome did not make any amendments with regard to the interpretation of Rev 12:1–6, which is of interest to us. This means that he interprets this biblical text in the same way Victorinus does; namely, in the ecclesiological vein: cf. Hieronymus Stridonensis, *Recensio ad Commentarium in Apocalypsim Victorini Petovionensis* XII, 1 and XII, 4.

<sup>30</sup> Victorinus ep. Poetoviensis, *Commentarii in Apocalypsim Ioannis* XII, 1 (ANF 7, 806).

<sup>31</sup> Victorinus ep. Poetoviensis, *Commentarii in Apocalypsim Ioannis* XII, 6 (ANF 7, 807).

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Paczkowski, “Alcuni aspetti teologici,” 202.

The theme of the apocalyptic sign of the Woman is also developed by Methodius of Olympus (312 AD) in the work titled *Symposium*, modeled on Plato's text bearing the same title. The above-mentioned author writes that

The Woman who appeared in heaven clothed with the sun and crowned with twelve stars and with the moon as her footstool, travailing in birth and in pain to be delivered, this, my dear virgins is properly and in the exact sense of the term our Mother, a power in herself distinct from her children, whom the prophets have, according to the aspect of their message, sometimes called Jerusalem, sometimes the Bride, sometimes Mount Sion, and sometimes the Temple and God's Tabernacle.<sup>33</sup>

Although Methodius does not identify the Woman with the Church directly in the text, as she is referred to with the word "power" (δύναμις), she is defined in typically ecclesial terms. She is called Jerusalem, the Bride, Mount Sion, Temple, and God's Tabernacle. All doubts are completely dispelled when Methodius, having quoted a passage from the prophet Isaiah on the future glory of Jerusalem (cf. Isa 60:1–4) further states that the power in question is the Church adorned with the glory of heaven, shining "in pure and wholly unsullied and abiding beauty, emulating the brilliance of the lights."<sup>34</sup>

It is also worth noting that the author of the *Symposium* calls the Church "our Mother" (μητέρα ἡμῶν) and "Virgin" (παρθένος). Methodius explains why the Church should be called a Mother. Explaining the meaning of the moon under the Woman's feet, he states that it is a metaphor for the faith of the baptized people. According to Methodius, the Church gives birth to new followers of Christ through baptism and shapes them into the image and likeness of Christ. This act of giving birth is similar to a woman giving birth; it involves pain, and through it, the Church is "bringing forth natural men as spiritual men, and under this aspect is she indeed their mother."<sup>35</sup> Further, the author explains that the son of the Woman in Revelation is not Jesus but the faithful and the baptized. Because of them it is "the Church that is in labor, and it is those who are washed in baptism who are brought forth."<sup>36</sup> According to Methodius, Jesus cannot be the son because "the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word was fulfilled long before the Apocalypse, whereas John's prophetic message has to do with the present and the future."<sup>37</sup>

In Methodius, as in earlier authors commenting on the sign of the Woman (Rev 12:1–6), we encounter a clear ecclesiological theme. However, no references to

<sup>33</sup> Methodius Olympius, *Convivium decem virginum* VIII, V (Musurillo, 110).

<sup>34</sup> Methodius Olympius, *Convivium decem virginum* VIII, V (Musurillo, 111).

<sup>35</sup> Methodius Olympius, *Convivium decem virginum* VIII, VI (Musurillo, 111).

<sup>36</sup> Methodius Olympius, *Convivium decem virginum* VIII, VII (Musurillo, 112).

<sup>37</sup> Methodius Olympius, *Convivium decem virginum* VIII, VII (Musurillo, 112).

Mary are made. The development of the exegesis to include the aspect of baptism, which appears in the explanation of the title Church-Mother, is a kind of novelty.

A *Commentary on the Apocalypse* was also written by Tyconius of Africa (390 AD).<sup>38</sup> The author was a well-known figure in the Christian world, as evidenced by numerous statements about him made by St. Augustine. On the one hand, the bishop of Hippo cautioned against reading his works without due caution, as these things “he has said as a Donatist heretic”;<sup>39</sup> on the other hand, however, he cited his works and emphasized his intellectual qualities, yet always with the reservation that “he was a Donatist.”<sup>40</sup> Returning to the commentary by Tyconius, it should be noted that it is highly allegorical. In the proposed explanations of Rev 12:1–6, in addition to Christological content, one can find ecclesiological themes with a spiritual and eschatological interpretation.<sup>41</sup>

The interpretation of the Woman of Rev 12:1–6 by Tyconius is quite complex, however, it is kept in the ecclesial perspective.<sup>42</sup> In his opinion, the apocalyptic Woman “signified the church, which, as the Apostle Paul testifies, puts on Christ, *the sun of justice* (Mal 4.2).”<sup>43</sup> The moon “however, which is described in this passage as having been placed under the feet of the woman, is designated as the church of the heretics, which *the sun of justice*, Christ, does not allow to shine with his presence.”<sup>44</sup> Yet, this is not the only explanation of the symbolism of the moon, as the author of the commentary believes that “since everything which is set down about the church in the Scriptures can be interpreted in a double way, we can also interpret and compare the moon to the good part of the church.”<sup>45</sup> The stars placed above the head of the apocalyptic Woman are also associated with the Church: “He designated the stars as the twelve apostles, whom Christ set over the twelve tribes of Israel as a crown on the head of his church and adorned with spiritual gems.”<sup>46</sup> Tyconius refers the fiery dragon, signifying the devil, with seven heads and diadems, and ten horns, to kings and their kingdoms “who will blow against the entire church in the end.”<sup>47</sup> We can find a Christological-ecclesial explanation in the work of Tyconius as well. Twice he

<sup>38</sup> Tyconius is also known for his important piece of work on the Holy Scripture, which was very popular even in the Middle Ages, titled *Liber regularum*, in which he discusses hermeneutic and theological questions in the Bible. For more see Czyżewski, “Ocena *Liber regularum*,” 235–247. For ecclesiological references in the commentary by Tyconius see: Adamiak, “Eklezjologiczny charakter,” 151–162. On the reception of the Commentary by Tyconius and its influence on other authors cf. Steinhäuser, *The Apocalypse Commentary of Tyconius*.

<sup>39</sup> Augustinus, *De doctrina christiana* III 30,43 (Shaw, 568).

<sup>40</sup> Augustinus, *Contra epistulam Parmeniani libri tres* I, 1 (PL 43, 33).

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Lempa, “Apokalipsa św. Jana,” 37.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation*, 308.

<sup>43</sup> Tyconius, *Commentarius in Apocalypsin* §444 (Lo Bue, 178).

<sup>44</sup> Tyconius, *Commentarius in Apocalypsin* §445 (Lo Bue, 178).

<sup>45</sup> Tyconius, *Commentarius in Apocalypsin* §446 (Lo Bue, 179).

<sup>46</sup> Tyconius, *Commentarius in Apocalypsin* §449 (Lo Bue, 179).

<sup>47</sup> Tyconius, *Commentarius in Apocalypsin* §457 (Lo Bue, 182).

mentions the Church that “always gives birth to Christ by means of suffering,”<sup>48</sup> foretelling the future of the Church; namely, the persecution of Christ and His followers.

St. Caesarius of Arles (542 AD) also made an attempt at the interpretation of the Revelation. His *Exposition of the Apocalypse* is likely just material collected for the study of this book of the Bible. Some hold the opinion that it contains homilies or homiletic commentaries on the Revelation.<sup>49</sup> Irrespective of that, it is worth looking at those passages of his work in which he explains the meaning of Rev 12:1–6. At the very beginning, we must emphasize that the interpretation of the passage that is of interest to us, proposed in the statements made by Tyconius that we analyzed earlier, is similar to that found in St. Caesarius of Arles. He too makes a very strong association between Christ and the Church.<sup>50</sup>

Caesarius assigns a separate meaning to nearly every passage in the text that is of interest to us. The Woman clothed with the sun (cf. Rev 12:1), according to his interpretation, represents the Church. This is nothing new, as we have already learned that the oldest traditions saw her as a symbol of the Church.<sup>51</sup> However, explanations of the symbolism of the elements accompanying the apocalyptic Woman offered by Caesarius are unique. He interprets the brightness of the Sun with which she is clothed as the hope of the resurrection. The bishop of Arles justifies it with the words in Matthew’s Gospel about the righteous who will shine like the sun (cf. Matt 13:43).<sup>52</sup> The moon under the feet of the Woman (cf. Rev 12:1), who signifies the Church, represents false people and bad Christians. They are under the feet of the Church, which means that it has power over them.<sup>53</sup> Finally, the twelve stars represent the twelve Disciples.<sup>54</sup> Caesarius also relates the sign of the great red dragon to the Church (cf. Rev 12:3). It symbolizes the devil trying to “kill the offspring of the Church.”<sup>55</sup> Commenting on the words in the Revelation referring to the Dragon’s tail, sweeping down a third of the stars of heaven (cf. Rev 12:4), he says that it symbolizes the heretics who persecute the Church. “Through their second baptism” they “cast down the stars from heaven to the earth of their followers.”<sup>56</sup> Therefore, the Church, which constantly gives birth to new believers through baptism, should be careful not to

48 Tyconius, *Commentarius in Apocalypsin* §463 (Lo Bue, 184).

49 Cf. Morin, “Les commentaires homilétiques,” 43; Żurek, “Kościół w czasach ostatecznych,” 167. Paweł Wygralak (“Pastoralne przesłanie,” 715–717) discusses the significance of the work by the bishop of Arles in the history of the exegesis of the Revelation of St. John.

50 Radosław Kimsza (“Cezarego z Arles,” 47–59) presents the significance of the symbols decoded by Caesarius in the Revelation of St. John, including that of the Church. In his study, he only included a commentary on the first nine chapters of this book of the Bible.

51 Cf. Piekarz, *Orędzie na nasze czasy*, 56.

52 Cf. Żurek, “Kościół w czasach ostatecznych,” 170.

53 Cf. Piekarz, *Orędzie na nasze czasy*, 57.

54 Cf. Caesarius ep. Arelatensis, *Expositio de Apocalypsy* 9 (PL 35, 2434).

55 Caesarius ep. Arelatensis, *Expositio de Apocalypsy* 9 (PL 35, 2434).

56 Caesarius ep. Arelatensis, *Expositio de Apocalypsy* 9 (PL 35, 2434).

lose them to heresy.<sup>57</sup> This mode of interpretation can also be seen in contemporary exegetes who identify the apocalyptic Dragon with Satan who is trying to eliminate Christ's presence from the sphere of his activity.<sup>58</sup> Caesarius does not hesitate to link the child born from the apocalyptic Woman (cf. Rev 12:5) with the Person of Christ and with the Church. For the Church is the body of Christ and consequently, as he mentioned earlier, it continually gives birth to new believers through baptism.<sup>59</sup> The Christological-ecclesial aspect is also to be seen in the interpretation of the verse referring to the Woman who escaped to the desert (cf. Rev 12:6). The desert is the world in which the Church acts thanks to the leadership and care provided by Christ himself. The power and help from Christ make the Church able to "trample and destroy like scorpions and snakes the proud and ungodly people, and every satanic force."<sup>60</sup> Therefore, in St. Caesarius of Arles, as in commentaries on Rev 12:1–6 analyzed earlier, we are dealing with a typical ecclesial interpretation, combined with a Christological one. Yet, there are no Mariological references there.

Sixth-century bishop of Hadrumetum in Africa and author of *Commentary on Revelation* Primasius also follows Tyconius' line. As he admits in the introduction to the text, some of the things he gathered in it were taken over from the Donatist; however, he had previously softened some of his statements and rejected others. Primasius offers an allegorical interpretation not only of the passage that is of interest to us but also of the entire book, which he relates to the Church.<sup>61</sup> Thus, the apocalyptic temple, heavens, and the Woman clothed with the sun represent the Church that has clothed itself with Christ. The moon, according to Primasius, also symbolizes the Church.<sup>62</sup>

References to the commentary by Methodius discussed earlier, were made by Andrew of Caesarea in Cappadocia, who lived at the turn of the 6th and 7th centuries.<sup>63</sup> His *Commentary on the Apocalypse* consists of 24 books, divided into 72 chapters (this is a symbolic number derived from the 24 elders of the Apocalypse, multiplied by 3, as each of them has a body, a soul, and a spirit, the product of which is 72). Like Methodius, he sees the sign of the Woman as the symbol of the Church; the newborn child is not Christ, and therefore the events described in the Revelation refer to the present and the future because Christ was born before the events accounted for by John. Andrew also provides an explanation of the birth pains. In his opinion, they symbolize the hardships borne by the Church in order to enable humanity to be

57 Cf. Caesarius ep. Arelatensis, *Expositio de Apocalypsy* 9 (PL 35, 2434).

58 Cf. Kotecki, *Kościół w świetle Apokalipsy*, 154.

59 Cf. Caesarius ep. Arelatensis, *Expositio in Apocalypsin* 9 (PL 35, 2434).

60 Caesarius ep. Arelatensis, *Expositio in Apocalypsin* 9 (PL 35, 2434).

61 Cf. Wysocki, "Prymazjusz," 994–995.

62 Cf. Primasius ep. Hadrumetanus, *Commentarius in Apocalypsin* III, 12 (PL 68, 872).

63 A general overview of the commentary by Andrew of Caesarea was provided by Arkadiusz Jasiewicz in "Interpretacja 'Komentarza do Apokalipsy,'" 163–173.

spiritually reborn through baptism.<sup>64</sup> Andrew also mentions the commentary by Ecumenius, however, he does not mention his name at any point; he is rather critical of him and argues with him. He says: “some [...] had understood this woman entirely to be Mother of God,”<sup>65</sup> and subsequently reinforces it with an argument from Methodius: “But the great Methodios took her to be the holy Church considering these things concerning her [the woman] to be incongruous with the begetting of the Master for the reason that already the Lord had been born long before.”<sup>66</sup> It can therefore be said that Andrew of Caesarea in Cappadocia is involved in a polemic with the Mariological interpretation. He believes that it was a result of a wrong understanding of the virgin birth. The Revelation speaks about present and future events and does not deal with events set in the past.

## 2. Mariological Interpretation of Rev 12:1-6

In the exegesis of the patristic times the sign of the Woman is sometimes associated with Mary, the Mother of Jesus.<sup>67</sup> Mariological interpretation of Rev 12:1-6 is first found in Greek authors. Epiphanius of Salamis (403 AD) was the first to identify the sign of the Woman with Mary. Discussing eighty heresies in the text titled *Panarion*, he devoted some attention to that issue. A reference to chapter 12 of the Revelation of St. John in the work of Epiphanius is made in connection with his attempt to answer the question about the end of Mary's life. Epiphanius quotes a text from Luke 2:35 and states that some interpret it as a hint suggesting Mary's death. Meanwhile, the bishop of Salamis believes that the author of the Revelation, speaking of the dragon chasing the Woman (cf. 12:13-14) does not suggest that the dragon has power over her; what is more, studying the Holy Scripture, he could “neither find Mary's death, nor whether or not she died, nor whether or not she was buried.”<sup>68</sup> Without going into the details of the suggestions made by Epiphanius, we need to conclude that he interprets the figure of the Woman in Revelation in an individual sense and identifies her with Mary. There can be no doubt about it, as he explains the above-mentioned text from Luke referring to the Mother of Jesus (Luke 2:35) on the basis of selected verses of the twelfth chapter of Revelation (12:13-14).<sup>69</sup>

In Greek circles, the Mariological interpretation was developed by Ecumenius, a philosopher and orator who lived in the 6th century. This is the name of the author

<sup>64</sup> Jasiewicz, “Interpretacja ‘Komentarza do Apokalipsy,’” 170.

<sup>65</sup> Andreas Caesariensis, *Commentarius in Apocalypsin* XI, 33 (FC 123, 136).

<sup>66</sup> Andreas Caesariensis, *Commentarius in Apocalypsin* XI, 33 (FC 123, 136-137).

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Lewandowska, “Figura Smoka w Ap 12,” 38.

<sup>68</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion* 78, 11 (Williams, 624).

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Corsato, *Lecture patristiche*, 169-171.

of the *Commentary on the Apocalypse*.<sup>70</sup> The image of the above-mentioned Ecumenius that emerges from this piece of work is one of an orthodox author who explains the Revelation in a spiritual manner, finding in it prophecies relating to the past, present, and future.<sup>71</sup> In his commentary one does not find any influence of the Western interpretation of this book of the Bible, which may mean that he was not familiar with it,<sup>72</sup> or that he comments on it using a key that is specific to him and entirely independent. Doubtlessly, Ecumenius identifies the sign of the Woman with Mary. He says that “this is the mother of our Savior, and that the sign in fact presents her in heaven rather than on earth, as she is pure of soul and body, equal to angels and to the citizens of heaven, [...] has a body, even though she has nothing in common with the earth, and is free from evil. On the contrary, she is fully exalted, worthy of heaven, even though she has a human nature and human essence. The Virgin is co-substantial with us.”<sup>73</sup>

The Son born of Her is Christ, the twelve stars over the Woman’s head are the twelve Disciples, and the pain and suffering She feels while giving birth point to Her suffering before Christ was born. Meanwhile, the apocalyptic dragon who wanted to devour the Woman’s child is Herod stalking Jesus; therefore, the scene of the Woman’s escape to the desert represents Mary’s escape to Egypt.<sup>74</sup> This explanation seems logical and consistent with later interpretations. A reservation can only be made with regard to the escape to Egypt, as the Revelation speaks about the Woman’s Child being taken to God, while she escapes to the desert. Meanwhile, in the case of Mary, all members of the Holy Family: Jesus, Mary, and Joseph made the escape (cf. Matt 2:13–14).

Quodvultdeus (c.a. 454 AD) was the first early Christian author writing in Latin to identify the Woman clothed with the sun with Mary.<sup>75</sup> In the *Sermon De Symbolo* he wrote “In the Apocalypse of the apostle John it is written that the dragon stood in full view of the woman about to give birth, in order that when she gave birth, he would eat the child born [of her]. Let none of you ignore [the fact] that the dragon is the devil; know that the virgin signifies Mary (*mulierem illam virginem significasse*),

<sup>70</sup> For information about Ecumenius and the main stages of research on the discovered manuscripts of his commentary see: Wojciechowski, “Metoda egzegetyczna,” 88–90.

<sup>71</sup> It can be said of the method of interpreting the Revelation used by Ecumenius that he did not over-allegorize and was rather focused on seeking the symbolic meaning, including allegorical meaning. He did so because he took into account the literary character of that book of the Bible. The exegetic method used by Ecumenius was discussed by Michał Wojciechowski in “Metoda egzegetyczna,” 90–91; also cf. Prigent, *Apocalypse 12*, 28–30.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Starowieyski, *Nowy słownik*, 302–303.

<sup>73</sup> Oecumenius, *Commentarius in Apocalypsin* 6, 12:1–2 (Groote, 165).

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Oecumenius, *Commentarius in Apocalypsin* 6, 12:1–2.

<sup>75</sup> Pavol Farkaš (*La “Donna” di Apocalisse 12*, 14) wrote in his monograph that Quodvultdeus was probably the first in the Western circle to interpret Rev 12 in the Mariological spirit. According to statements made by early Christian writers analyzed above, he was the first to apply this kind of exegesis.

the chaste one, who gave birth to our chaste head (*quae caput nostrum integra integrum peperit*).<sup>76</sup>

This theologically intriguing statement, apart from a Christological and ecclesial theme (which will be addressed in the next point), contains a Mariological theme too. The author points to Mary and says that the apocalyptic Woman represents her. He refers to her using the title Virgin (*virgo*). It must be emphasized that Quodvultdeus, in his teaching on Mary's virginity, adopts the views of his master, St. Augustine. The bishop of Hippo defended this truth many times, especially in his polemics with Jovinian, Helvidius, and the Antidicomarianites.<sup>77</sup> Like St. Augustine, Quodvultdeus calls Mary "Virgin" (*virgo*) even though she gave birth to Christ. He reinforces this term with another one, saying *integra integrum peperit*.

Mention should also be made of Cassiodorus, a Latin writer later than Quodvultdeus (583 AD), who is the author of a short summary of the Book of Revelation (*Complexiones in Apocalypsin*)<sup>78</sup> that contains only thirty-three short chapters. The interpretation of the Woman of Rev 12:1 is Mariological, as it identifies her with the Mother of Christ not with the Church,<sup>79</sup> even though the author cites Tyconius in his explanations.<sup>80</sup>

### 3. Mixed Interpretation

By now, we have identified two ways of interpreting Rev 12:1-6; namely, ecclesial and Mariological. However, there is a third possibility, mentioned by Quodvultdeus, whom we have cited above. As was mentioned before, it is not only Mary that he sees in the figure of the apocalyptic Woman. He admits that a different interpretation is possible too. In the *Sermon De Symbolo* he writes that "[the woman] also embodied in herself a figure of the holy church (*ipsa figuram in se sanctae Ecclesiae demonstravit*): namely, how, while bearing a son, she remained a virgin (*virgo permansit*), so that the church throughout time bears her members (*membra eius pariat*), yet she does not lose her virginity (*virginitatem non amittat*)."<sup>81</sup>

Thus, Quodvultdeus employs an interpretation that can be called mixed. The apocalyptic Woman is not only Mary but also the Church. Moreover, the Mariological and ecclesial themes are linked to Christ. In the first place, it is worth noting

<sup>76</sup> Quodvultdeus, *Sermo ad catechumenos. De Symbolo* III 1,4-6 (Finn, 67).

<sup>77</sup> The problems related to St. Augustine's doctrine on Mary's virginity were addressed by M. Gilski in his book on St. Augustine's contextual Mariology (*Mariologia kontekstualna*, especially 99-103).

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Kieling, "Księga Apokalipsy," 216.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Cassiodorus, *Complexiones in Apocalypsin* 16 (PL 70, 1411).

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Corsato, *Letture patristiche*, 175.

<sup>81</sup> Quodvultdeus, *Sermo ad catechumenos. De Symbolo* III 1,4-6 (Finn, 68).

the adjective “holy,” which is applied to the Church. Here, as earlier with Christ and Mary, we have the problem of purity understood in terms of holiness: *integra integrum peperit*. Of course, a certain amount of caution must be exercised here, as the holiness of Christ and Mary and the holiness of the Church are not of the same degree, especially when we consider that the Church brings together holy and sinful people alike. Nonetheless, the Church is holy because its Head, Christ, is holy. This means that the holiness of the Church follows from the purity (holiness) of Christ. We also need to consider the continuation of Quodvultdeus’ statement, which continues the above-mentioned triple theme, stating that Mary “while bearing a son, she remained a virgin (*virgo permansit*), so that the church throughout time bears her members (*membra eius pariat*), yet she does not lose her virginity (*virginitatem non amittat*).”<sup>82</sup> The author points to Mary as the Mother of God and, at the same time, believes in her virginity *in partu*. In this, he sees a certain analogy to the Church; namely, its giving birth to the followers of Christ through baptism, which does not diminish its significance and holiness in any way. Just as Mary remained a virgin during and after the birth of Christ, we can speak of the virginity, or innocence, and holiness of the Church. However, the virginity of the Church should be viewed in two dimensions; bodily and spiritual. In bodily terms, the Church can be called a virgin only in part, as not all of its members live in chastity. What matters to us here is the spiritual dimension, which indicates that the whole Church is a virgin.<sup>83</sup>

There is one more aspect worth paying attention to. Although Quodvultdeus in his statement does not use the terms *Mater Dei* and *Mater Ecclesiae* with reference to Christ and to the Church, respectively, it can be suspected that this is how he thinks of Mary and the Church. Due to the fact that it gives birth to the followers of Christ, the Church can be seen as representing spiritual motherhood. Quodvultdeus’ master, St. Augustine, compared Mary to the Church in an almost identical way. In one of his sermons, he stated that the Church

is a virgin (*virgo est*) and she also brings forth children. She imitates Mary who gave birth to the Lord. Did not the holy Mary bring forth her Child and remain a virgin? So, too, the Church both brings forth children and is a virgin (*virgo est*). And if you would give some consideration to the matter, she brings forth Christ, because they who are baptized are His members. [...] If, therefore, the Church brings forth the members of Christ, she is very like to Mary.<sup>84</sup>

It is worth pausing a bit longer on this statement by St. Augustine which, as was already mentioned, is very similar to a statement written by Quodvultdeus, a spiritual

<sup>82</sup> Quodvultdeus, *Sermo ad catechumenos. De Symbolo* III 1,6 (Finn, 68).

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Gilski, *Mariologia kontekstualna*, 105–106.

<sup>84</sup> Augustinus, *Sermo 213: In traditione symboli* II, 7 (Muldowney, 127).

disciple of the bishop of Hippo. Analyzing this statement will give us a better understanding of Quodvultdeus' thought. In the cited text, St. Augustine, like Quodvultdeus, links the theme of virginity to the motherhood of Mary and the Church. The bishop of Hippo is not alone in linking these aspects. Although Augustine speaks about the imitation of Mary by the Church with reference to virginity and motherhood, he also notices the differences that exist between them. They are identified by Marek Gilski in his monograph, where he considers the text cited above, as well as many other statements made by the bishop of Hippo.<sup>85</sup> It should first be noted that Augustine speaks about the imitation (*imitatur*) of Mary by the Church with regard to virginity and motherhood. Therefore, it is legitimate not to identify the virginity of the Church with Mary's virginity. Using the expression *virgo est* twice with reference to the Church, Augustine refers to its spiritual character, as the Church's virginity in the bodily sense can only be spoken of with respect to a certain group of its members. Meanwhile, in the case of Mary, the bishop of Hippo recognizes her virginity both in the bodily and spiritual sense: "the holy Mary bring forth her Child and remain a virgin." About the Church, we can say that it imitates Mary in the sense that, like she, it is both a mother and a virgin. It is a mother because it gives birth to members of the Body of Christ in the sacrament of baptism. Although Augustine speaks of the similarity between them, he still sees a double difference in the nature of the motherhood of Mary and of the Church. Based on the statement of the bishop of Hippo cited above, and on his other statements, M. Gilski, whom we have already mentioned, explains this difference by pointing out that, according to Augustine, Mary gives birth in the body (*in corpore*), while the Church has been given by Christ in the spirit (*in spiritu*) the thing "that His mother had in the body."<sup>86</sup> There is one more difference, which M. Gilski calls a quantitative difference, pointing out that while Mary gives birth to Christ, the Church gives birth to whole nations. In spite of this difference, we can talk about the similarity between the motherhood of Mary and the Church. Through Christ (one Person) who was born of Mary, all people who were born in the Church were united. On the other hand, however, it should be noted that the similarity mentioned by St. Augustine does not imply that Mary and the Church are similar in their relationship to Christ. The bishop of Hippo calls the Church the Bride of Christ and Christ the Bridegroom of the Church, but when it comes to Mary, he does not attribute to her "any particular bridal relationship with her Son."<sup>87</sup>

Summing up the statement made by Quodvultdeus, we can say without a doubt that it represents an ecclesio-Mariological and, additionally a Christological interpretation of Rev 12:1–6. It certainly relies on Tyconius' exegetic tradition (specifically,

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Gilski, *Mariologia kontekstualna*, especially 98–112.

<sup>86</sup> Gilski, *Mariologia kontekstualna*, 111.

<sup>87</sup> Gilski, *Mariologia kontekstualna*, 111–112.

the fourth of his hermeneutic rules *de genere et specie*)<sup>88</sup> which makes it possible to combine the Mariological and ecclesial traditions. Therefore, he identifies the symbol of the Woman (*species*) with the person of Mary who gives birth to Christ and, at the same time, is a representative and a figure of the Church. Meanwhile, the genus (*genus*): the Church as mother-virgin is represented by Mary who gives birth to the mystical Christ.<sup>89</sup>

## Conclusions

The cited statements by early Christian writers, except for Epiphanius, Cassiodorus, Quodvultdeus, and Ecumenius, leave us with no doubts that the apocalyptic Woman was not identified with Mary. It should therefore be concluded with all decisiveness that the Mariological interpretation of Rev 12:1–6 was not frequent in history, and especially in the Church of the first centuries.<sup>90</sup> Except for the above-mentioned writers, the remaining early Christian authors representing both the Eastern and the Western Church, emphasized that the sign of the Woman in the Revelation symbolized the Church. Methodius of Olympus, who recognizes the Church in the sign of the apocalyptic Woman, focuses on two images: that of the Church as Bride of Christ, and of the Church as Virgin-Mother.

Having read the texts on Rev 12:1–6 written by early Christian writers, one can raise a legitimate question about the reason for the dual interpretation of this passage in the Bible. We are dealing with an ecclesiological interpretation initiated by Hippolytus of Rome. In the 4th century, Epiphanius of Salamis provides an explanation in the Mariological key, which associates the sign of the Woman mentioned in Rev 12:1 with Mary. We also need to mention an interpretation combining the ecclesiological and the Mariological exegetic trends (Quodvultdeus). The answer to the question is certainly complex and arises from historical and theological causes.

First of all, it is worth considering the place in the Revelation in which we find the chapter that is of interest to us. In an extensive monograph dedicated to the entire chapter twelve of the Revelation, Sister Barbara Barylak remarks correctly that it is placed in the section referring to three great visions that are directly or indirectly linked to the Church. She refers to the first vision, in which Christ addresses seven Churches with a message (cf. Rev 1:9–3:22). The second vision contains numerous

<sup>88</sup> In the work titled *Liber regularum* (PL 18, 33–46), in which Tyconius deals with biblical hermeneutics, the fourth rule is called *De specie et genere*. He explains that he understands species (*species*) as a certain part, while genus (*genus*) is understood as a whole to which the part called species belongs. For more see Czyżewski, “Ocena *Liber regularum*,” 235–247.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Prigent, *Apocalypse 12*, 23.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Poniży, “Niewiasta,” 357–358.

ecclesial allusions (cf. Rev 4:1–11:19). Finally, the third vision (cf. Rev 12:1–18) accounts for the plight of the persecuted Church, even though it does not contain the word *ecclesia*.<sup>91</sup> This may be the first reason why the ecclesiological interpretation dominates in all the analyzed texts referring to Rev 12:1–6. We should also consider the fact that the first four centuries were marked by persecution of the Church. As the apocalyptic vision mentioned above was identified with the plight of the persecuted Church, this could have influenced the explanation of the sign of the Woman in the ecclesiological key.

Both Epiphanius of Salamis and Andrew of Caesarea noted that a Mariological interpretation was known before Methodius. Does this mean that this view, as John McHugh maintains, was held widely in the 4th century?<sup>92</sup> We certainly should not underestimate two significant events that could have provided a stimulus for interpreting the sign of the Woman in the Mariological key. The first one is linked with St. Jerome, who referred the Hebrew pronoun *hu*, used in Gen 3:15 to the Woman and translated it into the feminine form as *ipsa*: “she shall crush your head” (Vulgate). This led to the application of the same interpretation in the Mariological vein to the woman in Gen 3:15 and in Rev 12:1–6.<sup>93</sup> We should also not forget the other important event in the history of the Church, namely, the Council of Ephesus, held in 431 AD, after which the doctrine of Mary started to flourish.

The two interpretations are not mutually exclusive; to the contrary, they complement one another. The apocalyptic Woman can represent the Church in the earthly and heavenly dimensions, which was strongly emphasized by writers such as Hippolytus of Rome, Victorinus of Pettau, Methodius of Olympus, Tyconius, Caesarius of Arles, Primasius, and Andrew of Caesarea. It can also represent Mary as an image, model, and type of the Church, which was pointed to, above all, by Quodvultdeus. The individual dimension of the apocalyptic sign related to Mary was noticed by Epiphanius of Salamis, Cassiodorus, and Ecumenius. Finally, we need to stress that both the ecclesial and Mariological interpretations of Rev 12:1–6 were sometimes linked to Christ, which gave rise to a mixed picture of ecclesial, Christological, and Mariological nature.

It is appropriate to ask about one more issue related to the interpretation of Rev 12:1–6. Could the above-mentioned differences be due to the translations of the book used by the respective authors? This does not seem possible for at least two fundamental reasons. Firstly, there were not that many ancient translations of the Revelation. The translations we have originate from Africa and from Europe. Moreover, Jerome’s Vulgate transmitted the text in a Latin translation. There were also

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Barylak, *Niewiasta z Ap 12*, 25. A solution of this kind is also suggested by Artur Malina in “Zwycięstwo Rodzicielki Życia,” 14.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. McHugh, *The Mother of Jesus*, 513.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Barylak, *Niewiasta z Ap 12*, 123.

two Coptic translations and an insignificant Syrian translation.<sup>94</sup> The second reason for giving a negative answer to the question asked is to be found in the Rev 12:1–6 passage itself. From the philological point of view, it was not so complex that differences in the translations of certain words could influence the ways it was interpreted. We can consider one more important aspect; namely, some commentators make it appear that they were familiar with commentaries on this book of the Bible. None of them has pointed to an improper use or incorrect translation of a word, sentence, or passage by another author, at least as far as Rev 12:1–6 is concerned. If there was any criticism, it referred only to the interpretation of this biblical pericope.

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<sup>94</sup> Cf. Jankowski, *Apokalipsa św. Jana*, 108–111.

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