THE PEMPTOUSIA JOURNAL FOR THEOLOGICAL STUDIES
ISSUE 01 | SEPTEMBER 2016

Anelogia

# MARY, THE THEOTOKOS

*My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.*

(Luk 1:46-50)

ΠΟΛΙΤΙΣΜΟΣ ΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΕΣ ΘΡΗΣΚΕΙΑ
ΠΕΜΠΤΟΥΣΙΑ

*Analogia* is a peer-reviewed academic journal dedicated to the scholarly exposition and discussion of the theological principles of the Christian faith. A distinguishing feature of this journal will be the effort to advance a dialogue between Orthodox Christianity and the views and concerns of Western modes of theological and philosophical thought. A key secondary objective is to provide a scholarly context for the further examination and study of common Christian sources. Though theological and philosophical topics of interest are the primary focus of the journal, the content of *Analogia* will not be restricted to material that originates exclusively from these disciplines. Insofar as the journal seeks to cultivate theological discourse and engagement with the urgent challenges and questions posed by modernity, topics from an array of disciplines will also be considered, including the natural and social sciences. As such, solicited and unsolicited submissions of high academic quality containing topics of either a theological or interdisciplinary nature will be encouraged. In an effort to facilitate dialogue, provision will be made for peer-reviewed critical responses to articles that deal with high-interest topics. *Analogia* strives to provide an interdisciplinary forum wherein Christian theology is further explored and assumes the role of an interlocutor with the multiplicity of difficulties facing modern humanity.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION: Individuals €30, Institutions €80. A subscription to *Analogia* comprises three issues. Prices do not include postage costs. For a detailed list of postage costs please visit www.analogiajournal.com

SUBSCRIPTION DETAILS: Payments are non-refundable. Payment is required in full for all orders. Please contact us for any subscription related enquiries at info@analogiajournal.com

METHODS OF PAYMENT: Payments are accepted via PayPal, bank transfer (AlphaBank, IBAN GR71 0140 2260 2260 0200 2008 780), and cash-on-delivery (Greece only).



*Analogia* is printed three times a year, in September, January, and May. The *Analogia Journal for Theological Studies* is the academic arm of the acclaimed web magazine PEMPTOUSIA (www.pemptousia.gr, www.pemptousia.com). Both *Pemptousia* and *Analogia* are published by *St Maxim the Greek Institute* (www.stmaximthegreek.org).

*Analogia* is generously sponsored by the Holy and Great Monastery of Vatopaidi, Mount Athos.

ISSN 2529-0967



POSTAL ADDRESS: Analogia, St Maxim the Greek Institute,
M Nouarou 22, 151 26, Marousi, Athens, Greece

Typeset by AH Graphic Design
Printed by Lyhnia S.A.

# EDITORIAL

What is it that we call theology? On an epistemological level, there is no doubt that the response seems easy: theology is every discourse concerning God regardless of source or intentions. In ecclesiastical experience, however, theology is nothing less than the very evangelical word of Christ, who 'explains' (John 1:1-2) in the Spirit the things of the Father. And this 'explanation' does not consist primarily of an addition to the primordial metaphysical 'great debate concerning being' (the Platonic *γιγαντομαχίαν περὶ τῆς οὐσίας)*. It is rather the proposal for our ontological introduction to a certain *mode of existence* through the Spirit, which occurs, according to St Nicholas Cabasilas, through the 'Mysteries of the Embodiment': Baptism, Chrism, the Divine Eucharist, and the attunement of our freewill by the grace they bestow. This 'mode' manifests the pre-eternal counsel of the Trinity within history for the eschatological gathering of Creation through its *ecclesialisation* in the human nature of its Creator, the enhypostatic God and Logos. Theology is manifested in this case as an imitation of Christ's own consent to the Father's loving good-pleasure. And in referring to imitation, we mean participation. Inasmuch as it is principally an event rather than a reductive intellectualism, theology is *acted out* in our burning desire, which responds to the divine unconditional desire that changes the rational creature's mode of existence; it is the fruit, in other words, of our will-to-participation in the Eucharistic transformation of Creation in the Body of Christ. Thus theology can only be articulated as an ecclesialisation of language, as an expression of the Eucharistic transfiguration of the intellect, which in a doxological yet simultaneously critical fashion ecclesialises created concepts in light of the 'obedience of Christ', following the biblical-patristic sense of a right 'discernment of spirits'.

In this sense, every form of authentic theology is contemporary or, as we say today, 'contextual'. This indicates chiefly that this acted-out and never-ending *event of gradual Eucharistic transformation of thought* is expressed precisely as the assumption as gifts of all the created givens of human intellectuality, civilisation, science, *etc*. and their *critical* elevation to the possibility of their transformation in the Spirit into multiplicitous manifestations of the mystery of Christ. Put in another way, this event is a highly dynamic and creative activity, and should never be regarded as an apologetic for or defence of a mythologised or petrified 'tradition'.

When these aforementioned criteria are met, theology naturally passes into its 'communicative phase', as Rowan Williams terms it, who goes on to further define it as 'a theology experimenting with the rhetoric of its uncommitted environment'.[1] However, this communication in our era must be, first of all, intra-theological. Like

[1] *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), xiv.

von Balthasar, who never thought to dismiss his Barthian inspiration, or Pannenberg, who could not function without the synthesis of 'Orthodox' and 'Roman Catholic' sources in his ecclesiology, or Congar, De Lubac and Daniélou, who made the Greek Fathers an inseparable part of modern Roman Catholic theological awareness, modern theology needs to *exist in dialogue.* This *real* dialogue is, unfortunately, often far from being self-evident. For some representatives of the major Christian confessions, such an enterprise must bring about a kind of ultimate absorption, explicit or implicit, of any form of theological otherness, thereby rendering their own theological certainty unshakable. Centuries of alienation created isolated, ironclad identities in need of permanent theological support. It is supposed, for example, that Thomas Aquinas' thought includes that of Gregory Palamas, Barth is more comprehensive than Maximus the Confessor, and Jonathan Edwards is more ground-breaking than John Chrysostom, *etc.*

*Cultural submission,* in the sense given to this concept by Arnold Toynbee, unfortunately seems to still be the *unconscious* ideal of some Western Christian theologians. It is still possible, for example, to read serious handbooks striving to give an account of twentieth century theology where Orthodox theology is not even mentioned, as if it never existed.[2] This is likely the case because some authors still insist in believing that there is nothing in Orthodox theology worth mentioning that is not already included in this or that Western theological sub-trend. Though things are rapidly changing today, confessionalism—a spiritual disease that touches theologians of all Christian confessions—is still the demise of any real theological communication. Nevertheless, it is absolutely possible to be Orthodox, or Catholic, or Protestant, and *discuss theology* since there are always better or worse theological expressions of the Christian experience. This discussion is not about who is saved by Christ or not (and it is good to know that Christ looks upon hearts and not upon good ideas), but about theologies to a greater or lesser degree facilitating or hindering salvation. Does this not provide sufficient ground for an honest theological communication?

On the other hand, postmodernity—the misfires of which are comprehensively described by Charles Taylor as a thoroughly self-sufficient humanism existing under the aegis of globalisation—provides some fundamental characteristics that can potentially be received positively, in a sense helping us move towards the aforementioned venture of a diachronic Eucharistic transformation of thought. When, for instance, post-modern philosophy casts doubt upon the existence of knowledge or truth as the exact replication of or a precise correspondence to reality, or objects to the idea of absolutely normative descriptions manifested through causes and distinctions that are hypothetically valid for all time periods, or resists any kind of sup-

[2] See, for example, the massive and erudite work by Rosino Gibellini, *La Teologia del XX secolo* (Brescia: Editrice Queriniana, 1992). Contrast this with David Ford, ed., *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century,* 2nd edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

posedly objective ethical philosophy combined with the great narratives laying claim to a global perspective, is it not in juxtaposition to the onto-theological equalising of metaphysics in a certain sort of Scholasticism, which culminates in the Hegelian abrogation of every difference through a unity that actually murders every form of otherness? The same can be said of the critique of metaphysical rationalism as well as of the influence of the Enlightenment and the idols of social rationalism, which, according to Horkheimer and others, reinstates the social function of religion. Even when post-modern thinkers like Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, Deleuze, and Vattimo as well as Searle and the other members of the analytic school resist every transcendental presupposition of thinking, they can perhaps also be read as intending to re-evaluate the real, which has sank beneath the metaphysical domination exercised by the modern transcendental subject.

Moreover, on an anthropological level, the critique of the transcendentality of the subject has resulted precisely in the discovery of the somatic roots of the conscience as well as the innate communality arising from human nature. The students of Marx, Darwin, Freud, and Nietzsche discovered, conversely, the domination exercised upon the supposedly free transcendent Ego of Western Idealism by the coercive and absolute referentiality in the communal and natural realms. This referentiality embeds the subject in economic relations and/or in an unconscious world of instincts supported by its unavoidable somatic underpinning. Additionally, the referentiality of this kind of consciousness to the things of this world offered phenomenology—from Husserl to Marion and, in our own era, Kearney—a means of founding the subject directly in intersubjectivity, bringing along with it all of the outstanding problems associated with intersubjectivity's ontological grounding.

Despite the fact that (and, also, precisely because of it) we do not underestimate the accompanying problems that post-modernity created—beginning with the abrogation of nearly all common sources of meaning that determine, according to Castoriades, the 'social imaginary', to the deconstruction of the subject, which occurs, as Besnier observes, either 'from above', through the social sciences analysing modern collectives, or 'from below', through the discoveries of neurobiology—we are bound to say that there has never been such a time when the hour of theological inquiry was so imminent for the West. It is up to us at this juncture to take advantage of the post-metaphysical—or, better, the beyond-metaphysical—and post-ontological—or, more accurately, the beyond-ontological, as we are yet able to use the expression 'ontology'—capacity of Christian theology to see enhypostatic nature fundamentally as a relationship between created and uncreated. This is a relationship that is constituted by dialogical reciprocity between created and uncreated. Consequently, enhypostatic nature as an open relationship is likely one of the most valuable gifts Christian theology can offer to Western thought today, which is exhausted by the ruptures between body and soul, matter and spirit, person and nature, transcendence and immanence, individual and person, history and eschatology, *etc*.

Apart from philosophy, a discussion must forthwith be extended also in the direction of psychology and sociology. Fundamental terms and dimensions within these fields—the meaning of selfhood or of social formation, for instance—must be discussed in a way that will bring mutual benefit. The same approach can be taken in relation to the contemporary theory of the state. Christian theology has the capacity to make a particularly significant contribution to the endeavour to locate an anthropocentric foundation for political theory. It is of the utmost importance that there also be engagement with the contemporary natural sciences and biology. Here theology can, though it may seem hyperbolic or paradoxical, contribute to the articulation of the methodological presuppositions of these scientific disciplines. And, naturally, theology is also capable of making a rather remarkable contribution to the theory of art.

Orthodox theology in particular can assist in bringing about these objectives and in engaging these various intellectual perspectives in a decisive way. Of course, it goes without saying that such engagements, along with many possible others, would enable modern theology to illumine hitherto undiscovered corners of Christian experience, and turn discussion in the direction of new and unexpected horizons.

As the mission statement clearly indicates, this new journal seeks to assist in the inauguration and promotion of discussions like those mentioned above. First and foremost, its goal is the facilitation of a dialogical Christian self-understanding in this seemingly meta-Christian world. Strangely enough for the heirs of the Enlightenment, this world still longs for a Christianity illumined by the Spirit. Orthodox theology, with its unbroken tradition, deserves a place in this dialogue. And no one doubts this today. It is therefore of the utmost significance that this academic journal is sponsored by the Holy Great Monastery of Vatopaidi, one of the largest, most ancient, and traditional monasteries of the Holy Mountain. Since its establishment more than a thousand years ago, this Monastery has given the Church dozens of canonized Saints, great Patriarchs, Bishops, and famous scholars as well as great works of philanthropy, education, and art.

It is therefore appropriate that this journal takes its point of departure from *Mary, the Theotokos,* the most venerated person, after the Triune God, on the Holy Mountain, the *Garden of the Panagia,* as it is called by its inhabitants. Mariological theology is extremely rich in both East and West, and the articles of this issue aspire to catch a glimpse of this theology's splendour. Starting from the New Testament, Dr Karakolis's article gives an excellent account of Christ's deep spiritual communion with his mother, demonstrating the uniqueness of Theotokos' role in Divine Economy. Archimandrite Ephraim, the Abbot of Vatopedi, offers an excellent panorama of the patristic literature concerning the Virgin's sinlessness, correcting some modern theologians' views concerning this matter. Dr Andreopoulos suggests a re-interpretation of the Areopagite's description of Mary's funeral, connecting it with the deeply Eucharistic dimension of Patristic theology. Dr Cunningham provides an exception-

al essay on the connection of the Theotokos with the natural world in the Byzantine patristic sources. Prof. Bronwen Neil offers us exciting new material concerning the role of the Theotokos as selective intercessor for souls in Middle Byzantine apocalyptic literature. She concludes by proving that 'the theme of Marian discrimination in intercession reflects an anti-Judaism found in some Marian hymns and homilies of the early Byzantine period, such as sixth-century Ephesus, but is not the standard in the hymns and homilies of John of Damascus, Andrew of Crete, or Germanos of Constantinople'. Dr Tsironi gives a convincing account of the Palamite affinities of Anthony Bloom's Marian theology. Finally, I strive to articulate a modern systematic discussion of Cabasilas' and Bulgakov's hesychastic *Mariological humanism* in dialogue with the contemporary theological and philosophical adventures of humanistic ideas.

*– Nicholas Loudovikos*
Senior Editor

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Mother of Jesus in the Gospel according to John: A Narrative-Critical and Theological Perspective
*Christos Karakolis*

The Sinlessness of our Most Holy Lady
*Abbot Ephraim*

The Theotokos as Selective Intercessor for Souls in Middle Byzantine Apocalyptic
*Bronwen Neil*

The Mother of God and the Natural World: Byzantine Conceptions of Sacrament and Creation
*Mary B. Cunningham*

Practising Consubstantiality: The Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary between Synergy and Sophia in St Nicholas Cabasilas and Sergius Bulgakov, and in a Postmodern Perspective
*Nicholas Loudovikos*

The Dormition of the Theotokos and Dionysios the Areopagite
*Andreas Andreopoulos*

The Palamite Background in the Marian Theology of Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh
*Niki Tsironis*

book reviews
Gateway of Life: Orthodox Thinking on the Mother of God
by mary cunningham
*Demetrios Harper*

# The Mother of Jesus in the Gospel according to John: A Narrative-Critical and Theological Perspective

CHRISTOS KARAKOLIS
*Associate Professor of New Testament, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece; Extraordinary Associate Professor, North-West University, South Africa*

This study attempts to analyse the narrative function and the theological significance of Jesus' mother for the overall theology of the fourth gospel, mainly based on the exegetical method of narrative criticism. In the first part, the problem of the anonymity of Jesus' mother in juxtaposition with the anonymity of the beloved disciple is dealt with. The second part consists of a detailed exegetical approach to the narrative of Jesus' first sign in Cana within the Johannine narrative context as a whole. On this basis, in the third part a response to further relevant questions about the significance of Jesus' mother according to the overall fourth gospel's witness is attempted. The article is concluded with a summary of exegetical and theological positions, including a hypothesis about a possible Johannine background of the current Orthodox understanding of *Theotokos*.

The fourth evangelist presents the mother of Jesus quite differently from the synoptic gospels. Specifically, he never mentions her name, and omits the nativity stories altogether, although apparently having some knowledge of at least parts of the synoptic tradition.[1] Instead, he refers to her in two incidents that are unknown to the synoptic gospels, namely the miraculous change of water into wine at Cana of Galilee (John 2:1-11), and her presence along with the beloved disciple at the foot of the cross (John 19:26-27). Through these two stories the fourth evangelist apparently complements the synoptic tradition and at the same time interprets it anew. The obvious question arising from these observations regards the particular significance of the 'mother of Jesus' in the Johannine narration and theology.

In my attempt to answer to this question, I will base my analysis on a relatively new method in New Testament studies, namely narrative criticism.[2] Using the tools

[1] For the problem of John's knowledge of the synoptic tradition, see for instance Ian D. Mackay, *John's Relationship with Mark: An Analysis of John 6 in the Light of Mark* 6–8, WUNT 2/182 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004); John Amedee Bailey, *The Traditions Common to the Gospels of Luke and John* (Leiden: Brill, 1963); Andrew Gregory, 'The Third Gospel? The Relationship of John and Luke Reconsidered' in *Challenging Perspectives on the Gospel of John*, WUNT 2/219, ed. John Lierman (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 109–134.

[2] On the use of narrative criticism in New Testament studies, see for instance James L. Resseguie,

of this method I will try to understand the narrative function and the theological significance of Jesus' mother for the overall theology of the fourth gospel.

I hope that my approach will shed some more light on the origins of the significance of *Theotokos* in Orthodox theology, worship and spirituality,[3] thus contributing to the general question about whether Mary's veneration in the Orthodox, as well as in the Roman-Catholic tradition, is indeed based upon the New Testament witness or whether it reflects a much later theological development.[4]

In the first part of the article at hand, I will deal with the problem of the anonymity of Jesus' mother in conjunction with that of the beloved disciple. In the second part, I will attempt a detailed exegetical approach to the narrative of Jesus' first sign in Cana in light of John's gospel as a whole. On this basis, in the third part I will try to respond to some further relevant questions about the significance of Jesus' mother according to the fourth gospel's witness. I will close my considerations with a summary of my exegetical and theological conclusions, including my view on a possible Johannine background of the current Orthodox understanding of *Theotokos*.

## *I*

The Johannine narrative mentions several anonymous individual characters. However, reference to them is usually limited to only one specific narrative context. The following narrative characters belong to this category: the bridegroom and the steward (John 2:8-10), the Samaritan woman (John 4:7-42), the royal official (John 4:46-53), the lame man (John 5:5-15), the man born blind (John 9:1-38), and the sister of Jesus' mother (John 19:25).[5]

On the contrary, although also anonymous, the mother of Jesus appears in two different narrative contexts, namely in John 2:1-5 and in 19:26-27. In addition to her, one more anonymous character appears repeatedly in different narrative occasions, namely the 'other disciple' or 'the disciple whom Jesus loved', referred to in John 1:37-40, 13:23-25, 18:15-16, 19:26-27, 20:2-8, 21:7-24.

Both the mother of Jesus and the so-called beloved disciple appear in the first and last narrative parts of the Johannine narrative. Concretely, the mother of Jesus appears at the beginning of Jesus' activity, namely in the story of Jesus' first sign at

*Narrative Criticism of the New Testament. An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Press, 2005).

[3] Cf. for instance Sergius Bulgakov, *The Burning Bush: On the Orthodox Veneration of the Mother of God*, trans. Thomas Allan Smith (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

[4] The latter position is often supported by Protestant exegetes, cf. for instance the monograph of *Heikki Räisänen, Die Mutter Jesu im Neuen Testament* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1969), esp. 156–186, in relation to the Johannine image of Jesus' mother.

[5] I do not take into consideration any collective anonymous characters because they simply bear the name of their group, thus belonging to an altogether different category. Such characters are the Jews, the Pharisees, the high priests, the disciples, the brothers and sisters of Jesus, etc.

Cana, while the beloved disciple appears even earlier than that as one of Jesus' first two disciples alongside Andrew.[6]

In the final part of the narrative, the beloved disciple appears again in the last supper enjoying, as it seems, a special relationship with Jesus since Peter uses him as a mediator to their master. Apart from that, the beloved disciple follows Jesus to his trial by entering the house of the high priest, he follows Jesus to his very crucifixion and death, and he witnesses the events of his resurrection and post-Easter appearances. The mother of Jesus is also present beneath the cross. Jesus connects his beloved disciple with his mother by proclaiming that from now on his disciple will be the son of his mother, and she will be the mother of his disciple. The gospel ends with an indirect reference to the disciple's death and a note of the narrator providing an explanation of the unexpected death of the disciple before the second coming of Jesus.

According to the above mentioned, while at the beginning of the narrative the mother of Jesus and the beloved disciple are presented separately from each other,[7] toward the end of the narrative they are connected with each other most closely as mother and son. What is more, they appear at the most crucial points of the gospel narrative, namely at the very outset of Jesus' public appearance and activity, as well as at the culminating end of his earthly presence, namely at the foot of the cross just before his death, thus forming a narrative *inclusio*.[8] The way both of these particular narrative characters are positioned in the Johannine text adds to their significance compared to all other important narrative characters, who are absent at Jesus' crucifixion, the most crucial moment of his earthly presence and salvific work.[9]

The actual names of these two most important narrative characters are certainly known to the Johannine community.[10] The beloved disciple cannot just be an archetypal, symbolic and even a non-historical personality because there is clear reference to the frustration experienced by his community due to his death, since the community members had been under the impression that he would not die until

[6] In my study, Christos Karakolis, 'The Sons of Zebedee and Two Other Disciples: Two Pairs of Puzzling Acquaintances in the Johannine Dénouement' in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John*, WUNT 314, eds. Steven A. Hunt, Francois D. Tolmie and Ruben Zimmermann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 663–676, at 663–671, I have argued in favour of the identification of John the Baptist's anonymous disciple who followed Jesus, with the beloved disciple of the last part of the gospel.

[7] Although, of course, it is implied that the beloved disciple is also present at the wedding of Cana, cf. John 2:1, 2:11.

[8] Cf. Colleen M. Conway, *Men and Women in the Fourth Gospel: Gender and Johannine Characterization* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1997), 70; Jean Zumstein, 'Johannes 19,25–27' in *Kreative Erinnerung: Relecture und Auslegung im Johannesevangelium* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2004), 253–275, at 271.

[9] On the theological importance of Jesus' crucifixion in the fourth gospel, see Robert Kysar, *John, The Maverick Gospel,* 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 53.

[10] Cf. Räisänen, *Die Mutter Jesu im Neuen Testament*, 185–186; Ulrich Busse, *Das Johannesevangelium: Bildlichkeit, Diskurs und Ritual* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002), 88n95.

Jesus' second coming (John 21:21-23).[11] Also the disciple's personal testimony (John 19:35, 21:24) would have had a very limited effect (if at all) on the gospel's historical recipients had he not been a historical person himself.[12]

Since this particular disciple accepts the mother of Jesus as his own mother and takes her to his house, we have to assume that the mother of Jesus had also somehow been known to the Johannine community members. Because of the fact that she is linked to the beloved disciple who is crucial for the formation of the community's identity, his 'mother' could not but be well known to its members and probably even highly revered by them.[13] Even if one does not accept a direct historical connection of the fourth evangelist and his community to the historical events that the gospel refers to, one has to at least accept that traditions about the mother of Jesus were broadly known whether directly from one or more of the synoptic gospels or indirectly from the fluid Christian tradition of the first century.

Of course other named protagonists in the history of Jesus are definitely also known to the community. Therefore, the anonymity of Jesus' mother and his beloved disciple is a trait that betrays or even constitutes a possible qualitative differentiation of them in relation to all the other characters of the Johannine narrative.

Furthermore, it is important that the way these two narrative figures are referred to is based on their special relationship with Jesus, a unique feature of anonymous individual characters (Jesus' brothers and sisters are a collective character and are therefore not taken into consideration here). It is characteristic that the fourth evangelist does not even enter into any details about the significance of the name Peter that was attributed by Jesus to the most prominent disciple in the fourth gospel right after the beloved one (John 1:42).[14]

Since in biblical thought names (either proper or descriptive ones) express actual individual identities, both the mother of Jesus and the beloved disciple are presented as being entirely defined by their relationship with Jesus and not by their proper names. In other words, their identity is based on their relationship with Jesus while their individual traits are of secondary importance, if at all.[15] It is indicative of the importance of the relationship with Jesus, which overshadows every other relationship or personal traits, that Andrew's name is mentioned in connection with the

[11] Cf. R. Alan Culpepper, *John the Son of Zebedee: The Life of a Legend* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 84–85.

[12] Many scholars see in the beloved disciple the founder and/or leader of the Johannine community, see for instance Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 358–411.

[13] Cf. Celestino G. Lingad, Jr., *The Problems of Jewish Christians in the Johannine Community* (Roma: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2001, 150–155.

[14] Quite possibly, even in the fourth gospel the name Peter goes back etymologically and theologically to the rock of Peter's confession, expressly mentioned in Matt 16:18; cf. the relevant discussion Bradford B. Blaine, Jr., *Peter in the Gospel of John: The Making of an Authentic Disciple* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 186–190.

[15] Cf. Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 96.

name of his brother, Simon Peter, and not of his father (John 1:40) because of Peter's historical and narrative significance. Furthermore, the 'sister of Jesus' mother' is identified by reference to her sister and not to her husband or her father (in the case that she is unmarried). Even more importantly, the mother of Jesus is herself determined by her son and not by her husband Joseph (see John 1:45, 6:42).

The fourth evangelist tends to conceal what is sacred in view of his obvious expectation for his gospel also to be read by non-believers as well (*disciplina arcani*).[16] Such a case is the omission *par excellence* of any reference whatsoever to the Eucharist during the last supper (John 13-17). In this case, the fourth evangelist conceals the identity of both the beloved disciple and Jesus' mother, resulting in the failure of his unknowledgeable readers to identify them. It is then perhaps not too far-fetched to assume that both the fourth evangelist and his community might consider these persons as being sacred in an analogous way to the sacredness of the Eucharist, to which only indirect references are made in the fourth gospel (see esp. John 6:48-58).

In the gospel of John there are also references to other persons bearing the names of Mary and John, which were common for Palestinian Jews of the New Testament era. *Maria* is also the name of the sister of Lazarus (John 11:1-2), of Mary Magdalene and of Mary of Klopas (John 19:25), while *Ioannes* is also the name of the father of Peter (John 1:42), and of John the Baptist (John 1:6). By avoiding any mention of the actual names of Jesus' mother and the beloved disciple, the fourth evangelist also avoids any case of confusion or misconception with regard to their importance. The anonymity of these two particular narrative characters can draw the knowledgeable reader to the conclusion that there may be other narrative characters bearing their names, but only one disciple who is loved by Jesus in a special way, and only one Mary as important as Jesus' mother.

Furthermore, the non-disclosure of these two characters' names indicates that the attribute given to them is fully sufficient. In the fourth gospel, a corresponding example would be the reference to Caesar only by his title and not by his proper name (John 19:12, 19:15). This is a practice that has been, and still is widely followed in the political, social, and not least the ecclesiastical field, when referring to persons with significant and/or unique positions, such as the king, the president of the republic, or the patriarch.[17]

On the basis of the above, it should be clear that the designations 'mother of Jesus' and 'beloved disciple' are not simple attributes, but indeed high titles of rever-

[16] See the argumentation in my study, Christos Karakolis, 'The Logos-Concept and Dramatic Irony in the Johannine Prologue and Narrative' in *The Prologue of the Gospel of John: Its Literary, Theological, and Philosophical Contexts: Papers read at the Colloquium Ioanneum 2013*, WUNT 359, eds. Jan van der Watt, R. Alan Culpepper, and Udo Schnelle (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 134–154, at 137–138n3, and 150n66.

[17] Such titles need further attributes when used by outsiders with regard to the respective community of the title-holders (e.g. the King of England, the President of the French Republic, or the Patriarch of Constantinople).

ence.[18] It would then seem that these two characters' special relationships with Jesus stand on the highest level from a narrative-critical and a theological point of view. Conversely put, usage of their proper names would lower them to a similar level with the other important narrative characters. Indeed, assuming that the gospel's readers are *a priori* aware of the superiority of these two particular persons, the mere use of their names instead of their titles could well signify a relative depreciation, in a similar way that it would be depreciating for a leading political or religious personality to be publicly addressed by his/her proper name and not by his/her title.

At this point an objection could be raised with regard to John the Baptist, who, although being God's envoy, is usually referred to simply by his own proper name. However, John the Baptist rejects any prophetic title whatsoever (John 1:19-23), and declares himself unworthy of even unbinding the strap of Jesus' shoes (John 1:27). It is then clear that the fourth evangelist deliberately downplays John the Baptist compared to the relevant synoptic tradition,[19] obviously having in view some of the latter's followers, who even at the time of the fourth gospel's composition apparently believed that their own master excelled compared to Jesus (cf. John 3:26-36).[20] This explains the omission of any honorary title in connection with John the Baptist apart from the 'man sent from God'[21] and the 'friend of the bridegroom', who stands aside and rejoices with the bridegroom's joy (John 3:29).

In the case of Jesus himself, his name should also be understood as one of his titles. The Hebrew name *Yeshua* means 'God saves'[22] and, as is evident, the fourth evangelist knows the etymologies of words derived from Hebrew or Aramaic.[23] Jesus is the incarnate God himself (John 1:18, 20:28), who saves the world in the name of God the Father (John 3:16-17, 5:43), and is therefore the living and real presence of God in the world (John 14:9). Thus, the name 'Jesus' does not fall under the rules of any other common name.[24] Besides, the name 'Jesus' has to be explicitly mentioned to avoid any possible misunderstanding about the actual identity of the saviour of the world (cf. John 3:17, 20:30-31). It is important in this regard that the fourth evangelist not only refers to those who believe in Jesus, but also to those who believe 'in his name' (John

[18] Cf. *The Gospel according to John I–XII* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 98; Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 196; Margaret M. Beirne, *Women and Men in the Fourth Gospel: A Genuine Discipleship of Equals,* JSNTSup 242 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 186.

[19] Matt 11:9–14, 17:12–13; Mark 9:11–13; Luke 1:17, 7:26–28.

[20] Cf. Walter Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition,* SNTSMS 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 98–106.

[21] See John 1:6, as opposed to the *Logos* who is God himself, cf. John 1:1, 1:18; furthermore John 20:28.

[22] Cf. Philo, *Mut*., 121.

[23] Cf. John 1:38, 1:41, 1:42; 9:7; 19:13, 19:17; 20:16. On the issue cf. for instance C.H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 424–432.

[24] It is rather telling that the name 'Jesus' belongs to the earliest *nomina sacra* of the New Testament. For this issue, see Philip Comfort, *Encountering the Manuscripts: An Introduction to New Testament Paleography & Textual Criticism* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 199–254.

1:12, 2:23). Since not only the person, but also the name of Jesus is sacred its appeal in faith, combined with all other christological titles, leads to salvation (John 20:31).

## *II*

Focusing now again on the mother of Jesus, the quality of her relationship with Jesus on a narrative level and the way her narrative character is developed appear most clearly in the narrative of the first miracle at Cana.

The mother of Jesus appears in the scene of the marriage feast before Jesus and his disciples (John 2:1-2), as is evident by the use of the verbs *ἦν* and *ἐκλήθη*. In the continuation of the story, the mother of Jesus perceives the problem of the shortage of wine even before the steward and the bridegroom (cf. John 2:3, 2:9-10). She also possesses the authority to command the servants of the house (John 2:5). Therefore, it is clear that one way or another she is related to the family of the bridegroom,[25] and that she has an organizational role of responsibility.[26]

Interestingly enough, when the mother of Jesus perceives the problem of the lack of wine—a serious problem that could destroy the celebration and damage the social image of the bridegroom[27]—she does not communicate the problem to those responsible, namely the steward and the bridegroom, but only to Jesus, although he is just a simple guest.

Consequently, she knows in advance that, although being a simple guest, Jesus can provide a solution to this particular problem that even those responsible could not.[28] This implies that Jesus' mother knows that her son is capable of solving problems that are insurmountable from an exclusively human point of view. This in itself seems like a paradox. But it is not the only paradoxical feature of the story under consideration.

At a second step, the mother of Jesus notifies him about the problem in a seemingly neutral way, as if merely transferring some casual piece of information, and not as submitting a request for a specific action on his part.[29] This behaviour is not typical of a mother towards her son. In line with the decalogue commandment

[25] Normally, wedding feasts took place in the house of the bridegroom, cf. Ernst Haenchen, *Das Johannesevangelium: Ein Kommentar* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1980), 187; Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes,* NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 177–178.

[26] Cf. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John,* PNTC (Leicester: Apollos, 1991), 169.

[27] Cf. Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel Code: Novel Claims about Jesus, Mary Magdalene and da Vinci* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 28–29.

[28] Cf. Räisänen, *Die Mutter Jesu im Neuen Testament*, 160; Haenchen, *Das Johannesevangelium*, 188; Conway, *Men and Women*, 71. This proves that the mother of Jesus does not need to 'redefine her understanding of his (Jesus') identity', as David R. Beck, *The Discipleship Paradigm: Readers and Anonymous Characters in the Fourth Gospel* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 58, claims.

[29] Cf. Mary L. Coloe, 'The Mother of Jesus: A Woman Possessed', in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John*, WUNT 314, eds. Steven A. Hunt, Francois D. Tolmie and Ruben Zimmermann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 203–213, at 205.

to honour one's own parents (Exod 20:12; Deut 5:16), Jewish mothers obviously did not lack the authority to directly ask their sons for any favour.

However, Jesus' mother does not merely make Jesus aware of the problem of the lack of wine matter-of-factly, but her statement implies an indirect request on her part.[30] This is obvious from the ensuing reaction by Jesus, who recognises this request and responds to it accordingly, as well as from his mother's subsequent command to the servants to follow Jesus' orders.[31]

Normally the implied readers of the gospel are supposed to know more than most of its narrative characters since they have already read the prologue (John 1:1-18), a key to understanding the gospel's plot and theology,[32] while they also continue to read the evangelist's enlightening comments on the narrated events.[33] At this point, though, the mother of Jesus definitely knows more than the gospel's readers. Even John the Baptist does not reach this level of knowledge. He has to see the Holy Spirit descending in the form of a dove and remaining in Jesus in order to identify Jesus as the one God told him about (John 1:32-34). On the other hand, Jesus' mother does not need to see any sign in order to understand or to be convinced of anything.[34] On the contrary, she seems to possess solid knowledge in advance, either from the time of Jesus' conception and birth[35] or in any case before the start of the narrative time of John's gospel.[36]

Therefore, the mother of Jesus is not preoccupied with the problem of Jesus' true identity and the nature and meaning of his work, as is the case with both John the Baptist (John 1:19-36, 3:25-36) and all other important characters of the narrative, even including his own brothers and sisters (7:3-5). Instead, she perceives the indirect signals of Jesus' attitude, signals so subtle that the evangelist does not or even cannot portray them. No other narrative character in John's gospel has this kind of access to Jesus' personality. Even Jesus' disciples, who have the most stable and close relationship with him (with the obvious exception of his mother), repeatedly misinterpret or fail to understand their master's words and actions.[37]

[30] Cf. Euthymius Zigabenus, *Interpr. Jo*. 2.79 (PG 129:1148B); Christian Dietzfelbinger, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes: Teilband 1: Johannes 1–12,* ZBK NT 4 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2001), 66; Coloe, 'Mother of Jesus', 205; contra Xavier Léon-Dufour, *Lecture de l'évangile selon Jean I: chapitres 1–4* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1988), 226.

[31] Cf. Raymond E. Brown et al., eds., *Maria im Neuen Testament: Eine* ökumenische *Untersuchung -eine Gemeinschaftsstudie von protestantischen und römisch-katholischen Gelehrten* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1981), 149–150.

[32] Cf. the relevant analysis in my study Karakolis, 'The Logos-Concept', 140–145.

[33] See among others John 2:21, 2:25; 4:44; 6:23, 6:71; 7:5, 7:30, 7:39; 11:51–52; 12:4, 12:6, 12:16, 12:37-43; 13:2; 19:35; 20:9, 20:30-31; 21:19, 21:23-25.

[34] Contra Jerome H. Neyrey, *The Gospel of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 68, who maintains that the faith of Jesus' mother is wanting.

[35] According to the relevant traditions of Matt 1–2 and Luke 1–3, cf. Theophylact, *Enarr. Jo*. 2.532 (PG 123:1188D–1189A).

[36] Cf. John Chrysostom, *Hom. Jo.* 21.122 (PG 59:130).

[37] See for instance John 2:22; 4:27, 4:31-33; 6:7-9, 6:20-21, 6:60-66; 11:8-16; 13:6-10, 13:36-38; 14:7-10, 14:22; 16:18-19, 16:30-32; 18:10-11, 18:25-27; 20:8-9, 20:25-28; 21:21-22.

In Jesus' response to his mother's indirect request, the phrase '*τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί*' is a Semitism, meaning 'what may be the relationship between me and you',[38] and is therefore an expression of intense distancing, differentiation, and detachment.[39] Of course, Jesus does not deny his relationship with his mother per se. Had this been the case, the fourth evangelist would not designate the mother of Jesus as such in the first place. However, at this point Jesus' mother intervenes into the very core of Jesus' salvific work, because if Jesus would indeed perform a miracle according to his mother's wish, he would set into motion the events that would eventually lead him to the cross, hence the reference to Jesus' 'hour', which in the fourth gospel hints at his passion.[40] Jesus stresses that his hour has not yet come, and in any case it is not for his mother, but for his heavenly Father to determine when his hour will actually come.[41] The mother of Jesus then indeed intervenes indirectly, and probably also unintentionally and inadvertently, into Jesus' salvific work. The problem here is not whether Jesus should perform a miracle or not,[42] but performing a miracle at an inopportune time in view of the realisation of God's salvific plan through his earthly activity.

Jesus also distances himself from his mother by calling her *γύναι* (woman). This way of addressing her is not pejorative in and of itself, since it was the normal way of addressing a woman in New Testament times.[43] Nevertheless, it was certainly not the proper address of a son to his mother.[44]

According to the above mentioned, the expressions 'what is it between me and you' and 'woman' express Jesus' distancing himself not just from his mother's specific request, but even from her as a person.[45] Furthermore, they are certainly not the usual and expected words of a son who is supposed to honour his mother. As crucial as the impact of the lack of wine on the social status of the bridegroom and on the wedding feast may be, it is totally unimportant when compared to the significance of

[38] Cf. Judg 11:12; 2 Kgs 16:10; 19:23; 3 Kgdms 17:18; 4 Kgdms 3:13; 2 Chr 35:21; Matt 8:29; Mark 1:24; 5:7; Luke 4:34; 8:28. The translation of John McHugh, *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1975), 394, 'of what concern is it to me or to you' does not do justice to the continuation of Jesus' saying. There is no convincing reason for Jesus to connect the coming of his hour with a matter so trivial that he does not even care to deal with. Therefore, the great majority of exegetes insist on the obvious Old Testament and Jewish semantic background of the phrase.

[39] See Beck, *The Discipleship Paradigm*, 56.

[40] Cf. C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (London: SPCK, 1978), 191.

[41] Cf. mainly John 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 12:27; 13:1; 17:1.

[42] According to the fourth gospel, Jesus performed so many signs that even the whole world could not contain the books about them, if all of them would be written down (John 21:25).

[43] Cf. Matt 15:28; Luke 13:12; John 4:21; 8:10; 20:13. See also Beck, *The Discipleship Paradigm*, 55.

[44] Cf. Conway, *Men and Women*, 73; Coloe, 'Mother of Jesus', 212.

[45] Cf. Michael Theobald, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes: Kapitel 1–12,* RNT (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2009), 212. From now on, Jesus' mother will have no say whatsoever over his actions and path towards the fulfillment of his Father's salvific plan. Thus, Jesus' relationship to his mother seems to be entering an altogether new phase. In the Johannine narrative, this is probably signified by the fact that Jesus' mother disappears and only appears again at the foot of the cross in order to be bound to the beloved disciple (John 19:25-26).

Jesus' 'hour' that is to come. Jesus does not yet want to reveal himself, nor manifest his glory (cf. John 2:11). Therefore, he does not want to initiate his path to the cross and his final glorification by means of a premature sign. Of course, as we have already seen, even before his distancing from his mother, she had already distanced herself from him, as can be deduced by her indirect way of submitting her request.

However, Jesus does not actually refuse the request of his mother since there is no actual denial in his words. Although the first impression of the readers might be that Jesus will not respond to the request of his mother in a positive manner, he merely expresses his dissatisfaction with her involvement in matters concerning the salvation of the world. On a symbolic level, Jesus' dissatisfaction could be paralleled to that of a king, who in the face of very important strategic decisions receives a request from his mother with regard to some trivial issue that could, nevertheless, affect his planning.

As already mentioned, it is clear that the mother of Jesus indeed realises that her son will respond in a positive manner to her request since, without waiting or asking for any clarifications on his part, she commands the servants to follow his instructions.[46] This confirms that here indeed a non-verbal communication between Jesus and his mother does take place, which is implied clearly enough, although not explicitly mentioned.[47] Moreover, the fact that the mother of Jesus tells the servants to follow her son's instructions means that not only does she know that Jesus will fulfill her request, but also that he will do so by giving specific instructions to them.[48]

The unique quality of this non-verbal communication between Jesus and his mother can be exemplified by comparing it to Jesus' communication with the royal official, who in John 4:47.49 asks him to come to his house in order to heal his dying son. It has been observed that the two narratives of the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11) and of the healing of the royal official's son (John 4:46-54) parallel each other with regard to both their structure and content, as is evident by several common elements.[49] However, there are also some notable differences between these two stories. As we have seen, Jesus' mother avoids submitting a direct request to her son, but merely indicates the problem while completely leaving in his hands the decision

[46] Cf. Brown, *The Gospel according to John I–XII*, 100; Conway, *Men and Women*, 74; Coloe, 'Mother of Jesus', 206; cf. however also Brown et al. (eds.), *Maria im Neuen Testament*, 154, where the editors maintain that the reaction of Jesus' mother betrays her actual misunderstanding of his response, although they do not convincingly explain in which way such a clear response can be misunderstood, and secondly why Jesus indeed performs the miracle as requested by his mother.

[47] Contra Sjef van Tilborg, *Imaginative Love in John* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 6, who claims that 'communicatively, the mother is presented as someone who does not listen to what Jesus says'.

[48] Contra Beck, *The Discipleship Paradigm*, 58.

[49] Such parallel elements are the following: the similar length of the narratives, the counting of the two miracles at their last verse, the location of both in Cana of Galilee, the request to Jesus followed by his distancing with sharp words, the subsequent meeting of the request, the presence of objective witnesses who certify the realisation of the miracle, and finally the coming to faith of some of the narratives' protagonists. See the comparison of the two narratives in my monograph Christos K. Karakolis, *Ἡ θεολογικὴ σημασία τῶν θαυμάτων στὸ κατὰ Ἰωάννην Εὐαγγέλιο* (Thessaloniki: Pournaras, 1997), esp. 120–121.

and the way of handling the problem (John 2:3-5). On the contrary, the royal official dictates to Jesus not only what to do but also how to do it (4:47-49). Furthermore, the mother of Jesus does not repeat her request because she already knows from Jesus' initial response that her request will be met, despite his seeming refusal and his distancing himself from her. On the contrary, the royal official perceives the answer of Jesus as a refusal to meet his request or, at least, he is unable to understand its meaning, which leads him to submit his request once more. Only when he hears Jesus explicitly saying that his son lives, does he trust Jesus and believe that his request has been satisfied (John 4:50). Finally, the royal official certifies the miracle by asking about the exact time of his son's healing (John 4:52). It is only in this way that he is able to reach the final stage of faith towards Jesus (John 4:53). Conversely, the mother of Jesus does not need to verify anything. She merely commands the servants to follow Jesus' instructions (John 2:5) and subsequently disappears from the Johannine narrative's front stage until Jesus' crucifixion (John 19:25-26). In the end, those who indeed reach a higher level of faith than they already had are Jesus' disciples, not his mother (John 2:11).

Jesus confirms his mother's command to the servants by giving them specific instructions, and letting them play a certain role in his changing the water into wine (John 2:7-8). Furthermore, Jesus handles it in such a way that only his own disciples and the servants are able to perceive his miracle, while the wedding's hosts and guests remain ignorant of it (John 2:9-11). Consequently, Jesus manages to actually maintain his incognito. The transformation miracle does not after all initiate his public activity,[50] and hence his 'hour' does not yet come. The servants play the role of the objective witnesses to the fact that the new wine presented to the bridegroom was indeed produced miraculously by Jesus and did not come from the bridegroom's store, as was the steward's impression.[51]

From a different point of view, however, Jesus is presented as indeed giving in and doing his mother the favour she asked him.[52] This is the only case in the fourth gospel in which Jesus gives in unwillingly[53] to somebody's request, thus not maintaining the initiative of his actions. The case of the royal official in ch. 4 is different, as he does not ask Jesus to change his 'hour', but simply to perform one more miracle after the miracles he had already performed in public while being in Jerusalem for the Pesach (John 2:23, 4:45). Moreover, Jesus' rebuke refers to the unbelief toward himself (cf. John 2:24-25, 4:44-45), and not to the requested healing as such. Since the royal official indirectly proclaims his faith by repeating his request despite Jesus'

[50] Jesus' public activity is actually initiated through the programmatic cleansing of the temple in John 2:13–22, cf. Jean Zumstein, *L'évangile selon saint Jean (1,1–12,50),* CNT 4a (Genève: Labor et Fides, 2014), 101–102. Quite differently, the first sign in Cana is performed incognito.

[51] Cf. Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Das Johannesevangelium I: Einleitung und Kommentar zu Kap. 1–4,* HThKNT 4.1 (Freiburg: Herder, 1965), 337.

[52] Cf. Cyril of Alexandria, *Comm. Jo*. 2.1.135 (PG 73:225C).

[53] Cf. *ibid*. 2.1.134 (PG 73:223D).

dismissive words, Jesus performs the healing without any further objections. In other words, the difficulty in the case of the royal official lies in his lack of faith, not in some involvement of his with God's salvific plan. On the other hand, Jesus' exchange with his mother demonstrates that meeting her request could potentially affect his path to the cross. This has no parallel in John, as no other narrative character comes so close to making Jesus deviate from his planned course of action.[54] Even in the extreme case of the Jews who attempt to seize or stone him, Jesus is not in the least worried because his time has not yet come.[55]

## *III*

After examining some relevant Johannine texts, there are still issues that need some clarification, which I will attempt in this third and final part of the present article.

The Johannine Jesus is presented as loving all his disciples (John 13:1, 13:34), his Father (14:31), his friend Lazarus and Lazarus' sisters Martha and Maria (11:5), and finally in a particular way also the anonymous beloved disciple (13:23, 21:7, 21:20). In the latter case, being loved by Jesus is the most dominant trait of this disciple, which even replaces his proper name. On the other hand, Jesus' relationship with his mother is much more complex. To begin with, Jesus' love towards his mother is not expressly mentioned. However, according to the above reading of John 2:1-11, Jesus is obedient, and therefore also respectful and loving toward his mother.[56] Furthermore, in the story of the first Cana-miracle Jesus and his mother mutually understand each other not only through verbal communication, but also on a non-verbal level. Finally, Jesus, even at his very last moments on the cross expresses his deep care and provides for his mother.[57] Besides, love is naturally expected within every family, so it should be considered as self-evident in the relationship between Jesus and his mother.[58]

It is also very much telling that the mother of Jesus is never said to believe, although faith is one of the most fundamental theological themes of the fourth gospel.[59] It is through faith that people are led to eternal life (John 3:16, 11:25-26),

[54] Cf. *ibid*. 2.1.136 (PG 73:225D).

[55] John 7:30; 8:20, 8:59; 10:31-33; 11:8-10; cf. 12:27; 13:1.

[56] Cf. John Chrysostom, *Hom. Jo.* 22.126–127 (PG 59:134). On the other hand, the fourth evangelist explicitly states that God the Father loves the Son (John 3:35; 10:17; 15:9; 17:23, 17:24, 17:26; cf. 1:1, 1:18) and the Son loves the Father (John 14:31). However, there is good reason for this differentiation. The love between the Father and the Son needs to be stressed, because it is on this very love that Jesus' salvific work is founded, cf. John 3:35; 10:17; 15:9; 17:23, 17:26.

[57] Cf. Tom Thatcher, "'I Have Conquered the World": The Death of Jesus and the End of Empire in the Gospel of John' in *Empire in the New Testament*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Cynthia Long Westfall (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 140–163, at 152 and 159.

[58] Cf. Cyril of Alexandria, *Comm. Jo*. 12.1065–1066 (PG 74:664C–665A).

[59] Cf. Karakolis, *Ἡ θεολογικὴ σημασία τῶν θαυμάτων*, 471–515.

while through unbelief to eternal damnation (John 8:24). Quite differently from the mother of Jesus, the beloved disciple reaches the final stage of faith in Jesus upon entering the empty tomb (John 20:8). It would then seem that the mother of Jesus does not need to believe in the first place because she already knows what nobody else seems to know,[60] namely that Jesus can provide solutions to urgent and serious problems that are impossible to resolve.[61] Consequently, she also knows Jesus' actual identity (cf. John 10:38).[62] From the point of view of faith, the mother of Jesus definitely stands on a higher level than the beloved disciple.[63]

As the incarnate *Logos* and pre-existing Son of God, the earthly Jesus is the moving force of the history of salvation. Both his mother and the beloved disciple are presented as playing some role in the fulfilment of God's salvific plan.[64] The role of the latter is simply to give an authentic witness about the salvific significance of Jesus' presence and work in the world.[65] Quite differently, the role of Jesus' mother is to introduce him to the world not only by enabling his incarnation (cf. John 1:14) through his birth, but even by bringing him up. John's emphasis on the incarnation of the *Logos* right from the start of the gospel clearly implies the irreplaceable importance of Jesus' mother therein, and hence her crucial part in the realisation of his salvific work for the world.[66]

There is a certain correlation between the expression 'my Father' that Jesus repeatedly uses in the gospel,[67] and the expression 'the mother of Jesus', which may not be used by Jesus himself, but is the way the evangelist refers to her. On the other hand, never in the gospel narrative is God referred to as the 'Father of Jesus'. It would then appear that the fourth evangelist discerns between the *Logos*' heavenly descent exclusively from his divine Father, and his earthly descent exclusively from his human mother.[68] The uniqueness of Jesus' mother makes her crucially important

[60] As Conway, *Men and Women*, 71, correctly puts it, 'the mother of Jesus is constructed as a uniquely knowledgeable character. Unlike any other character in the narrative, apart from Jesus, she shares insight with the narrator.'

[61] Characteristically, in John 6:5-9 Andrew and Philip are presented as lacking this kind of insight into Jesus' real capabilities.

[62] Cf. Cyril of Alexandria, *Comm. Jo.* 2.1.135 (PG 73:225B).

[63] Cf. Coloe, 'Mother of Jesus', 209.

[64] Cf. Alan R. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 134, who, however, sees the roles of both characters as complementary to each other. This even applies potentially to all believers, especially after Jesus' departure to his Father, cf. John 4:34-38; 14:12.

[65] Cf. John 19:35; 21:24; see also 15:27 for the witness of the disciples as a whole, and 1:7–8, 1:15, 1:32, 1:34; 3:26 for the witness of John the Baptist.

[66] Cf. Gaventa, *Mary*, 89.

[67] Cf. mainly John 2:16; 5:17, 5:43; 6:32, 6:40; 8:19, 8:49, 8:54; 10:18, 10:25, 10:29, 10:37; 14:2, 14:7, 14:20, 14:21, 14:23; 15:1, 15:8, 15:10, 15:15, 15:23, 15:24; 20:17. This expression corresponds with the explicit or implicit use of the title 'Son of God', cf. mainly John 1:14, 1:18, 1:34; 3:16-18, 3:35, 3:36; 5:19-27; 6:40; 8:35-36; 10:36; 11:4, 11:27; 14:13; 17:1; 19:7; 20:31.

[68] The two references to Joseph as Jesus' father come from Philip (John 1:45) and the Jews (John 6:42). Philip proclaims Jesus' messianity to Nathanael, without however having any idea about Jesus' divinity. This stage of belief is reached in the fourth gospel only after Jesus' resurrection (John 20:28). Therefore

not just with regard to her motherly function, but also as a person, since her function and personality are inseparably connected with each other by the replacement of her proper name through the title *μήτηρ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ*.

On the other hand, while the beloved disciple is indeed the one with whom Jesus is more closely related compared to any other disciple, he lacks the particular uniqueness of Jesus' mother: Though being the beloved disciple, he still belongs to the group of the disciples, being one of them. It is in this sense that he is also referred to as *ὁ ἄλλος μαθητής*.

From a different perspective, it is significant that in the last part of the Johannine narrative the beloved disciple becomes the son of Jesus' mother, and thus Jesus' brother.[69] At a later stage, this kind of upgrade in his relationship with Jesus applies to all disciples (John 20:17), as well as to all believers (John 1:12-13).[70] This could well mean that the mother of Jesus also becomes the mother of all disciples and believers.[71] In other words, as believers become Jesus' brothers and sisters through their spiritual rebirth (John 1:13) after Jesus' resurrection, and thus share his heavenly Father with him (John 20:17), they may be implicitly sharing his earthly mother as well. According to this reading, the newly established relationship of Jesus' beloved disciple with Jesus' mother functions as an exemplary story that could be understood as spiritually applying to all believers as well.[72]

Lastly, it is noteworthy that Jesus entrusts his mother to the beloved disciple, and not to his brothers and sisters in the flesh.[73] On a symbolic level, this means that the relation with Jesus surpasses any kind of earthly kinship and blood-ties according to the prologue of the Gospel (cf. John 1:12-13).

Philip's witness about Jesus' apparent earthly father is not yet reliable since Philip does not possess vital information about Jesus' real identity. The same principle also applies to the Johannine Jews, who notoriously and habitually misunderstand Jesus (John 6:42) and should therefore not be considered as reliable witnesses about his origin. The fourth evangelist may not speak expressly of Jesus' virgin-birth, but he also does not challenge it. Although we are not able to draw any secure conclusions based on the *argumentum e silentio*, it is telling that Joseph is fully absent from the gospel as a narrative character, that he is only mentioned once by one of Jesus' novices and not yet knowledgeable and fully believing disciples, and once by the unbelieving Jews. In my opinion, John 1:45 and 6:42 should not be understood as a neutral reference to Joseph's paternity (according to Brown et al., eds., *Maria im Neuen Testament*, 156–158), but rather as an indirect critique aimed at the notion that Joseph was indeed Jesus' earthly father.

[69] Cf. Coloe, 'Mother of Jesus', 213.

[70] *Ibid*., 209.

[71] Conway, *Men and Women*, 84, correctly remarks that the mother of Jesus enables the creation of the new family of God, without however specifying what her actual role in this new family is; cf. also the relevant analysis in Turid Karlsen Seim, 'Roles of Women in the Gospel of John' in *Aspects on the Johannine Literature: Papers Presented at a Conference of Scandinavian New Testament Exegetes at Uppsala, June 16–19, 1986*, ed. Lars Hartman and Birger Olsson (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1987), 56–73, at 62–66. On the other hand, already McHugh, *The Mother of Jesus*, 377, 402–403, sees the motherhood of Jesus' mother in a way extended to all disciples through her new motherhood-relationship with the beloved disciple.

[72] It is impossible to prove beyond any doubt that the fourth evangelist indeed implies an extension of the motherhood-relationship between Jesus' mother and the beloved disciple to all believers. There are, however, indications strong enough to make such a reading at least plausible.

[73] Cf. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St John*, 552.

## *IV*

On the basis of the above analysis it should be beyond any doubt that in John's Gospel the mother of Jesus occupies a uniquely significant position. Her anonymity makes way for her title of reverence since her name is replaced by a designation that clearly indicates her maternal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal and incarnate *Logos*. In the Johannine narrative she is presented as being able to understand Jesus in a unique way that differentiates her from all other narrative characters. She does not need to believe in Jesus because she is already aware of his capabilities, and therefore also of his true identity.[74] In the brief references to her person, she is presented as approaching Jesus with unusual respect and discretion for a mother communicating with her son. She seems indeed to know not only that as a rule Jesus can provide solutions to otherwise insurmountable problems, but also that he will indeed act in this particular case too. She even knows in advance that he will engage the servants.

In the narrative characters' implicit ranking with regard to their faith in Jesus, his mother is clearly on a superior level compared to his beloved disciple, who only reaches the last stage of true faith upon entering the empty tomb. Furthermore, she is superior to John the Baptist, not only because she is the mother of the 'Lord Jesus Christ', as opposed to being his friend or someone who is not even worthy of unbinding the strap of his shoes, but also because she is familiar with Jesus on a much deeper level than him.

Most importantly, the mother of Jesus intervenes indirectly even in relation to Jesus' hour, causing him to deviate slightly from his planned course of action in order to satisfy her request. This is a unique occurrence in the Johannine narrative.

Finally, the unique position of being the mother of Jesus seems to make her also the mother of all believers, who through their faith in her son become his brothers and sisters, and thus children of God. This development is exemplified when the crucified Jesus proclaims his mother as the mother of his beloved disciple and vice versa.

It would of course exceed the boundaries of this study if I were to attempt to present the Orthodox perception of Jesus' mother, the *Theotokos*, according to her historically most established and well-known ecclesiastical title. What should be clear from the above analysis is that the Orthodox understanding of the unique position of Jesus' mother in relation to her Son, the eternal and incarnate *Logos*, her capacity to exert influence on the realisation of his salvific plan, her willingness to interfere with this plan by mediating in favour of those in need, as well as her motherly love and care towards them, are clearly compatible with the narrative and theology of John's gospel and have even perhaps, at least partly, derived from it.

[74] Contra Beck, *The Discipleship Paradigm*, 58.

# The Sinlessness of our Most Holy Lady

ABBOT EPHRAIM
*The Holy and Great Monastery of Vatopaidi*

Following the Third Ecumenical Council, the assimilation of the dogmatic teaching about the Theotokos was very slow. Certain Fathers were waypoints regarding the person of the Theotokos, such as Cyril of Alexandria, John Damascene, Gregory Palamas, Nicholas Kavasilas, Nikodimos the Athonite, and Silouan the Athonite. In this paper, we compare the positions of certain contemporary Orthodox theologians with those of the previously mentioned Fathers regarding the subject of the sinlessness of the Virgin Mary.

'Let no uninitiated* hand touch the living Ark of God', we sing at the ninth ode of many of the feasts of the Mother of God. Indeed, the mystery concerning the person and the life of the Mother of God is a book 'sealed with seven seals'[1] for the uninitiated, for those who do not have the revelation, the divine grace. It is a real and audacious mystery, divine and human, inaccessible to those with feet of clay. How can anyone understand the most sublime matters concerning the Mother of God, since he or she does not even have experience of lesser things? How can anyone who has not been purged of the passions speak with authority about deification?

The Gospels are silent regarding the life of Our Lady, the Virgin, and reveal only very little. But the Holy Spirit, with the Tradition of the Church, teaches us a great deal, such as the significance and meaning of the Gospel references. And the Mother of God herself often reveals information to her faithful servants, the Fathers of the Church.

In the beginning, the Church was not greatly concerned with formulating dogma about Our Lady. It did so only as regards the Triune God (Trinitarian dogma) and the incarnate Word (Christological dogma). The dogmatic teaching of the Church concerning Our Lady was formulated gradually, in direct correlation with Christology. It was only the Roman Catholic Church which formulated particular doctrines about Our Lady (immaculate conception, the assumption of her body, etc.). Thus, Saint Basil the Great, within the perspective of the ancient patristic tradition and addressing those who had doubts about the virginity of the Mother of God after she gave birth, shifted the significance of the matter onto the virgin birth of Christ,

*Literally 'outside the temple' therefore 'uninitiated', which is what the hymn says, rather than the modern meaning of 'irreverent'. [trans. note]

[1] Rev 5:1.

and said that virginity was essential until the incarnation, but that we should not be curious about afterwards because of the mystery involved.[2]

Saint Cyril of Alexandria, whose teaching on the term 'Mother of God' was endorsed by the Third Ecumenical Synod,[3] and Saint John the Damascene were fundamental in the development of the dogmatic teaching concerning Our Lady. In general, we might say that, from the Third Ecumenical Synod onward, the absorption of the doctrinal teaching about the Mother of God was a very slow process.

The fourteenth century was called the century of Christian humanism for Byzantium, and, unlike earlier Fathers, Saint Gregory Palamas was perhaps the first who stressed the anthropological significance of the person of the Mother of God, though he did not, of course, ignore her Christological importance, nor minimize the requirement for her. He spoke at length about the person and the ascetic life of the Virgin. He presented her as a hesychast within the Holy of Holies and as a model of spiritual perfection.[4] It was he who demonstrated that Our Lady was the first to see the risen Christ. According to Saint Gregory, she was 'the only virgin in the true sense'. She had acquired perfect purity, she was a virgin in body and soul and was unable to be touched by anything polluted, whether in the bodily senses or in the faculties of her soul.[5]

Palamas' perception was followed by his near contemporary, Saint Nikolaos Kavasilas. He writes that: 'It was a source of wonder, not only among people but among angels as well, that, though the Virgin was a simply a human and had nothing more about her than any other person, she—and she alone—was able to escape our common infirmity (i.e. sin)'.[6] She was 'the one and only person who was freed from sin once and for all'.[7]

Later we find Saint Nikodimos the Athonite, whose theology was a synthesis based on that of all the preceding Fathers. He declared: 'If we suppose that all people and the rest of created beings wanted to become wicked, only Our Lady the Mother of God alone would be sufficient to please God' and that 'the whole of the intelligible and perceptible world came about for this end, that is for Our Lady the Mother of God, and, again, Our Lady the Mother of God came about for Our Lord Jesus Christ'.[8] In his interpretation *On the ninth ode to Mary the Mother of God*, he writes

[2] Basil the Great, *Εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν τοῦ Χριστοῦ γέννησιν* 5 (PG 31:1468*AB*).

[3] See Chrysostomos Stamoulis, *Θεοτόκος καὶ ὀρθόδοξο δόγμα. Σπουδὴ στὴ διδασκαλία τοῦ ἁγίου Κυρίλλου Ἀλεξανδρείας* (Thessaloniki: Palimpsiston, 1996).

[4] Whereas the Fathers of the fourth century promoted the Prophet Moses as the model of perfection (see Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *Περὶ τοῦ βίου Μωϋσέως τοῦ νομοθέτου, ἢ περὶ τῆς κατ' ἀρετὴν τελειότητος* [PG 44:297-429]), Saint Gregory Palamas places the Virgin as the model of perfection and examplar for the faithful in his homilies and in partuclar in Homily 53 in *Γρηγορίου Παλαμᾶ Ὁμιλίαι ΚΒ΄*, ed. S. Oikonomou (Athens: F. Karampini & K. Vafa,1861), 131-80.

[5] See Saint Gregory Palamas, Homily 14 (PG 151:172BC).

[6] See Saint Nikolaos Kavasilas, *Ἡ Θεομήτωρ, Εἰς τὴν Γέννησιν* 6, ed. P. Nellas, 4th ed. (Athens: Apostoliki Diakonia, 1995), 69.

[7] Saint Nikolaos Kavasilas, *ibid*. 8, 196.

[8] Saint Nikodimos the Athonite, *Συμβουλευτικὸν ἐγχειρίδιον* (Athens: O agios Nikodimos, n.d.), 224.

that 'the Mother of God was beyond any deliberate sin, whether venial or mortal, even to the extent of being attacked by wicked thoughts'.[9]

Finally we come to Saint Silouan the Athonite who testifies in the Holy Spirit that 'the Mother of God never sinned even in thought'.[10]

Christ did not sin because, as a divine hypostasis (person) he could not do so. He was completely sinless by nature. 'No-one is sinless but God'[11] refers to this sinlessness by nature of the Holy Trinity and, naturally, of Christ as the second person thereof. The Mother of God did not sin, although she could have done so. She was not sinless by nature, but by choice, by will, by grace.

The Mother of God had a real, perfect and not relative[12] sinlessness in her works, words, and thoughts, and not just a relative sinlessness. Neither was 'the sin of the Mother of God minimal',[13] nor did her exemption from sin occur after Pentecost,

Cf. Saint Nikodimos the Athonite, *Ἀόρατος Πόλεμος*, (Athens: O agios Nikodimos, n.d.), chap. 49, 165-6.

[9] Saint Nikodimos the Athonite, *Κῆπος Χαρίτων*, 4th ed. (Thessaloniki: Rigopoulos, 1992), 200.

[10] Archimandrite Sophrony, *Saint Silouan the Athonite* (Essex: Stavropegic Monastery of St. John the Baptist, 1991), 392.

[11] Saint John the Damascenee, *Ἱερὰ Παράλληλα*, *Τίτλ. ΙΓ΄* (*P*G 95:1172*AB*).

[12] See, for example, in the Dogmatics of Panayiotis Trembelas, where he writes: 'As regards the sinlessness, which the Western Church, based on the one hand, on the salutation of the angels, in which the Mother is God is called "full of grace" and on the other on the idea that, were we to accept that she had been guilty of sin, this would reflect badly on the honour of her Son, we accept this as being merely relative, in the sense that Saint Paul says of himself "as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault"'. What is the late professor implying by the word 'relative'? Whether the Mother of God sinned or not is not clear. Further on, however, he states that 'only Saint Augustine accepts the Mother of God as completely free of personal sin'. And he goes on to say: 'Many of the other Fathers and writers, however, attribute to the Virgin not only the potential to sin, but also that she was not free of weaknesses and certain imperfections (i.e. the passions)'. Thereafter he cites isolated passages from the Fathers and Church writers (Origen, John Chrysostom, Zigavinos), but without any examination of the reason, the cause of them writing this. Nor does he link it with the rest of their teaching on the Mother of God, where he 'proves' her to be impassioned! See P. Trembelas, *Δογματική*, vol. II, 2nd ed. (Athens: *Ἀδελφότης Θεολόγων «Ὁ Σωτήρ»*, 1979), 213-5. See also, *ibid*., 215-6, for the Protestant-leaning manner by which he seeks to counter the Roman Catholic innovations concerning the Mother of God, where he is puzzled by Ludwig Ott's assertion that no grace is transmitted to people without her active intercession'. It appears that the professor was unaware that by the same token we can also charge Saint Gregory Palamas, who writes revealingly: 'Therefore she is the border between created and uncreated nature and no-one can come to God except through her and the Intercessor born of her. And none of God's gifts can be made to people and angels except through her'. Gregory Palamas, *Ὁμιλία* 53, 23, *Ἰρηγορίου Παλαμᾶ Ὁμιλίαι ΚΒ΄*, ed. S. Oikonomou (Athens: F. Karampini & K. Vafa, 1861), 159.

[13] See Amalia Spourlakou-Eftyhiadou, *Ἡ Παναγία Θεοτόκος τύπος χριστιανικῆς ἁγιότητος* (Athens: [n.n.], 1990), 57, n. 1. In other words, Our Lady did not have many sins and they were of minor consequence! This thesis was written, as appears from its explanatory subtitle as 'A Contribution to the Orthodox Position against the Roman Catholic Immaculate Conception and Dogmas Related to it'. In her efforts to counter the Roman Catholic dogma, Spourlakou generally uses Protestant-leaning arguments and at many points contradicts herself, employing a host of Patristic and other passages to no effect, thus rendering the whole of her dissertation (in total 646 pages) somewhat rambling. As regards the issue of the sinlessness of the Mother of God, her position is not clear. For example, apart from the 'subordinate sin', which we mentioned above, at the beginning of p. 53, although she has written that Our Lady 'received the grace not sinning', she continues, on the same page, to claim that she had imperfections and venial faults. But venial faults/sins are in essence consent to sins in the mind. Likewise, on p. 628, where the sinlessness of the Mother of God is likened (essentially downgraded) to that of the righteous in the Old Testament and that the sanctity of the Mother of God 'is open to all those who have the same receptiveness'. Cf. p. 55,

or even after the Annunciation.[14] Nor is it sufficient to argue that sin was potential within her, but not active, unless we make clear that this 'potential' was not activated in deed, words, or thoughts.[15] Even this 'sinlessness by grace'[16] is accepted with the supposition that, with the synergy of divine grace, the Mother of God remained sinless from her birth until her Dormition and not that 'irresistible grace' imposed sinlessness after the Annunciation. This is put forward by many of 'our' modern theologians who answer Roman Catholic doctrines concerning the Mother of God with theology which leans towards Protestantism. If the heretics, ancient and modern, doubted the sinlessness of Christ,[17] how much more would they that of his Mother?

A heretical doctrine cannot be refuted by argument and intellectual theologizing, but only through the empirical knowledge of Orthodox patristic theology. Those who most purely express the dogmas of the Church have developed their noetic and rational energy[18] to the fullest extent, who have acquired a dogmatic conscience. According to the blessed Elder Sophrony, this 'is the fruit of spiritual experience, independent of the logical brain's activity'.[19] 'It is the deep-set life of the spirit, having nothing to do with abstract gnosis', and it is absorbed after years of fluctuating spiritual states, of visits and withdrawal of grace[20].

where she writes about the 'similarity and identity of every Christian with the (sanctity of) the Mother of God'. Of course, we do not have the opportunity to make a detailed critique of Spourlakou's dissertation, but we think (and believe that without wishing to do so) she diminishes the person of the Mother of God. Who can attain to the sanctity of the Most Holy Mother of God? Or perhaps she should also be judged, as the Pentecostals say? It is one thing to say that the Mother of God is a model of the Christian life, and quite another to say that we should be likened to her, that we should have the same receptivity of sanctity.

[14] See Professor Ioannis Kaloyirou, '*Μαρία*', in *Θρησκευτικὴ καὶ Ἠθικὴ Ἐγκυκλοπαίδεια*, vol. 8 (Athens: Athanasios Martinos, 1966), 675. Kaloyirou is normally very profound and a pioneer in his studies of Our Lady (Trembelas followed him and Spourlatou more or less copies him), but here, fearing that the perfect sinlessness of Our Lady (not, of course, by nature, but by will, by choice) comes from the immaculate conception, transposes this sinlessness until after either the Annunciation, the Resurrection, or Pentecost. This phobia is also apparent in his study *Μαρία, ἡ Ἀειπάρθενος Θεοτόκος κατὰ τὴν ὀρθόδοξον πίστιν* (Thessaloniki, [n.n.],1957), where, in the chapter, '*Τὸ ἀναμάρτητον τῆς Θεοτόκου ἐξ ἐπόψεως Ὀρθοδόξου*', p. 78 ff., he enlists Syrian and Monophysite theologians in his support, ignoring the Patristic Tradition post-Saint John the Damascene. He also believes that Saint Nikolaos Kavasilas writes about the purity and sinlessness of the Mother of God 'acting under Latin, scholastic influence'. See *ibid*., 86.

[15] See Amalia Spourlakou-Eftyhiadou, *Ἡ Παναγία Θεοτόκος τύπος χριστιανικῆς ἁγιότητος*, *ibid*., 57. Besides, once Orthodox Christians are baptized they are not only potentially but also actively sinless.

[16] *Ibid*., 53. Cf. Kaloyirou, '*Μαρία*', *ibid*., 675.

[17] See Christos Androutsos, *Δογματικὴ τῆς Ὀρθοδόξου Ἀνατολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας*, 4th ed. (Athens: Astir, 1992), 191-3. Our theologians have also misinterpreted the sinlessness of Christ. See, for example, Andreas Theodorou, *Ἡ περὶ Τριάδος καὶ Χριστοῦ διδασκαλία τῆς Παρακλητικῆς* (Athens: [n.n.], 1962), 32, where Christ is presented as sinless by will, not by nature.

[18] See our paper, *"Η χρήση λογικῆς καὶ νοερᾶς ἐνέργειας τοῦ ἀνθρώπου κατὰ τὸν ἅγιο Ιρηγόριο Παλαμᾶ*', in *Πρακτικὰ Διεθνῶν Ἐπιστημονικῶν Συνεδρίων Ἀθηνῶν καὶ Λεμεσοῦ*, *Ὁ ἅγιος Ιρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς στὴν ἱστορία καὶ τὸ παρόν* (Mount Athos: Holy Great Monastery of Vatopaidi, 2000), 776.

[19] Archimandrite Sophrony, *Saint Silouan the Athonite*, 186.

[20] *Ibid*., 188. Cf. the vision which Saint Gregory Palamas had of the transformation of milk into wine, where his moral discourse was elevated to the dogmatic after 18 years of monastic asceticism. Philotheos of Constantinople, *Λόγος ἐγκωμιαστικὸς εἰς Ιρηγόριον Παλαμᾶν* (PG 151:580AD).

According to the teaching of the Orthodox Church, Our Most Holy Lady, the Mother of God, is 'ever-virgin'. That is, she was a virgin before she gave birth, while giving birth, and after giving birth. This virginity does not lie so much in her bodily purity, but much more so in that of her soul because 'virginity, as a mere biological state, is of no significance for theology or for salvation'.[21] To put it another way, the 'ever-virgin state' of the Mother of God is to be identified with perfect purity, i.e. sinlessness.[22] Sinlessness before she gave birth, while doing so, and afterwards. Her sinlessness did not derive from her Immaculate Conception[23] as the Roman Catholic Church wrongly dogmatized through Pope Pius IX in 1854, but from her free, personal turning away from sin.

The Virgin was conceived 'temperately in the womb of Anna by Joachim'. The fact that she was conceived 'temperately' means that the manner of her conception was pure and restrained. But for the Virgin to have been conceived immaculately, she would have had to have had a virgin birth, as Christ did.[24] The All-Pure Virgin, is the only member of the human race to have preserved, unblemished and bright, the 'image of God'. With her pure will and ascetic life, she developed, in freedom, all the godly virtues to the greatest extent. It is only in Our Lady that we have the full harmony of nature and hypostasis, or person. We have the union of outlook, of will, with the order of nature, so that, as Saint Maximos the Confessor puts it, we have 'the reconciliation of God with nature'.[25] Her will was completely aligned with that of God. She had rendered her volition entirely to God.

This is why she was able to say, with magnificent humility, at her Annunciation: 'Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; let it be unto me according to your word'.[26] When it was explained to her that the conception would occur through the Holy Spirit in her virgin womb, she agreed, she accepted God's ineffable dispensation. Only someone who had led a spotless and unblemished life, only someone who had shown particular, unique, and magnificent awareness of God, who had acquired divine love

[21] Georgios Mantzaridis, *Ἡ Παρθένος Μαρία, μητέρα τῆς καινῆς κτίσεως*', in *Πρακτικὰ Θεολογικοῦ Συνεδρίου εἰς τιμὴν τῆς Ὑπεραγίας Θεοτόκου καὶ Ἀειπαρθένου Μαρίας* (15-17 *Νοεμβρίου* 1989) (Thessaloniki: Holy Metropolis of Thessaloniki, 1991), 274.

[22] 'Spiritual virginity is sinlessness'. Protopresbyter George Florovsky, *Ἡ Ἀειπάρθενος Μητέρα τοῦ Θεοῦ*', in *Θέματα ὀρθοδόξου θεολογίας*, 2nd ed. (Athens: Artos Zois, 1989), 136.

[23] This dogma of the Papist Church brought another one as a logical concomitant, that of the Assumption, which was formulated by Pope Pius XII in 1954. If the Roman Catholics spoke explicitly about the physical death of the Mother of God, the Orthodox would agree, since, according to tradition, after her demise Our Lady ascended, in the body, to the heavens. Testimony to her translation is the Holy Girdle, which was given to the Apostle Thomas. Professor Megas Farandos, who was also of a Protestant mind in his teaching on the Mother of God, does not accept the translation in the body, see *M*. Farandos, *Δογματικὰ καὶ ἠθικὰ I* (Athens: [n.n.], 1983), 270-1. Naturally, he also considered the sinlessness of Our Lady to be relative, too, see *ibid*., 268-9.

[24] See also the testimony of Saint Paisios on the untroubled conception of the Mother of God in Hieromonk Isaak, *Βίος τοῦ Γέροντος Παϊσίου τοῦ Ἁγιορείτου* (Mount Athos: Holy Hermitage of St. John the Forerunner, 2004), 171-2.

[25] See Saint Maximos the Confessor, *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὸ Πάτερ ἡμῶν* (PG 90:901CD).

[26] Luke 1:38.

such as no other created being had ever known, could accept this incomprehensible dispensation on the part of God without any doubts. The holy Virgin did accept Gabriel's praise, with humility and simplicity, as also the message of the divine incarnation, because she alone was so well suited to the supreme honour and mission which God had given her.[27]

This is precisely where her central and active role lies in the mystery of the incarnation of God and the salvation of humankind. She prepared herself with her most holy life so that she would attract God from heaven to earth. The Ever-Virgin Mary was not the best woman on earth, nor simply the best woman of all time, but she was unique in bringing down heaven to earth, in making God a human person. 'For she alone stood between God and the whole race of humankind. She made God the Son of Man, and men the sons of God. She made the earth heaven and our race divine'.[28]

Had the Virgin committed sins before the Annunciation—even if only in thought—how could the good, the holy Lord have come to be joined, to become incarnate from something that was not good and holy but rather had experience of sin? The Virgin who made room for God lived on earth as if she has no relation to the sin which humankind had committed in history. Saint Nikolaos Kavasilas compares her to the ark of Noah, which took part—and indeed a saving one—in the flood, but had nothing to do with the people of the time of Noah.[29]

Born of human persons—Joachim and Ann—the Virgin inherited and bore the sin of Adam and Eve and its consequences: mortality and the blameless passions.[30] She received as much help from God as everyone else, and she lived without sin before she gave birth. It was from this sinless body and sinless soul, in other words this complete, sinless person, that the Son and Word of God took a sinless body and sinless soul and became a human person. His was the only immaculate conception.

[27] 'The Virgin Mary alone was the worthy temple of the divine incarnation! The Divine Word looked to the wondrous beauty of her soul in order to borrow His human nature through her precious blood. A Mother worthy of Her Son!' A. Theodorou, *Ἡ περὶ Τριάδος καὶ Χριστοῦ διδασκαλία τῆς Παρακλητικῆς* (Athens: [n.n.], 1962), 33.

[28] Saint Gregory Palamas, *Ὁμιλία* 37, *Εἰς τὴν Κοίμησιν* (PG 151:465B). We do not agree with the scholastic view that Our Lady could have had a married life and still served without obstacle or hindrance the plan for the divine incarnation. Had that been preferable to the life of a virgin, why did God not do it?

[29] See Saint Nikolaos Kavasilas, *Ἡ Θεομήτωρ, Εἰς τὸν Εὐαγγελισμὸν* 3, ed. P. Nellas, 4th ed. (Athens: Apostoliki Diakonia, 1995), 126.

[30] Since the Fall, people have not inherited/ participated in the guilt of sin of Adam and Eve, but are subject to the consequences for what is now debilitated human nature, decay, the venial sins and death. If people feel guilt over the sin of Adam and Eve and that they are being punished by God, this indicates an influence from Western, legalistic teaching on the Fall. See Fr. John Romanidis, *Τὸ προπατορικὸν ἁμάρτημα*, 3rd ed. (Athens: Domos, 1992), 154 and 160-1. We did not sin in the person of Adam, nor did everyone become sinners because of him. In his interpretation of the passage in Saint Paul, 'For as through the disobedience of one person [Adam] many became sinners' (Rom 5:19), Saint Cyril of Alexandria writes: 'Many people became sinners not through having transgressed with Adam, since they were not there then, but as being of that nature which has fallen under the law of sin […] Human nature fell sick through Adam through the corruption of disobedience and it was thus that the passions entered it' (PG 74:789B).

God created human beings 'sinless by nature and independent by will'.[31] Through misuse of his independent will, sin entered man and has overcome him. According to Saint Nikolaos Kavasilas, God knew that humankind was capable of offering him an untainted and pure human nature—like the one which had first been created—so that he could take his Mother from it.[32] God waited for the 'only Pure and Spotless Virgin' to be born, so that the dispensation He had created before the foundation of the world could be implemented. He did not change His plans, nor did he do away with His creatures, because that would have indicated that he had done something not 'very well'.[33]

Of course, the process of the Virgin's labour was also sinless, since it was supernatural, 'without pain'. But even after she had given birth she lived sinlessly, since within her dwelt 'bodily the whole fullness of the Most High'.[34] From the moment when she was 'overshadowed by the power of the Most High',[35] that is, of the Holy Spirit, at the Annunciation, Our Lady the Virgin received a continual increase in sanctity, which did not cease and was not interrupted. Saint Gregory Palamas writes: 'For you are holy and full of grace, but the Holy Spirit will come upon you through a more sublime addition of sanctity, preparing and making provision for the birth of God within you'.[36] George Florovsky agrees with Palamas and considers that at the time of the Annunciation we have 'a premature Pentecost'.[37] In other words, what happened to the Virgin at the Annunciation was a purification, according to the Fathers;[38] not purification from personal sins, which did not exist, but 'an addition of graces'.[39]

Those who do not accept the sinlessness of the Mother of God try to support their view with certain scriptural passages and events which, unfortunately, they misinterpret. Thus, at the marriage of Cana in Galilee,[40] they claim that the Mother of God 'was moved "by the sickness of vanity", since "she troubled the Lord in an untimely manner" when Christ at first refused to perform the miracle, as his Mother

[31] Saint John the Damascene, *Ἔκθεσις πίστεως* 26 (PG 94:924*AB*).

[32] 'But requiring this, He did so in order that He would take His Mother from it, after supplication had been made'. Saint Nikolaos Kavasilas, *Ἡ Θεομήτωρ, Εἰς τὸν Εὐαγγελισμὸν* 8, ed. P. Nellas, 4th ed. (Athens: Apostoliki Diakonia, 1995), 150.

[33] Gen 1:31.

[34] Col 2:9.

[35] Cf. Luke 1:35.

[36] Saint Gregory Palamas, *Ὁμιλία* 14 (PG 151:176).

[37] See Fr. George Florovsky, *'Ἡ Ἀειπάρθενος Μητέρα τοῦ Θεοῦ'*, in *Θέματα ὀρθοδόξου θεολογίας*, 2nd ed. (Athens: Artos Zois, 1989), 130.

[38] 'For after she consented, the Holy Spirit came upon her according to the word of the Lord which the angel had spoken, and purified her'. Saint John the Damascene, *Ἔκδοσις ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως* 46 (*P*G 94:985*B*).

[39] 'According to the holy teachers, the Virgin was not purified by the Spirit as if she were not pure before, but as an addition of graces, in the same manner as angels are purified, though there is no evil in them'. Saint Nikolaos Kavasilas, *Ἡ Θεομήτωρ, Εἰς τὴν Γέννησιν* 10, ed. P. Nellas, 4th ed. (Athens: Apostoliki Diakonia, 1995), 84.

[40] See John 2:1-10.

urged him to do'.[41] But we would say that this demonstrates exactly the extent of the confidence of the Mother of God, because, despite his initial refusal, Christ obeyed Our Lady and performed the miracle.[42] Something similar happened with a miracle connected to one of the seven wonder-working icons in our Monastery, Our Lady the Consolation.[43]

As regards the occasion when Christ was speaking to the multitudes and his mother and those considered to be his brethren wished to speak to him and Christ said that 'whoever does the will of my father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother',[44] it has been claimed that, with this answer, the Lord gently chided her ambitious aim and expelled the tyrannical passion of vanity'.[45] But here, as in all his public appearances, Christ shows no particular sentimental attachment to his mother, which is why it appears that he never calls her 'mother' in the Gospels. Because those who have not experienced love in the Holy Spirit would be able to misinterpret this as sentimental. There is, however, an enormous difference between the two kinds of love, as great as the difference between the created and the uncreated. Moreover, Christ did not want to have his mother as a witness to his work, because, since he was mostly addressing disbelieving and inflexible Jews, her testimony would have been suspect. Saint Gregory Palamas proposes something similar, in fact, when he explains why it was that the evangelists did not explicitly state that the risen Christ appeared first to his All-Holy Mother.[46]

[41] See Trembelas, *Δογματική*, vol. II, 214. Trembelas bases his argument on Homily XXI of Saint John Chrysostom *Εἰς τὸν εὐαγγελιστὴν Ἰωάννην*, though the focus of Chrysostom's homily is not the person of the Mother of God but the moral teaching: 'Let us not then boast of our lineage, for even if we have a whole host of wonderful forebears, let us make it our business to outdo them in virtue'. *Εἰς τὸν εὐαγγελιστὴν Ἰωάννην, Ὁμιλία* 21 (PG 59:132). With his skill as an orator, Chrysostom develops this idea throughout his homily, though not to the detriment of the Mother of Christ, since Christ 'honours her greatly'. *Ibid*., (PG 59:131).

[42] Hieromonk Grigorios, *Ἡ Ὑπεραγία Θεοτόκος* (Mount Athos: Holy Cell St John the Theologian of Monastery Koutloumousiou, 1994), 39. Our Lady's words 'do whatever he tells you' are her testament, since they are the only time she refers to Christ and they are also the last of her words to be recorded by the evangelists. See Hieromonk Grigorios, *ibid*., 38-42.

[43] See Georgios Mantzaridis, 'Miraculous icons – holy relics', in *The Holy and Great Monastery of Vatopaidi, Tradition – History - Art,* vol. I (Mount Athos: Holy Great Monastery of Vatopaidi, 1998), 118.

[44] See Matt 12:46-8. Cf. Luke 8:19-21.

[45] See Trembelas, *Δογματική*, vol. II, 215. Amalia Spourlakou refers to the passage Luke 8:21 on the cover of her book. Both quote Saint John Chrysostom, *Εἰς τὸ κατὰ Ματθαῖον, Ὁμιλία* 44 (PG 57:463-472) to support their view that the Mother of God was not sinless and that she even had passions. But they misinterpret Chrysostom, since they do not understand the basics of this particular homily. In this homily, the saint wanted to stress the value of virtue, which doesn not lie in family, but in will, which is why he emphasizes, in the same homily that we not boast of our children unless we share their virtues, nor of forebears unless we are like them, see *ibid*., (PG 57:466).

[46] 'And the evangelists did not say this clearly, not wishing to offer His Mother as a witness, so as not to give the non-believers any cause for suspicion' Saint Gregory Palamas *Ὁμιλία* 18 (PG 151:237D). Besides, many interpreters, such as Saint Nikolaos Kavasilas consider that, with this comparison, Christ places his Mother as a model at the very peak of sanctity. See Saint Nikolaos Kavasilas, *Ἡ Θεομήτωρ, Εἰς τὴν Γέννησιν* 10, ed. P. Nellas, 4th ed. (Athens: Apostoliki Diakonia, 1995) 86. Cf. Hieromonk Grigorios, *Ἡ Ὑπεραγία Θεοτόκος*, *ibid*., 41.

It is also claimed that, at Christ's crucifixion, the 'sword which pierced'[47] the virgin's heart was due to lack of faith and that she was shocked and shattered by Christ's dishonourable death.[48] Saint Silouan the Athonite writes, however:

> We cannot attain to the full the love of the Mother of God, and so we cannot thoroughly comprehend her grief. Her love was complete. She had an illimitable love for God and her Son but she loved the people, too, with a great love. What, then, must she have felt when those same people whom she loved so dearly, and whose salvation she desired with all her being, crucified her beloved Son? We cannot fathom such things, since there is little love in us for God and man.[49]

Of course, to show that the Mother of God was a human being and not a goddess (because Nestorios and other heretics said, 'it is impossible for God to be born of a human'[50]), Saint Luke the evangelist has preserved for us the occasion when, on their return from Jerusalem, Our Lady did not know where, Christ, her child, was and she and her betrothed, Joseph, looked for him for three days.[51] This, however, demonstrates a sinless error and the fact that she was not all-knowing, since she was human.[52]

The Mother of God did not even have venial sins. She had perfect sinlessness as regards works, words, and sin in the mind.[53] This came about because, from her birth to her Dormition, she was in unbroken and conscious communion with God. 'The whole of her life was an uninterrupted transcendence of the tendency towards evil, and continuous ascent and progress towards virtue. With her holy Life, Our Lady surpassed the stage of asceticism and purification'.[54] Saint Silouan writes revealingly that: 'The Mother of God never lost grace', which is why she never sinned, even in thought'.[55]

[47] See Luke 2:35.

[48] See I. Kaloyirou, *Μαρία, ἡ Ἀειπάρθενος Θεοτόκος κατὰ τὴν ὀρθόδοξον πίστιν* (Thessaloniki: [n.n.], 1957), 96 ff.

[49] Archimandrite Sophrony, *Saint Silouan the Athonite*, 390.

[50] See I. Karmiris, *Τὰ Δογματικὰ καὶ Συμβολικὰ μνημεῖα τῆς Ὀρθοδόξου Καθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας*, vol. 1(Athens: [n.n.], 1952), 138.

[51] See Luke 2:44-6.

[52] See also Archimandrite Sophrony, *Saint Silouan the Athonite*, 392.

[53] Patriarch Kyrillos I (Loukaris) confessed this 'threefold sinlessness' of Our Lady in a homily on the Dormition of the Mother of God. See I. Karmiris, *Τὰ Δογματικὰ καὶ Συμβολικὰ μνημεῖα τῆς Ὀρθοδόξου καὶ Καθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας*, vol. II (Athens: [n.n.], 1953), 711.

[54] Eftyhia Yioulstsi, *Ἡ Παναγία πρότυπο πνευματικῆς τελειώσεως* (Thessaloniki: Pournaras, 2001), 87. As regards the sinlessness of Our Lady, Yioulstsi writes clearly that 'with her most holy life, she herself completely avoided sin and is the only person without sin', *ibid*., 89. Fr. Alexander Schmemann, *Ἐξομολόγηση καὶ Θεία Κοινωνία*', *Ἐπίγνωση*, 86 (Autumn 2003): 13, also is clear as regards the sinlessness of Our Lady, when he writes that 'no human being has been sinless with the exception of the Most Holy Birth-Giver of God, the Mother of the Lord'.

[55] Archimandrite Sophrony, *Saint Silouan the Athonite*, *ibid*., 390.

The way a person sees, his or her witness and confession concerning the person and sinlessness of Our Lady the Mother of God, reveals his or her internal spiritual state. Of course, the Protestants and the Roman Catholics stand respectively at the two extremes of under-appreciation and over-appreciation of the person of Our Lady. But within the sphere of Orthodoxy, too, the moralists, on the one hand, and the intellectualists, on the other, certainly have mistaken views concerning Our Most Holy Lady, the Mother of God, because they are not founded on empirical, existential communion with her.[56] The moralists accept the corporeal virginity of the Mother of God, but not the spiritual, because they cannot get beyond the 'outside of the cup'.[57] The intellectualists do not believe in the sinlessness of Our Lady, because it is unacceptable to their brilliant and penetrative, though obsolete and unenlightened, minds. The blessed Elder Sophrony of Essex, who was an empirical theologian and beholder of God and, in my opinion, the greatest theologian of the twentieth century, confesses: 'No person has ever been sinless, except the Most Holy Virgin Mary',[58] 'and with her, and thanks to her, the history of the world stepped into a new orbit immeasurably more grandiose than before'.[59] If someone believes that the deification of man is a moral event[60] and not an ontological state, how can he or she penetrate and infiltrate the mystery of the Mother of God?

Of course, 'the more profound experience of the Mother of God is hidden from us and nobody will ever be able to share in that unique experience'.[61] It was and is not possible for any created being to be more perfect than her, nor could she herself have become more perfect than she is. According to Saint Augustine, 'despite being all-powerful there are three things which God could not have made more perfect: the incarnation, the Virgin, and the bliss of the righteous in the life to come'.[62]

[56] This empirical communion is created through prayer, but principally through the body of Christ. 'The body of Christ is one and undivided. It is the body which was born of the Virgin Mary. It is the body of which the faithful partake at the sacrament of the Divine Eucharist. This body creates the new creation. This is the land of the living, which manifested to the world the container of the uncontainable, the Virgin May, the mother of the new creation'. Georgios Mantzaridis, *'Η Παρθένος Μαρία, μητέρα τῆς καινῆς κτίσεως*', *ibid*., 277. In this sense, the blessed Elder Iosif the Hesychast, that Athonite friend of the Mother of God, saw in the body of Christ 'the most wonderful relationship, which we have received from Our Lady and sweet little Mother'. Elder Iosif, *Θείας Χάριτος ἐμπειρίες*, *Γέροντας Ἰωσὴφ ὁ Ἡσυχαστής*, *Ἐπιστολὴ* 13 (Mount Athos: Holy Great Monastery of Vatopaidi, 2005), 172.

[57] Matt 23:25.

[58] Archimandrite Sophrony, *Ὀψόμεθα τὸν Θεὸν καθώς ἐστι* (Essex: Stavropegic Monastery of St. John the Baptist, 1992), 240 (greek version) and in the first edition in Russian Архимандоит Софроний (Сахаров), Видеть Бога как Он есть (Essex: Stavropegic Monastery of St. John the Baptist, 1985), 148.

[59] Archimandrite Sophrony, *We shall see Him as He is* (Essex: Stavropegic Monastery of St. John the Baptist, 1988), 217.

[60] 'Of course, this glorification can be understood only in a moral sense'. Amalia Spourlakou-Eftyhiadou *Ἡ Παναγία Θεοτόκος τύπος χριστιανικῆς ἁγιότητος* (Athens: [n.n.], 1990), 433.

[61] Protopresbyter George Florovsky, *'Η Ἀειπάρθενος Μητέρα τοῦ Θεοῦ*', in *Θέματα ὀρθοδόξου θεολογίας* 2nd ed. (Athens: Artos Zois, 1989), 134.

[62] This passage has been borrowed from Monk Theoklitos Dionysiatis, *Ἱερομόναχος Ἀθανάσιος Ἰβηρίτης, Ὁ θερμὸς λάτρης τῆς Πορταΐτισσας* (1885-1973), 2nd ed., (Athens: Spiliotis, 2002), 41.

Because of her 'God-bearing, spiritual beauty, beyond measure and description',[63] her all-holiness, and her sinlessness, Our Lady is magnified in Orthodox worship with wonderful and theologically rich hymns[64] and is praised with sublime, revelatory words which are inaccessible to the ordinary human mind.[65] Fervent prayers are addressed to her.[66] We are not paying the honour due to Our Lady the Mother of God if we maintain that she was merely virtuous and lived in obedience and humility, but do not confess what is even greater: that she lived without sin. Christ is not jealous; we do not detract from his person as the only creator and Saviour of the world[67] if we say that his Mother is sinless. Not, of course, by nature, but by choice. We need to cast aside the phobia which comes from Protestant-style arguments which claim that by honouring the person of Our Lady, we are separating her from Christ, from the mystery of the incarnation. Honour and veneration of Our Lady do not mean acceptance of Roman Catholic Marianism.[68] Orthodox teaching on the Mother of God expresses and interprets her true position within the Church.

[63] Monk Theoklitos Dionysiatis, *Ἡ Παναγία Σουμελᾶ* (Thessaloniki: Panagia Soumela, 1994), 39.

[64] The hymnology does not exaggerate, but rather theologizes and saves. Dimitrios Tselengidis, Professor of Dogmatics, declares: 'The teaching of the Church concerning the Mother of God, as this is manifested in the hymnography of her feasts, is no different from the dogmatic formulations of the Ecumenical Synods which dealt with the Mother of God'. D. Tselengidis, *'Η θεοτοκολογία στὴν ὑμνολογία τῶν θεομητορικῶν ἑορτῶν'*, in *Ὀρθόδοξη θεολογία καὶ ζωή* (Thessaloniki: Pournaras, 2005), 48. We do not agree with Kaloyirou when he talks of 'poetic and rhetorical embellishments and overstatements in hymns to the Mother of God' (See I. Kaloyirou, *Μαρία ἡ Ἀειπάρθενος*, *ibid*., 108-9) or when he attempts to oppose Elder Theoklitos Dionysiatis over the hymn 'Hail God after God […] (See idem, *'Η ὀρθόδοξος συμβολὴ εἰς τὴν σύγχρονον ἐπιδίωξιν, κοινῆς χριστιανικῆς ἐκφράσεως τῆς περὶ τῆς Θεοτόκου Μαρίας ἀληθείας καὶ τῆς πρὸς αὐτὴν τιμῆς'*, in *Πρακτικὰ Θεολογικοῦ Συνεδρίου εἰς τιμὴν τῆς Ὑπεραγίας Θεοτόκου καὶ Ἀειπαρθένου Μαρίας* (15-17 *Νοεμβρίου* 1989) (Thessaloniki: Holy Metropolis of Thessaloniki, 1991), 693-4. Nor do we agree with I. Karmiris when he writes. 'What is said thus, metaphorically and by poetic licence, and is sung in the whole of Worship should not be taken literally, since it does not belong to the substance of Orthodox dogmas', I. Karmiris, *Τὰ Δογματικὰ καὶ Συμβολικὰ μνημεῖα τῆς Ὀρθοδόξου Καθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας*, vol. I (Athens: [n.n.], 1952), 245-6, n. 4. The late Elder Porfyrios became a saint through reading and poring over the hymns of the Paraclitic Canon, the Minaion and so on; see *Γέροντος Πορφυρίου Καυσοκαλυβίτου, Βίος καὶ Λόγοι* (Hania: The Holy Monastery of Chrysopigi, 2003), 176-7. And the blessed Elder Iakovos Tsalikis did not have the opportunity to study patristic texts, but still delved into the liturgical books; see S. Papadopoulos, *Ὁ μακαριστὸς Ἰάκωβος Τσαλίκης*, 2nd ed. (Athens: Trohalia, 1995), 72-3.

[65] See, for example, the discourses of Saints Gregory Palamas, *Homily 53* (On the Entry of the Mother of God); Nikolaos Kavasilas, *On the Annunciation*; Andrew of Crete, *On the Nativity*; and John the Damascene, *On the Dormition*.

[66] Our holy Fathers have left written examples of their fervent and intensely supplicatory prayers to Our Lady. Saint Kallistos, in a broken and contrite spirit, but aflame with divine love, prays: 'Therefore, do not desert me, All-Spotless Lady. For everyone has overlooked me and passed me by, seeing me as incurable: Prophets, Apostles, the Righteous, divine Fathers. And I have been left alone […] (This is why he cries aloud to the all-hymned Mother of God) who is capable of all things and of completing them' A.D. Simonov, *Μέγα Προσευχητάριον* (Athens: Pelekanos, n.d.), 329.

[67] See the scholastic view and association of sinlessness with the Saviour, which permeates Mitrofanis Kritikopoulos and is accepted by Ioannis Kaloyirou. The syllogism works as follows: Christ is the Saviour. Christ is sinless. The Mother of God is not the Saviour. Therefore, the Mother of God cannot be sinless. But by the same token we might posit: the angels are sinless; are they therefore saviours? See I. Kaloyirou, *Μαρία, ἡ Ἀειπάρθενος Θεοτόκος κατὰ τὴν ὀρθόδοξον πίστιν*, *ibid*., 93.

[68] This anti-Roman Catholic polemic affected even virtuous people, such as Saint John Maximovich, who had no access to the texts of Gregory Palamas and Nikolaos Kavasilas and (despite his obvious sanctity as expressed by the gifts of foresight and healing which he did possess) fell into the error of writing that the

The all-holy life and the sinlessness of the Virgin, through which she became the Birth-Giver and Mother of God, explain her special position, which we confess to be after God and above all the angels and saints. With the hypostatic union of the divine and human nature in the person of Christ, and the creation of the theanthropic family and society, Our Lady became the Mother of the new creation.

Our Lady is 'at the boundary between created and uncreated nature', the 'god after God who bore the Second Person of the Trinity' who is 'more honourable than the Cherubim and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim', 'greater than the holy of holies', who is capable of doing 'whatever it is she wishes to do' and to whom alone is due 'the veneration of her servants' while 'to God is due worship and to the saints honour'.[69] This is why we believe we are not outside the spirit of our holy Fathers if we address this hymn of praise to Our Lady: 'Hail, sinless Lady, Bride of God' Amen.

Mother of God was not free 'from any personal sins'. See Saint John Maximovich, *The Orthodox Veneration of Mary the Birthgiver of God*, 5th ed. (Platina, CA: Saint Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1996), 53 ff. Of course, at the end of his study, Maximovitch writes that 'She repulsed from Herself every impulse to sin' (*ibid*., 65), perhaps in order to moderate what he had written earlier. Be that as it may, in this book he gives a confused view of the sinlessness of Our Lady.

[69] See Monk Theoklitos Dionysiatis, *Μαρία ἡ Μητέρα τοῦ Θεοῦ* (Thessaloniki: Melissa, 1988), 59.

# The Theotokos as Selective Intercessor for Souls in Middle Byzantine Apocalyptic

BRONWEN NEIL
*Professor of Ancient History, Macquarie University, Sydney;*
*Research Fellow, University of South Africa, Pretoria*

The *Apocalypse of the Holy Theotokos*, first edited from a single manuscript in 1866, has only recently become available in an English translation and commentary. However, the work enjoyed enormous popularity in the later Byzantine period of the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, when the Greek text was translated into almost a dozen other languages. An equally popular work of the mid-tenth century was the *Vision of Anastasia*. This paper considers Mary's role in the two *Apocalypses* of the ninth to eleventh centuries in the broader context of Byzantine apocalypticism of the period. In particular, I focus on Mary's role as a selective intercessor for Christian souls in torment, but not Jews. The increasing recognition of Mary's humanity in the cult of the *Theotokos* (Mother of God) emerges as the justification for her discrimination against those who were perceived as the murderers of her son.

This paper considers Mary's role in two *Apocalypses* of the ninth to eleventh centuries in the broader context of Byzantine apocalypticism of the period.* The *Apocalypse of the Holy Theotokos* has recently become available in an English translation and commentary by Jane Baun.[1] Selections of this text were edited from a single manuscript, Venice Marc. VII.43 in 1866.[2] Its relative inaccessibility to scholars does not reflect the enormous popularity of the work in the later Byzantine period of the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, when it was translated into almost a dozen other languages, including a sixteenth-century Romanian version and Old Church Slavonic versions,

* Some of this material has been included in my chapter 'Mary as Intercessor in Byzantine Theology', *The Oxford Handbook of Mary*, ed. Chris Maunder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

[1] Jane Baun, trans., *Tales from Another Byzantium. Celestial Journey and Local Community in the Medieval Greek Apocrypha* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 391-400. This paper was originally presented at the conference on *The Theotokos in the Oriental Churches*, 18-20 August 2015, University of Winchester, UK.

[2] Konstantin von Tischendorff, ed., *Apocalypses Apocryphae Mosis, Esdrae, Pauli, Iohannis, item Mariae dormitio, additis Evangeliorum et actuum Apocryphorum supplementis* (Leipzig, 1866; repr.. Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1966). A completed edition followed, made from Paris BN graecus 390, by Antoine Charles Gidel, 'Étude sur une apocalypse de la Vierge Marie', *Annuaire de l'association de l'encouragement des études greques* 5 (1871): 92-113. Another two editions appeared in 1893, the first in Athanasius Vasiliev, ed., *Anecdota graeco-byzantina. Pars prior* (Moscow: Imperial University, 1893; repr., Moscow, 1992), 125-34, and the other in Montague R. James, ed., *Apocrypha Anecdota. A collection of thirteen apocryphal books and fragments*, Texts and Studies 2.3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893), 109-26, the latter edition based on Oxford Bodleian Library MS Auct. E.5.12 (*olim* Misc. Greek 77).

as well as medieval Greek.[3] An equally popular work of the mid-tenth century was the *Vision of Anastasia*.[4] I intend to focus attention on Mary's role as a selective intercessor for souls in torment, Christians but not Jews, asking whether her discrimination reflects a standard anti-Judaism to be found in other Marian hymns and homilies of the early and middle Byzantine periods, or whether it is characteristic of the apocalyptic genre.[5]

## *Anti-Judaism in the Marian cult*

As observed by Leena Mari Peltomaa and Andreas Külzer, authors of an introduction to a recent study of the origins of Marian intercession, Mary's virginity at the birth of Christ (based on Isa 7:14) was disputed by the Jews.[6] This gave the perfect grounds for anti-Judaism in the Marian cult, a phenomenon which is usually characterised as of western rather than eastern origins. However, Stephen Shoemaker has shown that versions of the Dormition of the Virgin appearing in Syria, Palestine, and Egypt in c. 500, were radically anti-Jewish:[7]

> Although the narratives often differ greatly in detail, they are almost unanimous in their identification of the Jews as fierce enemies of both the Virgin in particular and the Christian faith more generally. With only one exception, the Dormition narratives indulge in anti-Jewish harangues and

[3] See Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium,* 37.

[4] Translated by Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium,* 401-424. Translations of the *Vision of Anastasia* were limited to the Slavonic version, *Slovo Nastasiya Chernorizitsya,* surviving in two manuscripts (see Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 61 and 67-70).

[5] On the careful methodology required to use apocalypses as historical sources, see Paul Julius Alexander, 'Medieval Apocalypses as Historical Sources', *American Historical Review* 73.4 (1968): 997–1018. Examples of his methodology applied to the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius are found in Paul Julius Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, ed. Dorothy de Ferranti Abrahamse (Berkeley: California University Press, 1985).

[6] Leena Mari Peltomaa and Andreas Külzer, '*Presbeia Theotokou*: An Introduction', in *Presbeia Theotokou: The Intercessory Role of Mary across Times and Places in Byzantium (4th – 9th Century),* ed. Leena Mari Peltomaa, Andreas Külzer and Pauline Allen (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2015), 13-24; at 13n1: 'The reading of Isa 7,14 by Christians caused a bitter controversy of long duration with Jews, with ongoing impact on their mutual distrust.' Andreas Külzer, *Disputationes graecae contra Iudaeos. Untersuchungen zur byzantinischen antijüdischen Dialogliteratur und ihrem Judenbild*, Byzantinisches Archiv 18 (Stuttgart – Leipzig: W. de Gruyter, 1999), esp. 261–262, has more on its significance for 'Mentalitätsgeschichte in Byzanz'.

[7] Stephen Shoemaker, '"Let Us Go and Burn Her Body": The Image of the Jews in the Early Dormition Traditions', *Church History* 68:4 (1999): 775-823; at 777. Shoemaker, '"Let Us Go and Burn Her Body"', 823, concludes: 'Thus the Dormition homilies portray Jews as dangerous enemies of the state, *deserving divine punishment*, which it was the state's duty to exact.' (my italics). See Klaus Schreiner, *Maria: Jungfrau, Mutter Herrscherin* (Munich and Vienna: Carl Hanser, 1994), chapter 11, on the focus of Christian/Jewish conflict in the late-antique and medieval Marian cult. The divine punishment exacted from Jews for their hatred of Mary and violent treatment of her was treated in Boudewijn Dehandschutter, 'Anti-Judaism in the Apocrypha', *Studia Patristica* (1989): 345-350. The single exception that Shoemaker notes is the Dormition homily attributed (perhaps falsely) to Modestus of Jerusalem; see '"Let Us Go and Burn Her Body"', 777n13.

report various episodes that depict the Jews as harassing and attacking the Virgin, actions for which they invariably receive violent divine punishment.

The refusal to admit salvation to the Jews is of a piece with descriptions of Jews that will be familiar to most readers, even in the works of a Father as universally esteemed as Maximos the Confessor, who characterised them as 'the hateful Jews' who might tomorrow seek peace with the Christians, saying, 'Let us […] remove circumcision and you [remove] baptism, and we won't fight with each other anymore'.[8] Christian resentment towards the Jews as the murderers of Christ ran high for many centuries, and this is reflected in the many polemical works against the Jews, such as the Greek *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati* ('The Teaching of Jacob, the Newly Baptized') of c. 634-635.[9] This work appeared in the context of the forced conversions of Jews in Carthage, ordered by Emperor Heraclius in 632. Christian apocalyptic literature was generally anti-Jewish with an emphasis on the anti-Christ who would present himself as the new messiah, the one for whom the Jews were waiting. Apocalyptic literature of all kinds (that of Pseudo-Methodius being only the best known of a dozen examples from western Syria)[10] flourished in the sixth and seventh centuries as a response to the many crises that beset the Byzantine world, both internally and externally.

### *Middle Byzantine Other-world Travel Literature*

Another class of apocalyptic is psychagogic literature, or guided tours of the next world, that flourished in the Middle Byzantine period from the ninth to eleventh centuries. Jane Baun points out that there is no idea of descent or going down to a world under this one; it was rather a case of going outside this world. Before the Christian tradition, beginning with the *Apocalypse of Saint Paul* in Late Antiquity, there was a strong Jewish tradition of psychagogy in the pseudepigrapha. The main differences between these early texts and the medieval Byzantine tradition seem to be the latter emphasises the punishments of sinful humanity, rather than giving equal attention to rewards of the righteous, and the possibility of, indeed the need for, the

[8] Maximos the Confessor, *Relatio Motionis* 4, in *Maximus the Confessor and his Companions,* Oxford Early Christian Texts, ed. and trans. Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 56-57.

[9] See Sarah Gador-Whyte, 'Christian-Jewish Conflict in the Light of Heraclius' Forced Conversions and the Beginning of Islam', in *Religious Conflict from Early Christianity to the Rise of Islam*, Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte 121, ed. Wendy Mayer and Bronwen Neil, (Berlin: EVA, 2014), 201-214. On anti-Jewish polemic in ancient and medieval Christian literature, see S. Morlet, O. Munnich and Bernard Pouderon, eds., *Les dialogues 'adversus Iudaeos'. Permanences et mutations d'une tradition polémique. Actes du colloque international organise les 7 et 8 décembre 2011 à l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne* (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 2013).

[10] Benjamin Garstad, ed. and trans., *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius: An Alexandrian World Chronicle*, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 14 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012).

*Theotokos*' intercession between God and humanity.[11] Baun plausibly suggests that the reason for this emphasis is a darkening eschatological world-view: the medieval visions place such great emphasis on intercession because they construe the Other World almost exclusively in terms of grim realities of judgement, purgation, and punishment.[12]

The first of the other-world vision texts under investigation here (although not perhaps first chronologically, the date being impossible to determine more precisely than the ninth to eleventh centuries) is the *Apocalypse of the Holy Theotokos concerning the Punishments*. The text presents the *Theotokos*' journey to the other world, where she acts as an intercessor for Christian souls in torment. She specifically excludes Jews from her intercessions, however. The other middle Byzantine text on similar themes, the *Vision of Anastasia,* comes from the mid-tenth century and relates a nun's vision of heaven and the punishment of sinners there, for whom 'prophets and apostles and martyrs' entreated.[13] In this text the *Theotokos* was just one of many intercessors for the sinful.

In these texts, Mary is all too human, badgering her son with intercessory pleas on behalf of Christian sinners.[14] One could consider her selective intercession characteristic of her humanity, her prejudices an aspect of her charm for Byzantine readers. Certainly in the climate that dominated in Constantinople at the time of writing, anti-Judaism would not have been worthy of note. My concern to identify whether this is an enduring part of her role as the Mother of God is, admittedly, entirely anachronistic.

The sins punished in the *Apocalypse of the Holy Theotokos* range from the serious to the trivial: 'eavesdropping, slandering, quarrelling, fornicating, ploughing or reaping beyond their furrow, weighing falsely, or taking interest […]'.[15] Those guilty of failing to wake on Sundays were punished by being seated upon clouds of fire, and those who failed to rise on the entry of the priest were relegated to fiery benches.[16] The only excuse for not going to church on Sundays was if your house was on fire on all four sides. Eternal punishments awaited those who committed incest with their close relations or godparents, those who consorted with demons, denied Christ or

[11] See Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 97, on the new capriciousness and remoteness of God in the Middle Ages and the need for the Mother of God to intercede on the sinner's behalf.

[12] Baun, *ibid*. See especially the examples at the end of the *Vision of Anastasia*, trans. Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 422-424.

[13] Rudolf Homburg, ed., *Apocalypsis Anastasiae ad trium codicum auctoritatem, panormmitani, ambrosiani, parisini* (Leipzig, 1903). *Vision of Anastasia*, §15, trans. Baun, 416.

[14] Mary Cunningham, 'Mary as Intercessor in Constantinople during the Iconoclast Period: The Textual Evidence', in *Presbeia Theotokou*, ed. Peltomaa, Külzer and Allen, 163-178; Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 274-275, and 278-279. See also Jane Baun, 'Discussing Mary's Humanity in Medieval Byzantium', in *The Church and Mary*, Studies in Church History 39, ed. Robert N. Swanson (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer for the Ecclesiastical History Society, 2004), 63-72.

[15] Judith Tonning, Review of Jane Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium,* in *New Blackfriars* 80 (2008): 740-741; at 740.

[16] *Apocalypse of the Holy Theotokos* §§12-13, trans. Baun, 394.

their baptism, women who killed babies, and 'the Jews who crucified our Lord Jesus Christ', all of whom were consigned to the everlasting 'outer fire'.[17] There are clearly two classes of person here: redeemable Christians in the dress circle suffering intermediate, temporary punishments, and those beyond the pale.

Mary views the former group, the Christians, as 'her children' and calls upon the Archangel Michael to 'command the armies of the angels and raise [her] up to the height of Heaven and break [her] through into the presence of the invisible Father' (§26), where she sways a reluctant master (God) first not to forsake those who call upon her name (§26), and then to grant respite to all souls in torment during the fifty days of Easter (§29). This is a God who is, as Tonning observes, angry, distant, and imperial.[18] Baun argues for an eastern provenance for the *Theotokos* text at some remove from the centre of imperial administration.[19] On the other hand, the *Vision of Anastasia* (§42) is markedly pro-imperial, supporting the cause of the late emperor, Nicephorus II Phokas (963-9), who was murdered by John Tzimiskes.

Judith Tonning's question, raised in her review of Baun, is whether the punishments witnessed by the *Theotokos* and the nun in the *Vision of Anastasia* are eternal or temporal, and whether they take place in Hell, Hades, or some sort of purgatory.[20] This is pertinent to our enquiry. The idea of purgatory is not now accepted in the Eastern Orthodox church since the matter was settled at the Council of Florence in 1438-1439, after some 200 years of debate.[21] However, it may well have leaked across from the West where it was instigated by Gregory the Great at the end of the sixth century. Certainly there were borrowings from Gregory's *Dialogues* on this subject (especially Book 4) in Paul Evergetinos' *Synagoge*.[22] The western doctrine of purgatory developed in parallel with a popular belief originating in Egypt in tax posts where government tolls were collected on goods for trade (*telonai*). The soul had to pass through a number of these (the number had increased from five to twenty-two by the tenth century) on its way to heaven, each being a reckoning for a certain set of sins. In the early fifth century, Cyril of Alexandria once preached in terrifying detail on the five toll-gates where the sins of each of the five senses were

[17] *Apocalypse of the Holy Theotokos* §23, trans. Baun, 397-398.

[18] Tonning, Review of *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 741.

[19] Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium,* 3: 'The apocalypses project the viewpoint of people who lived on the margins of imperial power', with the *Vision of Anastasia* perhaps hailing from central Greece but also possibly Macedonia, Crete or Cappadocia: see Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium,* 233-235.

[20] Tonning, Review of *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 740.

[21] Rosemary Morris, *Monks and Laymen in Byzantium, 843-1118* (Cambridge, 1995; repr., 2002), 128, comments that Byzantine attitudes to purgatory before the discussions with the Latins began in the thirteenth century is 'a neglected area of study'.

[22] Viktor Matthaios, ed. and trans., *Euergetinos ētoi Synagōgē tōn theophthoggōn rhēmatōn kai didaskaliōn tōn Theophorōn kai hagiōn Paterōn*, 6th ed., vol. 1 (Athens, 1966). These borrowings are traced by Andrew Louth, 'Gregory the Great in the Byzantine Tradition', in *A Companion to Gregory the Great*, ed. Bronwen Neil and Matthew Dal Santo (Leiden, 2014), 343-358. See also Gregory Collins, 'A Neglected Manual of the Spiritual Life: the *Synagoge* of Paul Evergetinos', *Sobornost/incorporating Eastern Churches Review* 12:1 (1990): 47-51.

interrogated, from one's youth to the moment of death.[23] On the day of judgement, fierce, monstrous, and merciless demons 'as black as Ethiopians' would accuse those souls who had committed sins of the tongue either knowingly or carelessly (e.g. those guilty of lying speech or gossip or false oaths or ribald laughter or gluttony or bold kisses or cheeky songs), while good angels defended those souls who were to be rewarded for right speech, singing psalms of praise, etc. At the Council of Florence, some Greek theologians, including as Gennadios Scholastikos, were happy to accept that these stages of interrogation were the equivalent of purgatory.[24] However, the differences between the East and West prevailed in the end.

A somewhat similar and contemporary tale is that of the elderly servant Theodora, in the mid-tenth century *Life of Basil the Younger*. Theodora expected to have to pass through twenty-two toll-gates on her way to heaven, where demons would interrogate her and collect fines for her wrong-doings. She is told by her spiritual guide, St Basil the Younger, that two angels have been watching her since birth: a good one who has recorded her good deeds, and a bad one who has recorded her sins.[25] She is spared the ordeal of the toll-gates, in the end, when Basil intervenes on her behalf by presenting a bag of gold coins to the woman's guardian angel from the store of his own good deeds.[26]

The power of Mary to intercede successfully, like that of St Basil, is proven in both our apocalyptic texts. In the *Vision of Anastasia*, her intercessory power seems to lie in the fact that she was Jesus' virgin mother, 'wholly undefiled'. Jesus sends Anastasia back to earth with the message: 'I wanted to destroy you utterly from the earth, but *through the entreaty of my wholly undefiled mother* […] I was reconciled'.[27] In a reminder that not all shall be saved, Christ adds that 'whosoever does not believe these things, and blasphemes, shall have the curse of the 318 God-bearing Fathers, and his portion shall be with Judas and with those who cry out, 'Away with him, away with him, crucify him!''.[28] Here the power of the 'God-bearing fathers' at the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325 CE) to impose curses is invoked in op-

[23] Cyril of Alexandria, *Hom.* 14 (PG 77:1073-1076). See Claudia Rapp, 'Safe-Conducts to Heaven: Holy Men, Mediation and the Role of Writing', in *Transformations of Late Antiquity. Essays for Peter Brown*, ed. Philip Rousseau and Manolis Papoutsakis, 2 vols. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 2:187-204, esp. 195-198.

[24] See Nicholas Constas, 'To Sleep Perchance to Dream: The Middle State of Souls in Patristic and Byzantine Literature', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 55 (2001): 91-124, esp. 105-109.

[25] *Βίος και πολιτεία και μερική θαυμάτων διήγησις του εν αγίοις πατρός ημών Βασιλείου του Νέου* (*Life of Basil the Younger*), ed. A. N. Veselovskij, 'Razyskaniia v oblasti russkogo dukhovnogo stikha', *Sbornik Otdeleniia russkogo iazyka i slovesnosti imperatorskoi, Akademii nauk* 46 (1890): 28-29. Denis F. Sullivan, Alice-Mary Talbot and Stamatina McGrath, eds. and trans., *The Life of Saint Basil the Younger. Critical Edition and Annotated Translation of the Moscow Version*, Dumbarton Oaks Studies 35 (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2014); and George Every, 'Toll-Gates on the Air Way', *Eastern Churches Review* 8 (1976): 139-151; at 144-148.

[26] *Life of Basil the Younger* 18.8. See Constas, 'To Sleep', 108-109, and Morris, *Monks*, 128.

[27] *Vision of Anastasia* §48 (Paris version), trans. Baun, 412.

[28] *Vision of Anastasia* §50, trans. Baun, 412.

position to the God-bearer's power to intercede. Judas, the ultimate traitorous Jew, remains beyond redemption.

### *Marian intercession in Byzantine hymnography*

While the Middle Byzantine apocalyptic tradition depicts Mary as clearly biased towards her Christian children, it was not always so. A very different picture of Mary the intercessor is presented in the hymns of Romanos Melodes, writing in Constantinople in the sixth century. Although in Romanos' *kontakia* the prayers of Mary usually occur in the final strophe and are fairly formulaic,[29] there are at least two exceptional cases. The first, in Romanos' hymn *On Mary at the Cross*, is when Mary agrees to intercede for Adam and Eve, who are stuck in Hades. The crucified Jesus himself attributed to her this task of intercession, which she accepted.[30]

Likewise, in Romanos' second hymn *On the Nativity*, a weeping Mary undertakes to intercede with her son for 'her ancestors', the lamenting Adam and Eve, 'for the mother shone forth in pity, being compassionate'.[31] These *kontakia* make a strong case for Mary the mother and God-bearer as universal intercessor. Many scholars have looked to Syriac homiletics to explain the influence on Romanos of the idea of Marian intercession, rare in Greek homiletics.[32] The seven-hundred verse homilies of Jakob of Serug (d. 521) reveal particularly striking examples. Jakob's lengthy festal homily for the feast of Christ's Nativity contains twelve couplets sung in the voice of Mary, who 'calls for the celebration of the new creation the Nativity brings'.[33] All are called to give praise to God: 'On this day let the people in all confines [of the world] give thanks because they were scattered among all kinds of religions [or: all forms of idolatry] but they are gathered by you'.[34] Among these, the Houses of David (the Jews) and Adam, the dispossessed heir, are singled out for special mention. This is

[29] Sarah Gador-Whyte, 'Changing Conceptions of Mary in Sixth-Century Constantinople: The *Kontakia* of Romanos the Melodist', in *Questions of Gender in Byzantine Society*, ed. Bronwen Neil and Lynda Garland (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 77-92, at 84-85, notes Romanos' use in his final strophe of formulaic lines such as 'through the prayers of the Holy *Theotokos* and Virgin', and 'through the intercessions of the one who bore you'. See also Jan H. Barkhuizen, 'An Analysis of the Form and Content of Prayer as a Liturgical Component in the Hymns of Romanos the Melodist', *Ecclesiastikos Pharos* 75.2 (1991): 91-102.

[30] *Hymn* 19.Θ'.7-10: 'so do not weep, mother, / but rather cry this: "Have mercy on Adam / and take pity on Eve, / my son and my God."'; trans. Gador-Whyte, 'Changing Conceptions', 84.

[31] *Hymn* 2.I'.1-8, cited by Gador-Whyte, 'Changing Conceptions', 86.

[32] Among them Gador-Whyte, 'Changing Conceptions', 85 and n. 25, where she notes that the question of Syriac influence on Romanos is much debated. Some influence from the homilies of Jakob of Serug seems beyond doubt.

[33] Jacob of Serug, Festal Homily 1, *On the Nativity*, lines 985-1008, discussed by Susan Ashbrook Harvey, 'Including the "Despised Woman": Jacob of Serug at the Nativity Feast', in *Byzantine Religious Culture: Studies in Honor of Alice-Mary Talbot*, ed. Denis Sullivan, Elizabeth A. Fisher and Stratis Papaioannou (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 3-18 at 6.

[34] Jacob of Serug, Festal Homily 1, *On the Nativity*, lines 993-4; ed. Paul Bedjan, *S. martyrii qui et Sahdona quae supersunt omnia* (Paris: O. Harrassowitz, 1902), 767; trans. Thomas Kollamparampil, *Jacob of Serugh, Select Festal Homilies*; with a foreword by Sebastian P. Brock (Rome: Centre for Indian and Inter-Religious Studies; Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1997), 87-88.

not, strictly speaking, Marian intercession, but it is a universalising call by Mary to recognise God's creative power and majesty, with none of the usual mid-Byzantine Greek exclusivity or anti-Jewish rhetoric about it. That is not to say that the medieval West was above such exclusive rhetoric; rather they adopted it with great enthusiasm, and with tragic consequences for later generations of Jews, for example, in Visigothic Spain in the seventh century.[35]

### *The evidence of Greek homilies*

Stephen Shoemaker has recently shown that the doctrine of Marian intercession seems to have arisen in Dormition Apocrypha composed in Palestine already in the third century.[36] However, images of Mary as intercessor, as indeed use of the epithet '*Theotokos*', are virtually absent from sixth- and seventh-century Greek homilies, as Pauline Allen has pointed out.[37] There is one notable exception, to be found in a sixth-century homily of Abraham of Ephesus on the Feast of the *Hypapante* (Mary's presentation of the eight-day-old Jesus at the Temple).[38] In the genuine part of Abraham's second surviving homily, the author also attacks Jews and heretics.[39] The appearance of these two ideas, Mary as *Theotokos* and intercessor, and the guilt of the Jews, may be more than a coincidence.

There are also many instances of Mary as *Theotokos* and intercessor in the early eighth century in the homilies on the Dormition of Mary by Germanos, Patriarch of Constantinople, if he is to be identified with the patriarch to whom the hymns are usually attributed.[40] Similar themes occur in the hymns on the *Nativity of the*

[35] See Rachel L. Stocking, 'Forced Converts, "Crypto-Judaism," and Children: Religious Identification in Visigothic Spain', in *Jews in Early Christian Law. Byzantium and the Latin West, 6th – 11th Centuries*, Religion and Law in Medieval Christian and Muslim Societies 2, ed. John V. Tolan, Nicholas de Lange, Laurence Foschia and Capucine Nemo-Pekelman (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 243-265.

[36] Stephen Shoemaker, 'The Ancient Dormition Apocrypha and the Origins of Marian Piety: Early Evidence of Marian Intercession from Late Ancient Palestine', in *Presbeia Theotokou*, ed. Peltomaa, Külzer and Allen, 25-44. This is perhaps less realistic than his dating of such texts as appearing c. 500 in Syria, Egypt and Palestine simultaneously: Shoemaker, '"Let Us Go and Burn Her Body"', 777.

[37] Pauline Allen, 'Portrayals of Mary in Greek Homiletic Literature (6th—7th Centuries)', in *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium: Texts and Images*, ed. Leslie Brubaker and Mary Cunningham (London: Routledge, 2011), 68-88.

[38] (CPG 7381), ed. Marcel Jugie, *Homélies mariales byzantines,* Patrologia Orientalis 16/3 (Paris: Firmin-Didot et Cie, 1907), 448-454, with a single reference to Mary as *Theotokos* (ed. Jugie, 448, line 9). See Allen, 'Portrayals of Mary in Greek Homiletic Literature', 80-81 and n. 79.

[39] At the end of Abraham's homily, there is 'a later addition', this judgement being based on the 'high-flown' praise for Mary in contrast to the sober language used in the rest of the piece, in which Mary is assigned an intercessory role: Allen, 'Portrayals of Mary in Greek Homiletic Literature', 81.

[40] Germanos, *Homily 1 on the Dormition* (PG 98:349B-351B), and *Homily 2 on the Dormition* (PG 98:361C-D), discussed by Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 280-281.

*Theotokos* by Andrew of Crete (d. 712 or 726),[41] and Germanos.[42] In the earliest manuscript of Germanos' hymn for the feast of Mary's Nativity, celebrated on 8 September, the *kanon* ends with a prayer to the Virgin Mary 'to pray without ceasing for her servants, because God the Logos dwelled in her and was ineffably born in flesh from her'.[43] The earliest evidence for the celebration of the feast of Mary's Nativity is believed to be a *kontakion* of Romanos Melodes,[44] suggesting that the feast probably originated in Constantinople. Germanos' homily *On the Consecration* also calls on Mary to intercede for sinners, calling her the 'consolation of Christians' and 'the breath and life of Christians',[45] but also asking, 'Who, after your Son, cares for the human race as you do?'.[46] In view of this evidence for a universally compassionate *Theotokos*, we must ask why she became the exclusive intercessor for the tormented souls of Christians by the ninth or tenth centuries, when our two *Apocalypses* appeared. The answer to this question seems to lie in the development of the cult of a more human Mary in the same period, when affective piety came into its own, and in the particular animus towards Jews that was felt in Byzantium from the seventh century onwards.[47]

[41] Andrew of Crete, *Homilies 1-4 on the Nativity of the Theotokos* (PG 97:805-881). See the translation by Mary Cunningham, *Wider than Heaven. Eighth-century Homilies on the Mother of God*, Popular Patristics Series 35 (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008), 71-138. See also from a slight later period John of Damascus' *Oration on the Nativity of the Holy Theotokos Mary,* 53-70, esp. 69-70.

[42] This significant hymnographic corpus, which has not yet been edited, is the subject of a forthcoming doctoral study by Kosta Simic, 'Liturgical Poetry in Eighth-Century Byzantium: The Hymnographic Works attributed to Germanos I (715-730), Patriarch of Constantinople' (PhD diss., Australian Catholic University, Brisbane, forthcoming). I am grateful to Mr Simic for allowing me to cite his work before publication.

[43] *Τὸν ἐν σοὶ Παρθένε· οἰκήσαντα Θεὸν Λόγον·καὶ ἐκ σοῦ ἀῤῥήτως σαρκί·προελθόντα ἀφράστῳ λόγῳ·δυσωποῦσα μὴ παύσῃ ὑπὲρ δούλων τῶν ἀκαταπαύστως ἀνυμνούντων σε* (Sinaiticus gr. 552, f. 78v, 11th c.), trans. Simic, 'Liturgical Poetry in Eighth-Century Byzantium', forthcoming. The other two manuscripts are both from the fourteenth century: Sinaiticus gr. 645, ff. 29v-35, and Sinaiticus gr. 671, ff. 24v-29. Kosta Simic is preparing an edition of all three manuscripts.

[44] Paul Maas and Konstantine Trypanis, ed., *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica: Cantica Genuina* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 276-280. These editors count 59 genuine hymns of Romanos: Gador-Whyte, 'Changing Conceptions', 78n4.

[45] Germanos of Constantinople, *On the Consecration of the Venerable Church of Our Supremely Holy Lady, the Theotokos, and on the Holy Swaddling Clothes of our Lord Jesus Christ,* 9 (PG 98:372-84); trans. Cunningham, *Wider than Heaven,* 147-255; at 252.

[46] Germanos of Constantinople, *On the Consecration of the Venerable Church of Our Supremely Holy Lady*, 10, trans. Cunningham, *Wider than Heaven,* 253.

[47] The evidence of four middle-Byzantine apocalyptic texts for negative Byzantine attitudes towards the possibility of salvation for Jews is assessed by Paul Magdalino, '"All Israel Will Be saved"? The Forced Baptism of the Jews and Imperial Eschatology', in *Jews in Early Christian Law. Byzantium and the Latin West, 6th – 11th Centuries,* Religion and Law in Medieval Christian and Muslim Societies 2, ed. John V. Tolan, Nicholas de Lange, Laurence Foschia and Capucine Nemo-Pekelman (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 231-242; at 232-33. Two of these texts are hagiographic with eschatological content: *The Life of Basil the Younger,* mentioned above, and the *Life of Andrew the Fool.* The other two are more obviously apocalyptic: *Diegesis Danielis* and *The Apocalypse of Leo of Constantinople*. Magdalino concludes that these texts do not display the ambiguity towards Jews that was characteristic of other examples of Byzantine literary production in this period. Instead, they are rigidly opposed to Jewish salvation.

### *Jews in Byzantine Apocalyptic*

In Constantinople during the attempted siege of the city by combined Avar-Slav and Persian forces in 626, Mary was the intercessor *par excellence*.[48] It has been suggested by Averil Cameron that the cult practice of inducing Mary's intercession via icons arose in the sixth century as a desperate response to desperate times.[49] The Marian cult certainly received a boost on that occasion from the perambulations of the people, led by Patriarch Sergios (610-638), around the walls of the besieged city, even if he did not carry aloft an icon of the *Theotokos* as was posited until recently, in the absence of any contemporary historical witnesses.[50] The Byzantine sense of being besieged only increased with the pressure of Islamic military victories from the 630s onwards, the context in which Maximos lived and wrote.[51] The monk Maximos opposed Heraclius' moves towards the forced conversions of Jews in c. 632, claiming that it would dilute Christian purity, hastening the advent of the Antichrist (*Ep.* 8).[52] This was just one in a series of attempts to impose baptism on Jews in the seventh to ninth centuries.[53] As Shoemaker observes, 'The late sixth and early seventh centuries bear witness to increasing violence between Jews and Christians in the East, in the context of generally increasing social and religious unrest in the region.'[54] In the context of the general hardening of boundaries upon religious lines that is characteristic of apocalyptic literature from the seventh century onward, the later emphasis on eternal punishment of the Jews in psychagogic literature seems to have been an inevitable development. It is important to note that the four versions of the Greek text of the *Apocalypse of the Theotokos* give different emphases to Christ's anger towards the Jews and the imminence of the *Eschaton*, an area that Baun and Magdalino have suggested would repay further study.[55]

[48] Averil Cameron, 'The Theotokos in Sixth-Century Constantinople. A City Finds Its Symbol', *Journal of Theological Studies, new series* 29 (1978): 79-108; at 79-80, 104.

[49] Cameron, 'The Theotokos in Sixth-Century Constantinople', 101-102.

[50] The lack of contemporary evidence is surveyed by Bissera Pentcheva, 'The Supernatural Protector of Constantinople: the Virgin and Her Icons in the Tradition of the Avar Siege', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 26 (2002): 2-41, esp. 9-12 and 15-22, and Bissera Pentcheva, *Icons and Power: The Mother of God in Byzantium* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 37-38, where she argues that such use of Marian icons in litanies did not occur until the second half of the tenth century.

[51] See further Pauline Allen, 'The Life and Times of Maximus the Confessor', in *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor*, ed. Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 3-17.

[52] Maximos the Confessor, *Ep.* 8 (PG 91:440-445). Magdalino, 'All Israel Will Be Saved', 236-38, 240-41, discusses the implications for the eventual salvation of Jews in both this letter and *Doctrina Iacobi*.

[53] Magdalino, 'All Israel Will Be Saved', 234-35, posits the forced conversions initiated by Heraclius in 632, Leo III in 721, and Basil I in 874, as a policy that some 'damnationist' apocryphal writers, who resisted the idea that Jews could be saved in the end times, criticised.

[54] Shoemaker, '"Let Us Go and Burn Her Body"', 782.

[55] Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium,* 59; Magdalino, 'All Israel Will Be Saved', 242.

This was not, however, the original tradition of the oriental churches, as represented by Jakob of Serug and Romanos Melodes in Constantinople, assuming that the latter was to some degree inspired by the former hymnographer. For them, the God-bearer was a generous and inclusive intercessor on behalf of those of all other religions, and especially the ancestral religion of the Jews. In sixth-century Asia Minor, by contrast, anti-Judaism and the *Theotokos* as intercessor were both current ideas in preaching, as we have seen in Abraham of Ephesus' homily on the *Hypapante*. In summary, we can say that the theme of Marian discrimination in intercession reflects an anti-Judaism found in some Marian hymns and homilies of the early Byzantine period, such as sixth-century Ephesus, but is not the standard in the hymns and homilies of John of Damascus, Andrew of Crete, or Germanos of Constantinople.

The *Theotokos* of Anastasia's other-world tour and of the *Apocalypse of the Holy Theotokos* seems to have taken her exclusionist cues from the tradition of Byzantine apocalyptic literature that flourished in the sixth and seventh centuries. Anti-Judaism was an unfortunately common feature of Byzantine Christian apocalyptic. It is difficult to judge on the basis of only two surviving witnesses, but the edifying sight of Christian souls being punished with temporary torments in the Byzantine apocalypses was obviously more powerful if contrasted with the negative exemplar of Jewish and other souls whose judgement was final and everlasting.

Pauline Allen notes that, in addition to allowing for social and regional variety in the early stages of development of the Marian cult, 'we have to accept some degree of contradiction or at least paradox in the evidence, even within the one genre'.[56] This is even more evident across the genres we have surveyed: Mary can be an intercessor in hymns but rarely in homilies of the same period; she can be a universal intercessor in Syriac liturgical poetry but an anti-Jewish judge of humanity in Greek apocalyptic three or four centuries later. The idea of the *Theotokos* interceding with her son for sinful Christians, and the idea that the mother of Jesus would not have wanted to intercede for the murderers of her Son, seem to have reinforced each other to justify discriminate intercession.

[56] Allen, 'Portrayals of Mary in Greek Homiletic Literature', 85.

# The Mother of God and the Natural World: Byzantine Conceptions of Sacrament and Creation

MARY B. CUNNINGHAM
*Honorary Associate Professor, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Nottingham, UK*

This article examines the connection between Mary, the Mother of God, and a transfigured natural world, as depicted in Byzantine liturgical texts and experienced in the lives of Orthodox Christians. Although these two aspects of Marian devotion may seem unrelated, they both reinforce the Virgin Mary's theological role as the meeting-place between the divine and created spheres. Byzantine hymnography and homiletics use typology not only to express Mary's role as the receptive creation into which God entered, but also to convey a sacramental meaning specifically linking the Theotokos with the mysteries of baptism and the Eucharist. More tangible reminders of her link with the material elements that play a part in spiritual renewal and healing can be found in the shrines, often endowed with miraculous pools and springs, that existed in medieval Constantinople. Both formal liturgical and popular association of the Theotokos with a transfigured creation thus reinforced her role as Christians' main intercessor before God in the Byzantine world.

> Hail, favoured one, the all-gold jar of manna and the tabernacle truly made of purple, which the new Bezaleel adorned in golden style! Hail, favoured one, forever purple God-bearing cloud and spring eternally pouring out grace for everyone![1]

Praise of Mary, the Mother of God, takes many forms in Orthodox liturgical worship. Passages such as the above, which appear not only in surviving Byzantine festal homilies but also in the hymnography that is still sung in offices of the great Marian feasts, may bewilder a visitor who encounters this tradition for the first time. Instead of instructing the faithful in a discursive or literal way by means of lessons and sermons, the Orthodox Church presents congregations with a fully developed exegetical interpretation of Scripture, much of which is expressed by means of prophecy, typology, and song (often the biblical canticles). Such didactic practice, which is especially espoused in the Eastern Christian tradition, must reflect a belief

[1] Germanos, *Homily on the Annunciation*, in D. Fecioru, 'Un nou gen de predica in omiletica ortodoxa,' *Biserica Ortodoxa Romana* 64 (1946): 71; trans. M. B. Cunningham, *Wider Than Heaven. Eighth-Century Homilies on the Mother of God* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 2008), 226.

that the Christological mystery is best expressed by means of poetic, and especially biblical, language. The purpose of this liturgical synthesis is to reveal the complete and integrated pattern of God's saving dispensation, from the moment of creation (Genesis 1) to Pentecost and beyond. Scripture is the material out of which Orthodox hymnography is woven: the resulting rich tapestry allows believers to understand better—or to put it another way, to pray and experience better—the Christological meaning of Scripture, which is expounded in both the Old and the New Testaments.[2]

Typology possesses a metaphorical dimension that expresses in a mysterious way God's ongoing immanence in creation.[3] Leaving aside for now the scholarly debate concerning whether typology as an exegetical method is primarily historical or allegorical in its aims,[4] it is worth examining its function in Marian liturgical celebration. The Mother of God, as the physical space and means whereby God became man, has attracted more typological treatment in Orthodox liturgical writing than any other biblical figure.[5] This form of praise, with special reference to Mary's role in the Christological mystery, appears to have originated in the fourth century—although it may have been adapted from earlier literary references to the Church.[6] It flourished especially after the Council of Ephesus (431), appearing in the poetic sermons of bishops including Proklos of Constantinople, Hesychios of Jerusalem, Basil of Seleucia, and many others.[7] The *Akathistos Hymn* represents an important link in this tradition, although scholars remain undecided about exactly where and when this Marian hymn was composed.[8] Many biblical types that came

[2] For good introductions to this subject, see E. Theokritoff, 'Praying the Scriptures in Orthodox Worship', in *Orthodox and Wesleyan Scriptural Understanding and Practice*, ed. S. T. Kimbrough (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 2005), 73-87; E. A. Briere, 'Scripture in Hymnography: A Study in Some Feasts of the Orthodox Church' (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 1983); Hugh Wybrew, *Orthodox Feasts of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary. Liturgical Texts and Commentary* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 2000).

[3] For a useful explanation of Marian typology, see P. Ladouceur, 'Old Testament Prefigurations of the Mother of God', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 50, nos. 1-2 (2006): 5-57.

[4] F. W. Young, following Sebastian Brock, argues that patristic typology expresses an eternal or 'sacramental' timeframe in liturgical contexts, thus transcending the historical associations of individual Old Testament types. John Breck meanwhile defends the historical nature of typology, as opposed to forms of allegory that identify eternal meanings. See F. M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), esp. 140-60; S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye. The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem the Syrian* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1985); J. Breck, *Scripture in Tradition. The Bible and its Interpretation in the Orthodox Church* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 2001), 21-31.

[5] For further discussion, especially in the Byzantine context, see M. B. Cunningham, 'The Meeting of the Old and the New: The Typology of Mary the Theotokos in Byzantine Homilies and Hymns', in *The Church and Mary*. Studies in Church History 39, ed. R. N. Swanson (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2004), 52-62.

[6] K. Banev, '"Myriad of Names to Represent her Nobleness": The Church and the Virgin Mary in the Hymns of Byzantium', in *A Celebration of Living Theology. A Festschrift in Honour of Andrew Louth*, ed. J. A. Mihoc and L. Aldea (London: Bloomsbury T. & T. Clark, 2014), 75-103.

[7] N. Constas, ed. and trans., *Proclus of Constantinople and the Cult of the Virgin in Late Antiquity. Homilies 1-5, Texts and Translations* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003); M. Aubineau, *Les homélies festales d'Hésychius de Jérusalem*, Subsidia Hagiographica 59 (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1978); Basil of Seleucia, *Homilies* (PG 85:27-474).

[8] L. M. Peltomaa has recently argued that the *Akathistos Hymn* was written in the period between the

to be associated with the Mother of God, such as the burning bush (Exod 3: 1-8), the cloud (Exod 19:9, 16-18), and the mountain (Exod 19:16-20, ff.; Dan 2:334; Hab 3:3; Isa 2:2), reinforce her association with creation. However, Mary is understood to represent a transfigured creation: the objects that such types evoke are those special places in which God has chosen to reveal himself to humanity.

In the discussion that follows, I would like to explore two specific aspects of Mary's association with nature, according to Orthodox theological teaching. The first has to do with the typological expression of this mystery in liturgical texts, with special focus on the Virgin's place as the physical *purveyor* of the sacramental encounter with Christ, especially in baptism and the Eucharist; the second concerns the less regulated, but possibly even more visible, role that she played in relation to holy springs or pools in Byzantine Constantinople from about the fifth century onward. Although these two topics may appear unrelated—in that the first represents a literary, or liturgical, mode of expression and the second a more spontaneous experience—I shall argue that both reveal the symbolic, and even ontological, connection between a transfigured creation, according to the inaugurated eschaton, and Mary, the Mother of God. Both thus possess a 'sacramental' aspect, in that they assist an encounter between the divine and earthly realms—whether this occurs in the context of liturgical worship or in less regulated moments of religious activity.

### *Typology of the Mother of God in liturgical texts: a sacramental meaning?*

To begin our discussion with liturgical texts, it appears that Byzantine hymnographers and preachers employed certain images and types for the Mother of God in order to evoke her place within the Christian mysteries. Building on the idea that Mary provided Christ with his human nature, from the moment of his conception in her womb, liturgical writers taught, with the help of poetic and typological imagery, that she represented the source, or material, from which elements such as water, bread, and wine were derived. We see this role illustrated in liturgical texts that associate the Mother of God either with the physical vessels or materials associated either with baptism (the font and blessed water) or with the Eucharistic rite (bread, wine, and the objects—such as the altar or chalice—in which these are contained).

Some textual examples will serve to demonstrate this point. To begin with the sacrament of baptism, we already find allusions to this mystery in the *Akathistos Hymn*. The anonymous author describes the Virgin Mary both as the source of the living water and as the vessel in which it is contained in the following stanza:

councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451), thus challenging the long-standing acceptance among scholars that it is a sixth- or even seventh-century composition. See L. M. Peltomaa, *The Image of the Virgin Mary in the Akathistos Hymn* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), esp. 113-4. For a critical review of this thesis, see the review by N. Constas in *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (2005): 355-58.

Hail, since you make the many-streamed river gush forth;
Hail, you who prefigure the baptismal font;
Hail, you who take away the filth of sin;
Hail, basin who washes clean the conscience […][9]

The association of the Mother of God with the material agents of spiritual rebirth, water and the baptismal font, was picked up by later Byzantine hymnographers. Their compositions, like the *Akathistos Hymn*, continue to be sung in offices of the Orthodox Church today. A sticheron in both Small and Great Vespers for the feast of the Nativity of the Mother of God compares her to 'the fountain of Life that gushes forth from the flinty rock' (alluding to Exod 17:6).[10] Although the type refers to Moses' smiting of the rock in Horeb when the people of Israel were thirsty, it points forward not only to Mary's role in the incarnation, but also to the living water of baptism through which Christians are granted eternal life in Christ.

The 'sealed spring or fountain (*πηγή*)', which is an allusion to the Song of Songs 4:12, also appears in homilies and hymns for various feasts of the Mother of God. A fifth-century example can be found in Hesychios of Jerusalem's fifth homily in honour of the Virgin Mary. In an extensive allusion to the garden imagery of Song 4:12, he writes: 'The Bridegroom whom you bore called you "an enclosed garden" and "a sealed spring"; he spoke of you before, in the Songs, as "sealed spring" […] he called you [this] because the River of Life came out of you and filled the inhabited earth, but the nuptial branch did not deplete your spring.'[11] The image of the sealed spring, like that of the closed gate of the temple (Ezek 43:27-44: 4), recalls above all Mary's virginity. This paradoxical Christological teaching, which implies both a rich potency but also inviolability,[12] could also have connections with the sacrament of baptism. New life is conferred on Christian initiates by means of water; Christ, the 'River of Life', imparts spiritual life after flowing out of his created source, the Mother of God.

Another fifth-century example, this time from the West, can be found in a sermon by the pope Leo I, who compared the virginal womb of the Theotokos to the Church (or more specifically, the baptismal font), also emphasising the role of the Holy Spirit both in Christ's incarnation and in the rite of baptism: 'By the Spirit, Christ is born from the body of his unsullied Mother; by this same Spirit, the Christian is reborn

[9] *The Akathistos Hymn*, Stanza 21; trans. Peltomaa, *The Image of the Virgin Mary in the Akathistos Hymn*, 17.

[10] Mother Mary and Kallistos Ware, *The Festal Menaion* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969; repr., S. Canaan, PA: St Tikhon's Seminary Press, 1998), 99, 104.

[11] Hesychios of Jerusalem, *De S. Maria Deipara* V.2, in Aubineau, *Les homélies festales d'Hésychius de Jérusalem*, 162.

[12] T. Arentzen, 'Virginity Recast: Romanos and the Mother of God' (PhD thesis, Lund University, 2014); forthcoming as *The Virgin in Song: Mary and the Poetry of Romanos the Melodist* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press).

from the womb of the holy Church'.[13] Biblical types that foreshadow the holy spaces of Christian religious celebration, the furniture and vessels therein, and even the bread and wine of the Eucharist, also appear frequently in Byzantine liturgical texts. The feast of the Virgin Mary's Entry into the Temple focuses in its hymnography on the replacement of the old temple, which was made of bricks and mortar, by the living Theotokos. Mary receives her formation in the innermost sanctum, the 'holy of holies', within the Jewish temple, thus becoming the holy—and living—space that will contain God in the new dispensation. As George of Nikomedia writes: 'The Law prefigured you most wonderfully as tabernacle, jar of manna, strange ark, veil of the temple, rod of Aaron, temple never to be destroyed, and gate of God […]'[14] The Eucharistic association of such imagery may not be obvious, but it is embedded typologically in this text. Within the sanctuary, the manna that was contained in the jar (Exod 16:32-33) symbolises the body of Christ. The Old Testament jar of manna prefigures both the paten and the chalice of the new dispensation, which will contain the body and blood of Christ. As in the case of other types connected with the tabernacle or temple, the Mother of God represents the sacred space, its furniture, or the vessels that contain the holy elements.[15] She thus mediates the mystery of sacramental encounter, acting as a bridge between God and humanity. It is also significant that the Theotokos can be the antitype of all such Old Testament objects at once. She thus stands not only for the whole of a transfigured creation, as we saw earlier, but also—and more specifically—as the sanctified space and holy vessels which God, the Logos, has chosen to enter and inhabit.

It is perhaps worth concluding this section of my article by recalling that an image of the Mother of God, holding the Christ child, adorns the apses of many Byzantine and modern Orthodox churches. This iconography is usually understood to symbolise the central doctrine of Orthodox Christianity, namely, the Incarnation, which serves to justify its placement in the sanctuary, just above the altar.[16] Beyond this, however, we may ask whether it is possible that the placement of the Mother of God within this sanctified space reflects her role both as source and container of the sacrificial body of Christ.[17] Without the Theotokos, Christ, the God-man whose body and blood are offered to the faithful in the Eucharistic sacrifice, would not be

[13] Leo I, Sermon 29.1 (PL 54:227); trans. L. Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church. The Blessed Virgin Mary in Patristic Thought*, trans. T. Buffer (San Fancisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 227.

[14] George of Nikomedia, *Kanon on the Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple*, *Canticle Nine, November Menaion*, 274; trans. Mother Mary and Kallistos Ware, *The Festal Menaion*, 191 (with adjustments).

[15] Ladouceur, 'Old Testament Prefigurations of the Mother of God', 9.

[16] See R. Cormack, 'The Mother of God in Apse Mosaics', in *Mother of God. Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*, ed. M. Vassilaki (Athens: Skira, 2000), 91-103.

[17] I am indebted to Maria Evangelatou for suggesting this idea to me in private correspondence. She will explore it further in a future article, '"*Κρατήρ ευφροσύνης καί αγαλλιάσεως ανεξάντλητος*" ("Inexhaustible Krater of Joy and Jubilation")': The Theotokos as Bearer of the Eucharist in Byzantine Culture', in *The Reception of the Mother of God in Byzantium: Marian Narratives in Texts and Images*, ed. T. Arentzen and M. B. Cunningham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

.

in our midst. It is nevertheless important to remember that the Virgin Mary's role in this context is not a priestly one; rather, she represents the place where Christ and humanity become one. She contains God, even as she represents the Church and indeed the whole of the transfigured creation.

### *The Mother of God in the physical landscape of Byzantine Constantinople*

Another way in which Orthodox Christians have come to recognise Mary's identification with creation is through her association with holy places, especially springs or pools, in the physical landscape. Although this phenomenon continues in the modern world, I shall focus in the discussion that follows on the imperial city of Constantinople, between about the late fifth and the fifteenth centuries. Literary and archaeological records of miracles associated with particular Marian shrines in this city survive throughout this period. Many of these sites possessed holy springs or pools that offered healing power, thanks to the mediation of the Mother of God.

I have already raised the question whether Byzantine (or indeed modern) congregations fully understood the complex, and deeply theological, typology concerning the Mother of God that was expounded in hymnography and festal sermons. Whatever the answer to that question may be, it is likely that the Christian faithful—at least those who frequented Marian pools and springs in Constantinople—fully recognised the healing power of these watery shrines. It is significant that holy springs were often associated with sanctuaries (known as *ἁγιάσματα*) dedicated either to the Virgin Mary or to her mother, St Anna.

Eirini Panou has argued recently that the association of both Mary and St Anna with holy pools of water may have begun in Jerusalem.[18] A pool (or more precisely two adjoining pools), located just north of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, was associated in early Christian tradition with the story of the healing of a paralytic in John 5:2. This site came to be commemorated by a three-aisled basilica in the middle of the fifth century. However, perhaps because of a long-standing tradition that associated the pool of Bethesda with the home of Mary's parents, Joachim and Anna, the church was re-dedicated to the Virgin Mary sometime before AD 530. Various literary sources, dating from the fifth century onward, describe the pool in Jerusalem as a place of miracles and healing. One such text, a fifth-century 'amulet' preserved in a papyrus discovered at Oxyrhynchus, called both on Christ ('the God of the probatic pool') and the Virgin Mary (named as 'Our Lady the Theotokos') to heal a woman named Ioannia from her fever.[19] In addition to its healing power,

[18] E. Panou, 'Aspects of St Anna's Cult in Byzantium' (PhD thesis, The University of Birmingham, 2011; soon to be published by Francis and Taylor); Panou, 'The Church of Mary in the Probatic Pool and the Hagiasmata of Constantinople', in *Patristic Studies in the Twenty-First Century. Proceedings of an International Conference to Mark the 50th Anniversary of the International Association of Patristic Studies*, ed. B. Bitton-Ashkelony, T. de Bruyn, and C. Harrison (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 635-50.

[19] C. Wessely, ed. and trans., *Les plus anciens monuments du Christianisme* écrits *sur paypyrus*, Patro-

the probatic pool in Jerusalem was associated from an early date with baptism and spiritual purification. Such symbolism may have been intended (albeit implicitly) in the Gospel of John; it was further developed by early Christian writers including Tertullian, Ambrose, John Chrysostom, and others.[20]

Whether or not the healing, baptismal, and Marian associations of the probatic pool in Jerusalem were closely related, it is possible that this body of water created a precedent for similar sanctuaries in Constantinople. In the latter context, the springs or pools of water at Marian shrines played no explicit baptismal role; rather, they served either as sites for ritual bathing or as centres of miraculous healing.[21] As in the case of liturgical texts that use typology or poetic imagery in order to suggest Mary's connection with physical objects or substances such as water, such functions would have reinforced the association of the Virgin Mary with created matter—even if they did not always display an explicitly sacramental aspect. Three of the most famous Marian shrines in Constantinople—all of which included churches and monasteries in their complexes—namely, the Blachernai, the 'Source' (*Πηγή*), and the Hodegon, had springs or pools associated with them. Ritual activities, as well as miracles, occurred at these sites. It is worth examining the surviving literary sources that deal with these shrines in order to explore how they featured in the liturgical and devotional lives of Constantinopolitan Christians.

The most important Constantinopolitan shrine of the Virgin that incorporated water was the complex known as the Blachernai.[22] This site, which was originally located just outside the Theodosian land walls (which were later extended in order to enclose it),[23] was probably founded as a Marian sanctuary by the empress Verina shortly before AD 475.[24] In its earliest phase, the shrine consisted of a round or octagonal sanctuary (known as the 'Soros'), which contained the most important relic of the Virgin, a robe; several centuries later this would be described as a mantle or mandylion. The early sixth-century emperor Justin I added a three-aisled basilica to the complex, which was remodelled by Justin II and his consort Sophia, later

logia Orientalis 18 (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1924), 417-20; Panou, *Aspects of St Anna's Cult in Byzantium*, 25.

[20] See Panou, 'The Church of Mary in the Probatic Pool', 637-38.

[21] One exception to this statement is the church of the Chalkoprateia, which contained a baptistery with a pool. However, this function within the church does not appear to have been linked explicitly with veneration of the Virgin Mary—apart from being contained within a whole complex that was dedicated to her. On the church of the Chalkoprateia in Constantinople, see T. E. Mathews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople, Architecture and Liturgy* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 1971), 28; C. Mango, 'The Chalkoprateia Annunciation and the Pre-Eternal Logos', *Deltion tes christianikes archaiologikes etaireias* IV, 17 (1993-94): 165-70.

[22] Other pools associated with Marian shrines in Constantinople included the *Theotokos ta Areobindou* and *ta Armatiou*. See P. Magdalino, 'Medieval Constantinople', in *Studies on the History and Topography of Byzantine Constantinople*, ed. P. Magdalino (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), I, 34; such pools were often run by fraternities and were known as *lousmata*.

[23] The walls were extended by Heraclius, following the siege of the Avars and Persians in 626. See R. Janin, *Constantinople byzantine: développement urbain et repertoire topographique* (Paris: Institut Français d'Études Byzantines, 1964), 163.

[24] C. Mango, 'Constantinople as Theotokoupolis', in Vassilaki, *Mother of God*, 19.

in the same century.[25] There was also a pool or bath, known as a *λούσμα*, associated with the shrine, which must have been there even before its foundation.[26] Most accounts of the Virgin Mary's veneration at the sanctuary of the Blachernai focus more on her robe or, from the eleventh century onward, a holy icon that performed on a weekly basis what came to be known as 'the usual miracle'.[27] The pool played a ceremonial role when, on certain Fridays during the year, emperors paid a special visit to the shrine.[28] According to the tenth-century *Book of Ceremonies*, the royal visitors first entered the holy Soros where they performed certain prayers, venerated and lit candles before an icon of the Virgin and Child known as the '*episkepsis*', and then immersed themselves three times in the adjoining sacred bath.[29] This description suggests a more ceremonial than impromptu role for the Blachernai pool. Nevertheless, it suggests an association between the Mother of God and water—in Constantinople, as well as Jerusalem.

The shrine of the Virgin of the Source (*Πηγή*) was based at a sanctuary—again just outside the walls of Constantinople—and was believed also to have been founded in the second half of the fifth century during the reign of Leo I. Thanks to a tenth-century collection of miracle stories associated with this shrine, it is possible to reconstruct not only the origins of the Pege sanctuary, but also the history of its use during the Byzantine centuries.[30] The anonymous author describes the legendary origins of the shrine, relating that Leo had discovered a spring just outside the walls of Constantinople when he was searching for water for a thirsty blind man. The Virgin Mary appeared to him, directing him to the spring. When the man drank the water, his sight was miraculously restored. The emperor then built a small shrine on the site, which was called a *Kataphyge* or refuge. In the sixth century, the emperor Justinian constructed a domed church in honour of the Mother of God after being cured of a urinary infection by water from the Pege. This church, to which a male monastery was soon attached, became a focus for both imperial and lay pilgrimage.

[25] Mango, 'Constantinople as Theotokoupolis', 21.

[26] See Janin, *Constantinople byzantine*, 161-71; C. Mango, 'The Origins of the Blachernai Shrine at Constantinople', *Actes du XIIIe Congrès International d'Archéologie Chrétienne*, vol. 2 (Rome: Pontifical Institute of Christian Archaeology and Split: Archaeological Museum, 1998): 62-63.

[27] E. N. Papaioannou, 'The "Usual Miracle" and an Unusual Image: Psellos and the Icons of Blachernai', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 51 (2001): 177-88; B.V. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*: *The Mother of God in Byzantium* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2006), 145-63; C. Barber, *Contesting the Logic of Painting: Art and Understanding in Eleventh-Century Byzantium* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 80-98.

[28] J. Ebersolt, *Constantinople: Recueil d'études, d'archéologie et d'histoire* (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1951), 48, 51.

[29] Constantine Porphyrogennetos, *Book of Ceremonies* II.12, trans. (with Greek edition of the Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonn 1829) A. Moffatt and M. Tall, *Constantine Porphyrogennetos, The Book of Ceremonies*, Byzantina Australiensia 18 (1-2) (Canberra: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 2012), vol. 2, 551 – 56. According to Janin, the ceremony was performed 'from time to time', but always on a Friday. See Janin, *Constantinople byzantine*, 170.

[30] A.-M. Talbot and S. F. Johnson, trans., *Miracle Tales from Byzantium* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

The Byzantine emperors visited the spring on Ascension Day; on this occasion, the patriarch celebrated a Divine Liturgy, which was followed by a meal.[31]

In addition to such imperial patronage, ordinary people visited the spring throughout the year, seeking healing from the water or sometimes from oil lamps that were hanging before an icon of the Virgin. The miraculous healings that took place at the shrine of the Pege were facilitated either by the Theotokos herself, who appeared to her supplicants in visions, or by her icon. However, they were always brought about by means of physical substances—water from the spring, mud from its banks, or oil from the lamps that were hanging in the sanctuary. For the most part, the pilgrims ingested these liquids; it is also noticeable that the illnesses were often internal ones, consisting of gastric, urinary or intestinal infections, or tumours. Dropsy, or bloating due to fluid retention, was also a common ailment. The beneficiaries of Mary's intercession ranged from emperors and their wives or relatives to common people; she appears to have acted without discrimination in her service to Christians of every gender and class. And, interestingly, the author of the miracles tells us that many pilgrims did not recognise the Virgin when they encountered her in visions; she appeared to be a woman 'of modest means' (*γυναῖκα τινα μετρίαν*).[32]

The monastery of the Hodegon lay closest to the centre of the imperial city; it was located between the Great Palace and the sea, not far from the churches of Hagia Sophia and Hagia Irene. According to legend, the monastery had been founded by the empress Pulcheria in the early fifth century. It possessed the famous icon which was believed to have been painted by St Luke and which had been sent from Palestine to Constantinople by the empress Eudokia.[33] In spite of such legendary credentials, however, the literary sources for the monastery of the Hodegon date from the second half of the ninth century onward; the famous procession of the Hodegetria icon through the streets of Constantinople on Tuesdays may have begun at this time, although sources concerning its institution are dated no earlier than the eleventh century.[34]

Another aspect of the Hodegon monastery—in common with the shrines at Blachernai and the Source—was an ancient and holy spring. Although this pool was later somewhat eclipsed by the Hodegetria icon, it continued to function as a site of miraculous cures throughout the Byzantine period. A lay confraternity tended both the holy spring and the icon at the Hodegon monastery, distributing holy water and oil to the faithful who attended the Tuesday procession and the weekly fairs that

[31] Constantine Porphyrogennetos, *Book of Ceremonies* I.18, trans. Moffatt and Tall, Constantine Porphyrogennetos, vol. 1, 108-14; J. Ebersolt, *Sanctuaires de Byzance. Recherches sur les anciens trésors des églises de Constantinople* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1921), 61.

[32] Talbot and Johnson, *Miracles Tales from Byzantium, 221.*

[33] Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 124 -27.

[34] C. Angelidi and T. Papamastorakis, 'The Veneration of the Virgin Hodegetria and the Hodegon Monastery', in Vassilaki, *Mother of God*, 373-87; Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 109-43.

were held at the monastery.[35] Thus Christians encountered the intercessory power of the Mother of God, as mediated through the material substances of water, oil, and sometimes earth, at various holy shrines in the imperial city. Whether or not they witnessed a vision of the Virgin Mary herself, these Christians would have experienced her mediating role between divine power and their own, earthly, existence in an intensely physical way.

## *Conclusion*

It is necessary now to draw together the evidence presented by liturgical, devotional, and historical texts concerning the Virgin Mary's mediating role between the divine and created worlds in Byzantium. With respect to the liturgical evidence (in the form of Marian hymns and homilies), writers consistently employed poetic images or biblical types that identified Mary with the created world. This didactic method invariably conveyed a Christological message: Mary, the Theotokos, represented the physical container of God the Word, as witnessed in types such as the tabernacle, the temple, the ark, and others. She could also be portrayed as the means of access to God, as revealed in Jacob's ladder (Gen 28:10-17), the closed gate of the temple (Ezek 43:27-44), and Elijah's chariot of fire (2 Kgs 2: 11-13). However, as we have seen, a few of the Old Testament Marian types exhibit more formal connotations of the two main Christian sacraments, baptism and the Eucharist. In this context, the Mother of God represents the material substance—or vehicle—by means of which initiates are reborn into new life in Christ and continue to participate in his life-giving and eternal Person.

The literary evidence associated with three important Constantinopolitan shrines (*ἁγιάσματα*) in Mary's honour, those of the Blachernai, the 'Source' (*Πηγή*), and the Hodegon, reinforces the impression of her connection with the created elements—in this context, especially water. The shrine at Blachernai, which included a pool that was fed by a spring, played a largely ceremonial role in the lives of Byzantine emperors. The fact that they immersed themselves three times in the pool on occasional Fridays throughout the year suggests some kind of purifying rite that mimicked their original baptism. The association of this pool with the Mother of God would have been reinforced by the presence of her icon, made of silver, in a conch on its right-hand side.[36] The shrine at the Marian church of the Pege—on the other side of town—also served ceremonial and devotional needs. However, this sanctuary stood out as a site that enabled Christians of every station in life to encounter the Virgin

[35] Angelidi and Papamastorakis, 'The Veneration of the Virgin Hodegetria', 379; N. P. Ševčenko, 'Servants of the Holy Icon', *Byzantine East, Latin West: Art Historical Studies in Honor of Kurt Weitzmann*, ed. D. Mouriki, et al. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 548-50.

[36] Constantine Porphyrogennetos, *Book of Ceremonies* II.12, trans. Moffatt and Tall, Constantine Porphyrogennetos, vol. 2, 554; Ebersolt, *Sanctuaires de Byzance*, 51.

Mary either in person (through visions) or by means of the water with which she was associated. The Hodegon Monastery, located at the heart of Constantinople, also possessed a pool that offered healing and comfort to the faithful. This body of water came to be associated with the intercessory power of the Mother of God, especially when the weekly ceremony involving the icon of the Hodegetria was instituted towards the end of the eleventh century.

The extent to which Byzantine Christians understood the Christological foundations on which the Virgin's power was based is difficult to determine. Hymns, which were sung on a daily basis in churches and monasteries throughout the empire, reinforced this message poetically and with the help of biblical imagery. Whether or not the complexity of such typological teaching was fully understood, the epithets by which the Theotokos was invoked conveyed vividly her connection with the created (and transfigured) world. Marian shrines such as the churches at Blachernai, the Pege, and the Hodegon, with their associated pools, would have reinforced this message by tangible—and sometimes healing—means. The combined impact of these various witnesses to Mary's ongoing presence in the world must have allowed Byzantine Christians to experience her power as intercessor in both body and spirit.

Faith and practice represent two central aspects of most world religions. In the case of Byzantine (and indeed modern) Orthodox Christianity, it is inappropriate to separate what might be termed 'orthodoxy' ('right belief') and 'orthopraxy' ('right practice'), since the two aspects of religious life are so closely entwined. One of the achievements of the iconoclastic controversy of the eighth and ninth centuries was to establish the inseparable connection between God's transcendent nature and his ongoing presence in the created world as a result of the Incarnation. Faithful Christians were henceforth expected to respond to this presence in appropriate ways—that is, not only with their minds and souls, but also with their bodies. Such a response applied also to Mary, the Mother of God, who came to symbolise in her person the meeting-place of the divine and human natures of Christ. Byzantine Christians assimilated this theological message not only by listening (or even responding antiphonally) to Christian hymnography that emphasised the Christological and intercessory importance of the Mother of God, but also by experiencing her power in more tangible ways. The sacred landscapes of both Jerusalem and the 'Queen of Cities', Constantinople, reinforced this message not only by means of churches and monasteries that were dedicated to the Mother of God, but also with the help of relics, icons, and watery shrines.

# Practising Consubstantiality: The Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary between Synergy and Sophia in St Nicholas Cabasilas and Sergius Bulgakov, and in a Postmodern Perspective

NICHOLAS LOUDOVIKOS
*Professor of Dogmatics and Philosophy, University Ecclesiastical Academy of Thessalonik; Visiting Professor, Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies, Cambridge, UK; Research Fellow, University of Winchester, UK*

This paper examines the in-depth way Nicholas Cabasilas assimilated Palamite Hesychastic theological anthropology, transforming it into a Mariological humanism of theological provenance, which responds to the humanism of the Western Renaissance. Then it compares it with an analogous tendency in Bulgakov's thought, putting this theological humanism in dialogue with the self-sufficient humanism of the post-modern kingdom of man.

## *A Long Introduction: Byzantine Individualism and Hesychasm*

According to the experts, the conflict between the iconoclasts and the iconophiles, which ended in the victory of the latter, seems to present a key to the interpretation for the understanding of the spiritual state of Byzantium in the period that Paul Lemerle refers to as the 'first Byzantine humanism' in his eponymous book.[1] This era spiritually preceded and somehow inaugurated the period that Steven Runciman calls the 'second (or last) Byzantine Renaissance/Humanism',[2] the period during which St Nicholas Cabasilas lived. The essence of the matter is that the icon defends the completeness of human nature and of the world against the likelihood of an Eastern (Semitic and Asian) 'blending' of this nature in the ocean of the divine nature. In this sense, the spiritual purview of icon veneration (apart from being

[1] In the 'historical' pages which follow, an attempt is made to construct a critique of the works of specialists. See particularly P. Lemerle, *Le premier humanisme byzantine. Notes et remarques sur enseignement et culture à Byzance des origines au Xe siècle* (Paris: P.U.F., 1971); C. Mango, *Byzantium, The Empire of New Rome* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980); H. G. Beck, *Das Byzantinische Jahrtausend* (München: O. Beck, 1978); S. Runciman, *Byzantine Civilization* (London: Edward Arnold, 1959); S. Runciman, *The Last Byzantine Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970; H. Ahrweiler, *L'ideologie politique de l'Empire Byzantin* (Paris: P.U.F., 1975).

[2] This also, not coincidentally, functions as the title of his book, *The Last Byzantine Renaissance.*

the locus where a distinctive eschatological ontology was consolidated, the significant theological and philosophical consequences of which have yet to be studied) also provided a home for a humanism which, apart from anything else, preserved certain fundamental requirements of classical Greek education as well as the whole of medieval 'Greek' Aristotelianism. Iconoclasm is seen as a kind of religious fundamentalism which, upon becoming established, lost no time in silencing that form of education which continued ancient tradition. For this reason, its adherents were accused of a lack of education by their iconophile opponents. After the conflict then, the way was paved for a renaissance which, even before the establishment of Bardas' university, produced scholars such as Leo the Mathematician and Photius. Of course, the other side of the question, according to Lemerle, was that victory went to the leaders of the iconophiles, particularly those of the monks, and this served to reinforce their intransigence.[3] *A posteriori*, this would blight a part of this humanism, depriving it of the chance of flowering fully. It is certainly a fact that the triumph of the iconophiles brought a new set of spiritual values to the Byzantine scene, though this did not mean that the continuum was ever completely broken. These values might perhaps be thought of as elements of 'humanism', and it may be that they needed some creative assimilation.

Byzantine citizens were certainly not all the 'religious man' type, which is the way the Western tradition has seen them (a notion that now also has been translated to the East). Sir Steven Runciman, however, has described the Byzantine love of beauty in its many forms—artistic, natural, or human—as well as their profound zest for life (to an extent which moralists find particularly difficult to digest), a description that certainly undermines the modern stereotypes put forth in both the East and the West.[4] These attributes were linked—in a way which this distinguished Byzantinist considers difficult for the Westerner to comprehend—with a love of withdrawal and asceticism, with the ideal of the vision of God. Cyril Mango, for example, to mention but one such Westerner, seems to have been unable to grasp the difference between the Byzantine monarchy and Western despotism, lumping the whole of the Byzantine world together in his charge of extreme social rigidity and servility.[5] He also speaks of hatred for the material world and a view of the flesh that bordered on Manichaean horror. Naturally, he also mentions the anti-urban attitude of the Church. All in all, Mango had very little understanding of the Byzantine world and its contradictions. In his *Byzantine Civilization,* Runciman wisely objects to any theory of the Byzantine emperor being an absolute and totalitarian monarch, since there were always centres of internal opposition, such as the army, the Senate, or the Church, while Beck has observed the phenomenon of cronyism, which, together

[3] See generally his *Le premier humanisme byzantine. Notes et remarques sur enseignement et culture à Byzance des origines au Xe siècle.*

[4] See generally his *Byzantine Civilization.*

[5] See generally his *Byzantium: The Empire of New Rome.*

with Church sermons, prevented the establishment of completely insuperable social barriers.[6] Such considerations demonstrate the extent to which Westerners really should reassess their criteria if they want to achieve a proper understanding of the unique features of Byzantine society. By the same token, Mango had very little grasp of the Byzantine ascetic ideal and its profoundly positive attitude—in its mature phase—toward history and the world, or toward the spirit of enquiry (*τὸ ἐξεταστικὸν καὶ θεωρητικόν)*, which Gregory the Theologian considered the genuine attribute of theology and which he also felt to be a legacy from Ancient Greek education, featuring prominently as it does in the works of the great Fathers.[7] Lemerle was more perceptive and felt that, at least as regards what he called ethics, Byzantium preserved within its Christianity the best of the Greco-Roman legacy.[8] In this way, the Byzantine person seems, as we shall see later on, closer to today's European than to his medieval Western counterpart, and we can add to that the powerful originality of the Byzantines in artistic expression.

It is, in any case, a fact, as Eleni Glykatzi-Ahrweiler observes, that after this first Byzantine renaissance, intellectuals began to adopt the term Hellene and a Helleno-Byzantine conscience was firmly established, as a sign of the superiority of Byzantine education over that of the 'barbarians'.[9] This marked the end of the ideology of ecumenicity, which had been founded on the great Roman idea as early as the reigns of Justinian I and Heraclius. The depiction of the Byzantine Roman Emperor on the coinage of his state holding the orb and cross would be called into question only when, after the successes of Heraclius against the Persians, the new, great, and henceforth permanent enemy, the Arabs, established their own caliphate on Byzantine soil in Damascus at the end of the seventh century. In his efforts to deal with the Arab threat, Leo III engaged in a populist policy which bolstered iconoclasm, thus making allies of the agricultural population of the hinterland of Asia Minor, and it is at this time that we see the rise of Byzantine nationalism and the institution of a militaristic period. Around the tenth century this would be transformed into the imperialism of a great world power, and it was then that a general sense of the superiority of the Byzantines and their civilization began to be felt, as opposed to the disregard for barbarous, corrupt, undignified and worthless peoples such as the Russians, Bulgarians, and Franks (*i.e.*, Western Europeans). So at this phase the multi-ethnic empire had been transformed for the first time into a Helleno-Christian empire, with a sense of identity and an education system that embraced all, which was distinctly different from the various ideals of the peoples surrounding it.

[6] See his *Das Byzantinische Jahrtausend.*
[7] *In laudem Basilii magni,* PG 36: 508-509.
[8] *Op. cit.*
[9] See *L'ideologie politique de l'Empire Byzantin.*

In this period, the empire was in its first great Christian—and yet Greek—maturity. This was not, of course, accompanied by any equally mature economic or institutional reality, even though this detail might also be thought of as characteristic of the Late Byzantine period. The unwieldy and rigid bureaucratic paternalism of the state, together with a notion of the distribution of wealth but not its accumulation, meant that the taxation system—usually unjust to the point of incoherence—and that of excise duties came close to a breaking point, and this in turn resulted, step-by-step, in an exhausted economy. From as early as the reign of Alexios I Komninos (1081-1118), there was admiration for the economic and technological superiority of the West, though this did not imply the possibility of any substantial dialogue.

However, the fundamental issue was the unique spiritual situation that had been produced. This situation's characteristics shed light on what followed, and, of course, the important thing is not the frequently mentioned stagnation of academic thought—though experts today agree that this was already a factor in the Hellenistic age. Nor is it, as Lemerle laments, that philosophy had come to be limited to the monastic position, and that the transference of all ultimate purpose and hope to the absolutely transcendental condemned everything in this world, *a priori*, to annihilation.[10] It is unfortunate that almost none of the well-known, professional Byzantinists (with the partial exception of Runciman) have been able to probe the depths of the real labours of the Byzantines. Lemerle argues that the Byzantines never really understood Homer, Thucydides, Sophocles, or Plato and that the sole aim of their education was to acquire rhetorical style.[11] If we accept this, if we agree that Ancient Greek learning was not handed down, even in some not easily discerned way, then it really is difficult for us to understand the profundity of patristic literature. The religiosity which foreigners see Byzantium focused upon was certainly a real temptation from time to time (although perceptibly less so than in the West), but this was not the essence or the point of the Byzantine ideal. Not even the distinction between sacred and profane literature had a religious character, as it has, for example, in the Muslim tradition. More frequently, it had a functional character: the great Fathers knew how to think about and be stimulated profitably by all that profane knowledge had to offer.

That time certainly was marked by the birth pangs of some aspects of our Western modernity. The population of New Rome now had a Hellene, Orthodox conscience, and this was not without its tribulations and dangers, which philologists and historians have rarely been able to elucidate satisfactorily. In particular, this has meant the beginning of a distinct tendency towards a search for individuality for the first time in medieval history—a search which preceded similar explorations in the West. Its beginnings are easily detectable in the work of St Symeon the New Theologian, for example, but it is plainly obvious in almost every aspect of public life

[10] See generally his *Le premier humanisme byzantine.*
[11] *Ibid.*

and creativity a little later in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[12] The essential characteristic of this search (a characteristic which marks the difference between this and its Western parallel some centuries later) is that it takes place within the Greek patristic theology, not beyond or against it. Thus education is upgraded through real research and dialogue, while art becomes more realistic and natural, giving the impression of movement and communication between the persons depicted, along with new bright colours exhibiting the sentimental contrasts and changes; in literature, romance novels are multiplied and everywhere we notice a transition from the ideal to the real and common, from the impersonal to the personal, and from the abstract to the natural.

Thus, to give some examples, in M. Psellos' work we see a re-evaluation of matter and body, a serious consideration of the contradictions within the human soul, or the special attention he pays to the natural details of human personalities in his *Chronography.*[13] In Anna Comnena's work, naturalism along with the decisive exaltation of the achievements and deeds of distinguished individualities does not completely ignore human internal contradictions, something that is more clearly obvious in N. Choniates' work, along with his deep sense of human transience.[14] The re-evaluation of natural being; the affirmation of the concrete human nature; the (unthinkable for the West) personal development of the bourgeois without the simultaneous rejection, on their part, of the religious or the political authorities; the (unexpected for the Western researcher) alliance between townsmen and landowners; the intense individual claim for social vindication along with the power of family support; and the great social mobility together with the absence of a concrete and solid ruling class are some of the prominent characteristics of these early developments, which prepared, step by step, the ground for analogous spiritual evolutions in theology a little later on. I am talking here of Hesychasm, which cannot be *culturally* understood (rather than merely spiritually) without the above remarks.

The difficulty with Hesychasm is that its absorption into scholarship was interrupted suddenly and early. The gradual collapse and eventual fall of the Empire, the resultant decapitation of the scholarship of the Greco-Roman nation in the 15th century, the terrible vicissitudes of the centuries-long, barbarous occupation, and, thereafter, the impositions of the West and the brutal clashes over confessions forced the Eastern Church, for a long time, to put its energies into preservation and conservation. The Orthodox Church in Russia was unable to undertake the task for the reasons described by Florovsky.[15]

[12] For the analyses that follow, see my *Orthodoxy and Modernization: Byzantine Individualization, State, and History in the Perspective of the European Future* (Athens: Armos, 2006), especially pp. 41-59 (in Greek).

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] See his *Ways of Russian Theology,* vol. 1 (Belmont, Mass.: Nordland, 1979).

First, this prevented a real, in depth dialogue after the Hesychast councils between the victors of the Hesychast conflict—the Hesychasts like Palamas, Cabasilas, Kokkinos, and, later on, Markus Eugenikos *et al.*—and the Westernizing opponents and their pupils, who were defeated. Second, it prevented a real and deep dialogue with the West, something for which many Western theologians, with their strong confessionalism, are also responsible. George-Gennadios Scholarios, in the fifteenth century, started a deep, unprecedented, and learned dialogue with the West, but by then it was no longer possible to truly hold such a major spiritual and cultural event within the collapsing Byzantine *intelligentsia.* The same is true concerning people like Vikentios Domodos, the great and erudite theologian of the 18th century, whose work is, ironically, still largely unpublished. There were two appalling consequences as a result of this situation. First, Hesychasm gradually gave the impression of real and substantive opposition to humanism, both classical and medieval, and to the natural, cosmological, and, in part, metaphysical dimensions of philosophy, whereas in fact it represented a drastic reacquisition, critique, and transformation of all these (even though this was formulated largely through thinking and experience, rather than in a systematic manner). It is therefore unfortunate, but true, that a good deal of obscurantism has crept in to Orthodox theology, especially in recent years, making it impossible to hold the potentially invaluable dialogue between Hesychasm and the human sciences and philosophy, which would provide these with new horizons. The second disastrous effect is that Hesychasm was understood as having an *a priori* anti-Western orientation and impetus, something which is of course untrue, since Palamas, along with his cleverer pupils in the centuries that followed, never condemned Augustine or Thomas Aquinas; many Western theologians are also responsible for this supposed hostility since, out of their inability to properly understand Palamas, they created a swarm of monstrous myths about Palamas and Hesychasm, to such an extent that even now all the good and faithful Catholic scholars feel unconsciously compelled to express a sort of theological nausea when they encounter Palamas and his ancient or modern proponents. It is impossible to find even one western scholar who completely rejects Palamas *due to a deep knowledge of his theology.*

On the other hand—and precisely because of having already excluded any vibrant and meaningful communication between Hesychasm and philosophy, science, and ecumenical theology in general—when, in recent years, a scholarly interpretation of Hesychasm was needed, what in fact occurred was the injudicious and uncritical introduction of a truly foreign conceptual framework (or rather spiritual outlook) derived principally from Western Christian Neoplatonism. This has resulted in the interpretation of Hesychasm in terms and ways which risk being at odds with its actual spiritual depths. I, therefore, think it urgent that we work today to seek the authentic patristic and existential criteria for an interpretation of Hesychasm, which, at the same time, highlights its vibrant topicality in the face of modern theological,

philosophical, and anthropological demands. The first steps in this direction have, in fact, already been taken, but there is still a long way to go.

I will make two important points concerning Palamas: the first has to do with the concept of psycho-somatic individuality, in its communion with God, in this life, and the second with this individuality's *koinonetic* dimensions. In both cases, Hesychasm represents not only a genuine offspring of the Greek patristic theology, but also the upshot of the mature Byzantine anthropological quest.

Palamas takes as his starting-point the rapture of Paul, since this of necessity poses certain ontological questions.[16] At the time of his rapture, the Apostle was what? Not to be grasped by physical force or rather free of all physical force? He was, answers Saint Gregory, the light with which he was unified. Through this light he knew himself.[17] He did not partake in the divine essence, but he did become uncreated by grace. Most importantly, however, he remained entirely himself; it was a case of the opening up of a particular person to eschatological likeness with God. What is fundamental here is that the specific person who was Paul did not need, for example, to become 'without form' in a Plotinian sense.[18] The real, natural existence of the person, not merely the intellect, but also the senses 'bound together in the Spirit, will see together the invisible light, or better they will become altogether eternal (*συνδιαιωνίσουσι)* through this vision'.[19] Before it gives a new dimension to anthropological ontology, this understanding of the human framework of body and soul, which will become together eternal through vision/participation, also reorients theological gnosiology: this is now the Biblical knowledge/participation, standing against any 'contemplation' of philosophical provenance.

And if Palamas is so severe towards apophaticism—which is a point of pride for every type of philosophical (*i.e.* Platonic) approach to the contemplation of the One—it is because the intellect, as well as sensation and the body, really and naturally take part in the vision 'above feeling and mind'.[20] The vision 'is suffered', not contemplated, and this means, above all, that not an intellectual apophaticism but communion beyond words is suffered[21] as a general passion of *Dasein*, not as Neo-Platonic angst over the absent material existence. Thereafter, of course, apophaticism is adopted, together with cataphatic theology, as a means of preserving this eschatological fulfilling/opening up of existence. Apophaticism here is a sign of the deep and real communion of the actual individual with his or her actual God, and this refers to participation in the divine energies, in Christ, in the Spirit, which, again, is of Biblical provenance.

[16] *Triads 2, 3, 37, Τὰ Συγγράματα*, ed. Panagiotes Chrestou, vol. 1 (Thessaloniki: 1966).

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] *Enneads* VI, 9, 3, LCL, trans. A. H. Armstrong, vol. 443 (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1967).

[19] *Triads* 2, 3, 50.

[20] *Ibid.*, 2, 3, 25.

[21] *Ibid.* 2, 3, 26.

In this sense there are two features which we might say are fundamental for the structuring of this new participatory eschatological ontology of existence: first, is the importance of the body along with the soul's passible part. Indeed, in Barlaam's deprecation of *Dasein* (in *Triads* 2, 2, 8 and particularly *Triads* 11-13) there is a patent Neo-Platonic echo which considers that attachment to the energies of the body and the passibility of the soul are darkness for the (rational) soul. Palamas, on the other hand, considers the body to be receptive to deification and divine communion since it already has 'signified spiritual intentions'.[22] The body participates in prayer[23] through which the 'energies of the Spirit' are put into action[24] (and the fulfilling of the commandments is a joint action of the soul and body.[25] Furthermore, Saint Gregory reacts[26] to Barlaam's philosophical definition of impassibility as a necrosis of the passibility of the soul by demanding a *metathesis*, a transformation, and not a dissolution of the soul's 'passive' power of feeling and desiring. It is tempting here to recall the Stoics and their astonishing findings regarding the emotions and the psycho-physiology of the feelings. With its central theme being the concept of deficiency or privation, Stoic theory came to the conclusion that it is not possible to remove the passibility of the soul from people. Reason itself is not merely divine, but is also a psychological function. And yet, despite these discoveries, natural man is to be rejected with even greater violence than before. The Stoic sage is in reality, impassive, someone who has set at nought the passible part of his soul. Palamas is at the very opposite pole. Thus, the Hesychast father accepts the inclusion in Being, in a Biblical fashion, of all wisdom and all the profundity of the actual, indefinability and multiplicity, body and spirit, the complex and the unspoken, beauty and mystery, feeling and reason, suffering and emotion, light and darkness, material and history, love and hate, music and serenity, contemplation and communion, providing all of them with an eternal future in Christ, so long as they are transposed by Being in the Church.

The second, this time a *koinonetic* point that I am going to make, is connected to ecclesiology because it is in the mysteries, culminating in the Eucharistic manifestation of Christ, that the individual vision of God is founded (see, for example, Homilies VII, 8; XXXVII, 10; XVII, 16, *et al.*),[27] and not in the personal efficiency of a pious individual. And at this point Saint Gregory shows how profoundly he absorbed Symeon the New Theologian, Maximus the Confessor, and, through the latter, Dionysius the Areopagite. This is why he sought to give an ontological foundation to anthropology, cosmology, and his ascetic teaching, through ecclesiology,

[22] *Ibid*., 2, 2, 10.
[23] *Ibid*., 2, 2, 16.
[24] *Ibid*., 2, 9, 22.
[25] *Ibid*., 2, 2, 20.
[26] *Ibid*., 3, 3, 15.
[27] In *Έλληνες Πατέρες της Εκκλησίας, Γρηγορίου Παλαμᾶ έργα,* trans. P. Chrestou and ed. E. Meretakes, vols. 9-11 (Thessaloniki: Πατερικαὶ Ἐκδόσεις 'Γρηγόριος ο Παλαμάς', 2004-9).

which he lived—entirely anti-metaphysically—as 'Eucharistic ontology' (*i.e.*, as an existential application of consubstantiality, on the ecclesial level).[28] In this sense, Palamas' vision of God is an ongoing process of communion. The philosophical union, then, is not entirely real; there are two ways of ascent to the One, he says.[29] The first is that of the philosophers, which he calls 'imaginative' precisely because it is only intellectual, without the body, which, being material, is abandoned. On the other hand, Hesychast ascent is real because it occurs through the Holy Spirit and because it involves 'every kind of creation'.[30] An individual can reach God only by bearing with him, in a *koinonetic* way, the whole of the material creation, so that 'the image of God will be complete'.[31] The vision of the uncreated light is due to the alteration of the particular person into the body of Christ. This, in final analysis, is the difference between a philosophical existence (even if it considers itself Christian) and a real, full, ecclesiological existence: the former 'contemplates', the latter 'participates in'. This is also the meaning of the sharp distinction between contemplation and communion with God, according to Palamas: 'the saints do not merely contemplate, they also commune with divinity, by grace'.[32]

This re-evaluation of the bodily, the material, and the cosmological dimension in general, along with an ontology of dialogical reciprocity, which does not absorb individuality (and *vice versa,* in a way that makes the one unthinkable without the other) are the final upshots of this *anthropology of participation,* which forms the very core of Hesychast theology. It seems thus plausible to claim that, through Hesychasm, the Greek patristic anthropological proposal has reached its culmination. And it is precisely this legacy that is substantiated and further explored in Cabasilas' Mariological thought, as we shall see next.

### *Mary the Theotokos between Synergy and Sophiology, Cabasilas and Bulgakov*
### *I) Cabasilas' Hesychastic Mariological Humanism*

Some fifty years ago, the well-known Protestant scholar, Hans von Campenhausen, was still able to assert in the Introduction to his *The Virgin Birth in the Theology of the Ancient Church* that,

> The aim of the present work is to open up a path through this scholastic wilderness, the so-called 'Mariology' of the early Church. It cannot be seriously

[28] See the First Study of my work, *Church in the Making An Apophatic Ecclesiology of Consubstantiality*, 21st Century Greek Theologians 1, trans. Norman Russell (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2016), 15-108.

[29] *Πρὸς Ἀκίνδυνον*, IX, 11, 36, in *Ἕλληνες Πατέρες της Εκκλησίας, Γρηγορίου Παλαμά έργα* 5, ed. P. Christou and E. Meretakis (Thessaloniki: Πατερικαί εκδόσεις 'Γρηγόριος ο Παλαμάς', 1986).

[30] *Ibid.*

[31] *Ibid.*

[32] *Πρὸς Ἀκίνδυνον,* VI. 12, 38.

> disputed that the early Church, at any rate during its first few centuries, knew no real Marian doctrine, that is, no thematic theological concern with Mary's person and her significance in the scheme of Salvation. Nevertheless, the flood of publications relating to the subject is now beyond computation, and under the pressure of present Catholic dogmatic interest it is still rising.[33]

It is of course simply impossible for the student of the Greek patristic tradition to take such an assertion seriously. Though the term 'Theotokos' can be found only a little later in texts,[34] the discussion of Virgin's role in salvation starts early in patristic thought, in Ignatius, Justin, and Origen.[35] I am not, of course, going to give an account of the extremely rich Greek patristic Mariology in this paper. It suffices to assert that in the final period of Byzantine thought, this entire heritage was re-explored and re-thought according to the new anthropological terms described above. Cabasilas was, as it is widely admitted today, a convinced Hesychast and a distinguished humanist at the same time, and thus his account of Mariology follows the thread of a deep and wise Christian humanism, which can be thoroughly meaningful also for our times. On the other hand, the views of Bulgakov, as I have claimed elsewhere,[36] are, up to a certain point, the product of modern philosophical humanism. Indeed, his Sophiology is incomprehensible without this dimension. Thus, it is important to put Cabasilas and Bulgakov in dialogue.

Cabasilas' Mariological thought is articulated in his three homilies, *On the (Theotokos') Birth(I), On the Annunciation(II),* and *On the Dormition(III).*[37] I have eleven interconnected points to make:

> 1) In order to understand Mary's achievement, the discussion starts with the human struggle against sin. As Cabasilas claims, the power against sin was inherent in human beings, but no one had fully activated it until Mary. Evil seemed to have become identical with human nature, and that means that this nature seemed to have disappeared under the distortion brought about by it. In the author's words: '*καί ἦν ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐν οὕτω μυρίοις σώμασιν*

[33] Hans von Campenhausen, *The Virgin Birth in the Theology of the Ancient Church*, Studies in Historical Theology 2, trans. F. Clarke (London: SCM Press, 1964), 7.

[34] It appears in Alexander of Alexandria for the first time in a letter about 320, see Theodoret, *Ecclesiastical History, I, 4, 54, GCS 44, 23, 3*. It also appears in the works of the following thinkers: Athanasius, *Orationes adversus Arianos,* PG 26: 349C; 385A; 393AB; Basil, *In sanctam Christi generationem,* PG 31: 1468B; Gregory. Nazianzen, *Lettres théologiques,* Source Chrétienne, ed. P. Galley, vol. 208 (Paris: Cerf, 2013), 42; Gregory of Nyssa, *In diem Natalem Domini* (PG 46: 1136C); Ambrosius, refers to her as 'Mother of God' in *Concerning Virginity*, II, 2,7, *NPNF,* ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, vol. 10 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publisher Co., 1896); and then of course in the works of Cyril of Alexandria after the Council of Ephesus.

[35] See G. Gharib, *Testi Mariani del Primo Millennio,* 4 vol. (Rome: Città Nuova, 1988-1991).

[36] See Loudovikos, *Church in the Making,* 206ff.

[37] All of which can be found in *Η Θεομήτωρ,* ed. P. Nellas (Athens: Apostoliki Diakonia, 1974).

*ἀφανής*', [and man was obscure (invisible, non-manifest), though he existed in myriads of human bodies].[38]

2) The Theotokos manifested this given power against sin in its fullness by struggling against evil and succeeding in staying untouched by it.[39] This was done by her '*ἔρωτι Θεοῦ καί ρώμη λογισμοῦ καί γνώμης εὐθύτητι καί φρονήματος μεγέθει*' [Through her love (eros) of God, the power of her thought, the straightforwardness of her will and the greatness of her spirit].[40] Thus she made manifest on her part the integrity of human nature as it was created by God. And that was necessary, according to Cabasilas, for God to add 'immobility' towards evil in order for him to be able to continue the work of humanity's salvation through Christ. Here the basic characteristics of this theological humanism are present: all parts of human soul move through Mary's personal will toward God.

3) This movement of her whole nature to God, was made *not without grace* ('*καί τήν χάριν εἵλκυσεν*'),[41] but without any *special grace,* beyond the usual grace human beings are accorded. Her inner motivation was 'pure gratitude'.[42] On this point Cabasilas takes the chance to argue, on the one hand, against any form of absolute predestination, claiming that it is against the nature of virtue not to be absolutely free, as a result of our *prohairesis* and personal will. Since humans are endowed with rationality and freewill, it is impossible for virtue to be against human nature: the purpose of virtue is precisely to save the integrity of human nature, not to diminish or abolish it.[43] On the other hand, these views concerning Mary's need to attract divine grace seem not to be easily compatible with the doctrine of the immaculate conception, which had already appeared in the West through, for example, Bonaventure.[44] The author, however, who expressed this doctrine in the best theological way in that period of time was, I think, Duns Scotus: 'To the question was the Bl. Virgin conceived without original sin? I say that God could have brought it about that she was never in original sin. I declare this to be possible, because grace is equivalent to original justice so far as divine acceptance goes, so that because of this grace there is no original sin in the soul that possesses it'.[45] This

[38] *Η Θεομήτωρ,* 64. All the translations of Cabasilas' texts are mine.
[39] *Ibid.*
[40] *Ibid.*, 66.
[41] *Ibid.,* 72.
[42] *Ibid.*
[43] *Ibid.*, 76-8.
[44] See St Bonaventure, *Mirror of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (The Catholic Primer's Reference Series, 2005), 9: 'Oh, how far from this woe of them that are born was the most holy nativity of Mary, who was not only free from original sin, but also from the fuel of misery, in so far as it leads to sin, for she was conceived without stain.'
[45] Scotus, *Ordinatio III, dist.3, qu.1,* in *Opera Omnia,* vol. 9, eds B. Hechich, B. Huculak, I. Percan, and S. Ruiz de Loizaga (Vatican City: Typis Vaticanis, 2006).

is the theory that claims that the merits of Christ could be applied to Mary by means of 'anticipatory redemption' (or 'pre-redemption'), in anticipation of her future role as the mother of the incarnate God.[46] The first problem with this position is that it cannot be explicitly or implicitly found anywhere in Greek patristic texts without stretching them. On a theological level now, the problem with this 'eschatological'[47] anticipatory redemption of Mary is that it tends to abolish real history; history is something that *has to happen indeed and in absolute freedom.* It is a serious misunderstanding of Orthodox anthropology, as well as eschatology, to think of the Virgin's conception as if 'the light of the end of times [is] breaking into history and transforming its categories'.[48] This notion arbitrarily changes Mary's conception into one that is immaculate, thus transforming her, through this irresistible grace, into an automatically graced person, who, without having any other possible choice, serves the one who saved her without her giving her consent or ever having been asked! Even if we admit that God foreknew her wholehearted consent, (and he certainly foreknew it), he could not automatically fulfil it. As a *historical human person,* Mary had to demonstrate her absolutely free *prohairesis*/gnomic will and not have it just assumed (or replaced) by God's irresistible will. And it is only through this freewill that she is pre-purified (*προκαθαρθεῖσα*) by the Spirit according to Gregory Nazianzen's oration,[49] which is followed by many other Fathers. It is important to stress here that this pre-purification has nothing to do with Mary's conception, but only with her giving birth to Christ. The eschatological intervention of grace *co-operates* with human will, and the Virgin's will, and does not conquer it, as we shall see in our author's text immediately hereafter. Otherwise, we are all already saved, or not, regardless of our deeds. And then we need the doctrine of predestination to help us to understand God's arbitrariness. Unless we find a way to safeguard human freedom, the dogma of the immaculate conception, according to any protological or eschatological interpretation, will be a problem for ecumenical theology. It is only in this way, I think, that the dogma of the immaculate conception can be accepted, though in a different form, by Orthodox theology, as I shall argue below.

4) Thus God has been made manifest through the Virgin for the first time in his image, Cabasilas continues, and 'she helped God to show his goodness' (*'τῷ Θεῷ πρός τήν τῆς χρηστότητος ἐπίδειξιν μόνη τῶν ὄντων ἐβοήθησεν*

[46] See M. O'Carroll, *Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004), 321.

[47] As J. P. Manoussakis—so far the only explicit Orthodox proponent of the dogma of the 'immaculate conception' of whom I am aware—calls it. See his *For the Unity of All* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 12ff.

[48] *Ibid*. This is Manoussakis's proposal.

[49] *In Theophania,* PG 36: 325.

*ἡ Παρθένος*').[50] Here we see this deep understanding of *synergy* (Mary *helped [ἐβοήθησεν]* God) based precisely upon the integrity of the divine image in man, an image which is precisely *freedom.* Man needs to exercise his freedom in order to open himself to God, in order for God, in turn, to express his goodness. God needs human freedom in order for his goodness to be exercised upon creation in the right way, i.e., freely. Synergy thus means freedom for both man and God, according to Cabasilas. In these lines, there perhaps exists a way to understand, from an Orthodox point of view, the Virgin's immaculateness. The Virgin received a very special grace, due to the sanctity and the prayers of her parents, Sts Joachim and Anna. She was the divine response to their saintly prayers. She began her life as a saint in the sense that she had already been given—through grace—the divine gift of a proper disposition of her *prohairesis.* Her parents' synergetic dedication to God nourished the integrity of her total dedication to him. Her dedication to God, however, should not be viewed as the effacement but rather as the reinforcement of her own synergetic self-offering to God. Thus her conception was immaculate indeed, though not in the sense of a mechanical absence of ancestral sin, but in the sense of her parents' total divine devotion, which formed and reinforced the synergetic inauguration of the final abolition (by Christ) of sin and death through her total divine devotion to God.

5) Through her loving freedom, Mary reached 'a divine love which consummated any other human desire' and through this she reached the 'possession of God' (*Θεοῦ κατοχή*), and 'coition with God' (*Θεοῦ συνουσία*). And because of that: '*τοῦ Θεοῦ πρός ἑαυτήν στρέφει τόν ὀφθαλμόν· καί τῇ παρ' αὐτής ὥρα καλήν τήν κοινήν ἀπέδειξε φύσιν· καί εἶλε τόν ἀπαθή καί ἦν ἄνθρωπος ὁ διά τήν ἁμαρτίαν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἀπηχθημένος*' [She turned the eye of God towards her; and through her beauty she showed the beauty of the common human nature; and thus she attracted the dispassionate God and he became man because of her, he who was hated by men, due to their sinfulness].[51] What a bold and brilliant statement! Here we have the apogee of synergy, an event of loving dialogical reciprocity. This is Cabasilas' *humanism as synergy.*

6) Thus Mary's adherence to God came out of her burning desire and was fully psychosomatic;[52] she gave everything she had to God in order for him to assume all humanity through her.[53] Due to this devotion, she does not even ask the archangel if she is ready for such a thing—to give birth to the Son of God;[54] she only asks for the way this can be done since she is a virgin.

[50] *On the Theotokos' Birth,* 108.
[51] *Ibid.,* 124.
[52] *Ibid.,* 136.
[53] *Ibid.*
[54] *Ibid.*

Because of this deep devotion, her body has become spiritual, in the sense Paul gives to this term, since it is wholly the abode of the Spirit.[55] She had been already 'enhypostasized' in Christ, and thus she cannot die, she cannot undergo material corruption.

7) Let us now attempt a closer examination of Cabasilas' *theo-humanism*. God, our author claims, created human beings in order to take from the human race a mother when he would like to be born as human ('*ἀλλά τοῦτο ζητῶν ἐποίησεν, ἵνα γεννηθῆναι δεῆσαν τήν μητέρα παρ' αὐτής λάβῃ*').[56] To become the 'theotokos' is then human eschatological culmination, the reason for God to create humanity. In a similar way, all the world existed in order to offer a mother to God: 'the world existed for Mary's own sake'.[57] The utmost humanism is identified here with the utmost divine participation, precisely as the antipode of what Charles Taylor called the 'self-sufficient humanism', as we shall see below.[58]

8) This leads St Nicholas to an even bolder assertion: 'the Theotokos,' he says 'was made mother of whom she was worthy to become the mother' ('*Μήτηρ ὑπῆρξεν οὐ γενέσθαι μήτηρ δίκαιον ἦν*').[59] Concerning now the Incarnation: 'this had to happen even for the sake of the Virgin, and only in order for her to rightly become the mother of God' ('*Ὑπέρ γε τοῦ τήν Παρθένον Θεοῦ δικαίως ἄν ὑπάρξαι μητέρα, μηδέν ἧττον χρῆναι τοῦτο γενέσθαι*').[60] Upon this strange 'equality' between God and man is established what I have called 'dialogical reciprocity',[61] something which seems to be the opposite of any anthropological passivity; God seems to see man as his equal and gives himself thoroughly to man instead of just ordering him or dictating his existence through any sort of predestination. But this is precisely the quintessence of the Maximian or Palamite understanding of *Life in Christ,* to recall the title of Cabasilas' masterpiece, which echoes his two masters' teaching in a personal and creative assimilation.[62]

9) This also leads Cabasilas to see the Theotokos as an image of the Church, and, subsequently, to use repeatedly ecclesiological expressions that refer to

[55] *Ibid.,* 204-6.
[56] *Ibid.,*150.
[57] *Ibid.,* 168.
[58] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 21.
[59] *Ibid.,* 154.
[60] *Η Θεομήτωρ,* 156.
[61] See my work, Nikolaos Loudovikos, *A Eucharistic Ontology. Maximus the Confessor's Eschatological Ontology of Being as Dialogical Reciprocity* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2010), ch. 5.
[62] It is of the utmost importance to note Palamas' use of hesychastic terminology to delineate Mary's life. See J. Meyendorff, *Gregory Palamas*, trans. G. Lawrence (London: Faith Press, 1964), 232-6.

the Theotokos.[63] The Theotokos, prefiguring the Church, is the *locus* where the hypostatic union between created and uncreated initially takes place.

The most important question, however, seems ultimately to be *how the Virgin achieved such spiritual progress.* Cabasilas' answer is, once again, original and inspiring. The Theotokos 'gave human prayers a way to heaven, by destroying the wall which prevented this from happening' (*'Οδόν ταῖς εὐχαῖς εἰς οὐρανόν ἔδωκεν τό διεῖργον καταλύσασα τεῖχος*').[64] Cabasilas is explicitly following Palamas here, who, in his *Homily 53,* considers the Virgin as the first Hesychast, discovering the 'prayer of the heart' in the Temple. The Theotokos, in other words, assumed human prayers in her prayer. She assumed human desire for life eternal, incorruptible, and meaningful in her own desire, and this means that she actively unified, for the first time, all of the human race in herself and offered it to God. She *practiced the consubstantiality* of all creatures in God, thus prefiguring Christ's perfect realization of consubstantiality of all creation through his salutary economy—consubstantiality is the essence of divine life, *analogically* transferred to creation *in Christ*, as the essence of his work of salvation.[65]

10) This is further explained by the great Byzantine theologian, when he writes that the Virgin, 'out of all humanity of the ages, she alone abode as the divine altar. And she offered herself as a purifying and preparatory sacrifice for all human kind before the great victim' (*'Διά τοῦτο τῶν ἐκ τοῦ παντός αἰῶνος ἀνθρώπων, τό θυσιαστήριον ὤκησε μόνη, θυσία προτέλειος τις και καθαρτήριος προ του μεγάλου θύματος ὑπέρ παντός προσενεχθεῖσα τοῦ γένους*').[66] The Theotokos' sacrifice[67] was to unify all human prayers (*i.e.*, pains, impasses, deaths, and divine desires) in her own desire and prayer by emptying herself (*i.e.,* by eliminating her narcissism, her *philautia*), through a kenotic imaging of Christ's absolute *kenosis* on the Cross, and thus prefiguring the christological consubstantial gathering of all beings in the Church. The Virgin's spiritual glory is that she started in loving freedom as a human God's very work of redemption and offered all creation in her to him, which allowed God's free love to respond through the Incarnation, fulfilling this

[63] *Η Θεομήτωρ,* 176, 202.

[64] *Ibid.,* 54.

[65] On the notion of Christological consubstantiality, see my work, Loudovikos, *Church in the Making,* 45ff, 213-231.

[66] *Η Θεομήτωρ,* 186.

[67] Cleo McNelly Kearns, *The Virgin Mary, Monotheism and Sacrifice* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008), following Louis Massignon and Timothy Winter, tries to create a strange convergence between the Theotokos and Mohammed, who are both, according to Winter, 'bearers of the Word' (301-305). While I agree with Kearns (and Massignon on whom she draws) that both the Abrahamic and the Marian prayer 'are sacrificially motivated by the necessity of otherness at the heart of what one tends to regard as one's own' (304), I cannot find sufficient evidence in the sources provided by the author for a similar sacrificial understanding of the Islamic prayer.

work so that everything can be recapitulated in Christ, who thus transfers *analogically* the divine *homoousion* to creation.
11) Thus we see that the fundamental elements of Hesychasm are creatively digested by Nicholas Cabasilas: the psychosomatic adherence to God along with the *kenotic and thus koinonetic/ecclesial way* of this devotion. The one is unthinkable without the other, and each one of them happens through the other. On the other hand, it is clear that, as a great humanist, Cabasilas finds a way to address, through his Mariology, the rising Western humanism of his time in a deeply theological manner: humanism can remain humanism, glorifying humanity in its fullness without losing its purely theological sources of synergy and participation—this is the lesson Cabasilas teaches his contemporary intellectuals.

### *II) Bulgakov's Sophiological Mariology*

Having called her 'the soul of creation, more precisely the soul of the soul: for humankind as Adam, as lord of creation, is the soul of the world, and the Mother of God is the soul of human race',[68] Bulgakov does not hesitate to exalt the Theotokos even higher: 'Alone of God's creatures found worthy of being inhabited by the Holy Spirit, She is the human hypostatic image of the Holy Spirit. One can say that, in this sense, She is the Holy Spirit not incarnate but manifested in a human hypostasis. There is no, and can be no, greater and fuller manifestation of the Holy Spirit.'[69] In other words, 'She is the peak of the world, which touches heaven. She is sanctified by the entire power of the Divine Sophia, of the revelation of the Holy Trinity. She herself remains the creaturely Sophia'.[70] Or differently, in summarizing all these in his well-known handbook *The Orthodox Church*:

> […] in her is realized the idea of Divine Wisdom in the creation of the world, and Divine Wisdom in created world. It is in her that Divine Wisdom is justified, and thus the veneration of the Virgin blends with that of the Holy Wisdom. In the Virgin there are united Holy Wisdom and the Wisdom of created world, the Holy Spirit and the human hypostasis. Her body is completely spiritual and transfigured. She is the justification, the end and the meaning of creation. She is, in this sense, the glory of the world. In her, God is already 'all in all'.[71]

[68] See Sergius Bulgakov, *The Burning Bush. On the Orthodox Veneration of Mother of God*, trans. Thomas Allan Smith (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publ. Co, 2009), 112.
[69] Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb,* trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2002), 411.
[70] *Ibid.*, 411.
[71] Bulgakov's *The Orthodox Church* was first published in English in 1935. Quotation here from the revised translation, Lydia Kesich, trans., *The Orthodox Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary

Regardless of the loose, poetic manner of Bulgakov's expressions above, and despite its shortcomings, it is clear that, as one can perhaps claim, the Theotokos as an image of Sophia or the Holy Spirit does what the Spirit or, better, Sophia, as the Spirit's uncreated energy, does in this world[72]: she gathers beings together in God and offers unified creation to God. Of course, this is a *possible* interpretation since Bulgakov does not say this clearly in the above passages. But if my interpretation of the Sophiologists' intentions is right, namely that the purpose of their theological enterprise is ultimately to decipher the meaning of consubstantiality,[73] then what Bulgakov wants to say here is not very far from Cabasilas, though the latter seems to do this in a considerably clearer, deeper, and more convincing way. The reason for Cabasilas' theological superiority is that he is adamant that the Virgin does what she does only through participation. On the other hand, Bulgakov at times gives the impression that Mary—as a 'human hypostatic image of the Spirit', 'Divine Wisdom in the created world' etc.—is forever and in a pantheistic fashion in sole possession of this image.[74] This is Bulgakov's assimilation of Western transcendental subjectivism, which demands the metaphysical autonomy and self-determination of the creature—though without losing communion with God, as I have claimed elsewhere.[75] The problem is that if the creature already has something uncreated in it, then why is there a need for this absolute distinction-in-communion between created and uncreated according to the terms in which Chalcedon used to explain the Incarnation?

On the other hand, and despite the above shortcomings, Bulgakov, like Cabasilas, clearly endorses synergy; this saves him from a complete panentheism (or pantheism), and, secondly, it is because of this endorsement of synergy that he is so against the dogma of the 'immaculate conception'. As he writes: 'in her, *original sin* preserved its *entire power* with all its fatal consequences—weakness and mortality of the body (for death is only the final revelation of this weakness)'.[76] Thus 'the immaculateness and sinlessness of the Ever-Virgin, refer not to her nature but to her condition, to her *personal* relationship to sin and her personal overcoming of it'.[77] In other words, the Virgin 'by her origination from Adam, having in herself all the power of the original sin as an infirmity, she remains free from every *personal sin,* of every participation in the work of evil, with the help, of course, of divine grace';[78] And, in order to leave no doubt about his endorsement of synergy, he concludes:

Press, 1988), 118.

[72] Bulgakov insisted on the identification of Sophia with the uncreated energies during the last period of his career, though this has remained unnoticed by his modern Western and Eastern admirers. See his *The Burning Bush*, 138, 153-56.

[73] See my work, Loudovikos, *Church in the Making,* esp. 205-11.

[74] *Ibid.*

[75] *Ibid.*, 206, 220-22.

[76] Bulgakov, *The Burning Bush,* 10.

[77] *Ibid.*

[78] *Ibid.,* 34.

'And so, the Mother of God by the power of her personal freedom and the grace of the Holy Spirit is completely free of every personal sin during and after her birth.'[79] Even clearer in his *The Bride of the Lamb,* he asserts that

> […] therefore the separation of the Mother of God from the human race by the mechanical 'privilege' of being free of original sin contradicts this love and, in a certain sense, does not exalt but diminishes Her holiness. The voluntary acceptance of the destinies of the fallen Adam with original sin in the name of sacrificial love prefigures the Incarnation, with the reception not only of human nature but also of the death on the cross.[80]

Here the author follows the patristic line of the pre-figuration of Christ in the life of the Virgin, and he describes her spiritual struggle as a reception not only of the human race, but also of Christ's cross, through synergy with divine grace. This allusion to Mary's solidarity with human beings—and this is, as far as I know, the only passage where Bulgakov says so clearly something like that—makes us think that he would not disagree with Cabasilas' position. However, this position of solidarity is described in a more advanced way by Cabasilas and this description involves, as I have claimed, the Maximian-Palamite idea of consubstantiality, thus creating an exceptional Mariological humanism, which can be discussed *par excellence* also in modern terms today.

### *Concluding Discussion: The Theotokos in the Kingdom of Man in a Secular Age*

Two significant books will help us help us to articulate this final discussion concerning the importance of the above Mariological humanism for our epoch. The first is Charles Taylor's masterpiece *A Secular Age*,[81] and the second is Rémi Brague's

[79] *Ibid.,* 44-45.

[80] *Ibid.*, 186n15. This line of thought, explicitly against the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, was also followed by Lossky, *A l' Image et à la Ressemblance de Dieu*, ch.11, trans. M.Michailides (Thessalonica: Rigopoulos, 1974), 198. Florovsky also did not approve this dogma. In his *Creation and Redemption,* trans. P. Pallis (Thessalonica: Pournaras, 1983), 205, he avers that the dogma of the Immaculate Conception is the offspring of 'an absolutely inadequate doctrine of the original sin', and it represents an 'unsuccessful terminology', which obscures the truth of the Catholic faith. He claims that the 'privileges' of divine maternity are not due to a 'non participation in the original sin'. The fullness of grace was given indeed to the Blessed Virgin, and her personal chastity was preserved only by the constant help of the Spirit. But this was not the abolition of sin. Sin was destroyed only upon the cross, and no exception was possible, as sin was simply the common and general condition of all humanity. Thus it seems that the three greatest Orthodox theologians of the twentieth century—Bulgakov, Lossky, and Florovsky, (followed by Popovich and Staniloae)—were explicitly against the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, in the form promulgated by the Roman Catholic Church in 1854. That means that Mary's holiness has to be discussed in a different theological way, focusing upon what the Theotokos really *does* and not simply who she *is*.

[81] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007). I use here the excellent Greek translation by Xenophon Comninos, trans. *Μιά Κοσμική Εποχή* (Athens: Indiktos, 2015), but I consulted the original book when I need to use the author's precise expressions

recent *Le Règne de l'Homme. Genèse et échec du projet moderne*,[82] which is, I think, in a certain continuity with the former. Taylor defines the modern self as the 'bounded self—I want to say "buffered self", against 'the "porous" self of the earlier enchanted world'.[83] The 'porous' self is permeable by the demonic or divine powers coming from outside, while

> […] for the modern, buffered self, the possibility exists of taking a distance from everything outside the mind. My ultimate purposes are those which arise within me, the crucial meanings of things are those defined in my responses to them […] As a bounded self I can see the boundary as a buffer, such as the things beyond don't need to 'get to me', to use the contemporary expression. That's the sense of my use of the term 'buffered' here. This self can see itself as invulnerable, as master of the meanings of things for it.[84]

The first apostle of this disenchanted, rationalized buffered self was the Reformation ('Reform' in Taylor's words), which prepared the way for the substitution of humanism for belief. Radical Protestantism, by rejecting any higher, self-denying vocation, prepared—through insisting on a demanding and disciplined personal morality aimed at an effective moral ordering of society—the western world for the exile of the sacred in favour of an instrumental rationalized/characterological morality: the subject can finally be moral of his own.[85] This brings about 'exclusive humanism'. As Taylor avers, now 'first the goal of order is redefined as a matter purely of human flourishing. We no longer see the pursuit of it as a way of following God, let alone glorifying him. And secondly, the power to pursue it is no longer something that we receive from God, but it is a purely human capacity'.[86] Now we are interested in nature for its own sake: by sharply distinguishing natural from supernatural, Thomas Aquinas, according to Taylor, had already prepared the autonomous conception of the former and the denial of the latter.[87] Thus, through the disenchanting Reform, we reach an individual religion of an individually constituted virtue,[88] along with an instrumental organization of society; this is the modern 'disembedding', where community ceases to be hierarchical/existential and takes the form of an individualism of rights, mutual service, and benefit.[89]

Thus the four pillars of the modern anthropocentric turn are, according to Taylor, the eclipse of any ulterior purpose of life, the disappearance of grace, the

or terminology. Hereafter I refer to the English original book as ASA, and to the Greek translation as MKE.

[82] Rémi Brague, *Le Règne de l'Homme. Genèse et échec du projet moderne* (Paris: Gallimard, 2015).

[83] ASA, 37-38; MKE, 65ff..

[84] *Ibid.*

[85] MKE, 125-135.

[86] ASA, 84; MKE, 136.

[87] MKE, 144-5.

[88] MKE, 227.

[89] MKE, 262-3.

fading of any sense of mystery, and, finally, the disappearance of any sense of a possible transfiguration of man by God, beyond immanence.[90] A radically immanent ethic now matches with a general culture of 'authenticity' and expressive individualism, where everyone is called to discover his 'authentic' self and enjoy it; the lack of transcendental meaning is replaced by efforts to find an anthropocentric meaning either in nature (Rousseau), or in beauty (Schiller, Göthe, Hölderlin), or in the sense of generosity (Shaftesbury), etc.[91] As Taylor avers,

> […] this is a culture informed by an ethic of authenticity. I have to discover my route to wholeness and spiritual depth. The focus is on the individual and on his/her existence. Spirituality must speak to this experience. The basic mode of spiritual life is thus the quest […] It is a quest that can't start with a priori exclusions or inescapable starting points, which could pre-empt this experience.[92]

This 'undemanding spirituality',[93] creates even small communities—the New Age movement is certainly involved here.[94] This instrumental individualism of the autonomous flourishing, through expressive authenticity, along with an instrumental use of society and the natural world, which ultimately considers life as a self-sufficient immanent order, form the 'immanent frame',[95] where the only possible value is totally submitted to what Isaiah Berlin called 'the self-authorization',[96] and the only transcendence accepted is Nussbaum's 'transcendence […] of an internal and human sort'.[97]

On the other hand, Taylor is, again, right when he criticizes Christianity for having abolished valuable facets of spiritual life, and given birth, for example, to the process that he calls 'excarnation', which is 'the steady disembodying of spiritual life, so that it is less and less carried in deeply meaningful bodily forms, and lies more and more 'in the head' […] Rather I am saying that Christianity, as the faith of the Incarnate god, is denying something essential to itself as long as it remains wedded to forms which excarnate'.[98] It is obvious from what I wrote in the introduction that I totally agree with Taylor, though I have found strong evidence that in the mature Christian East things were substantially better.[99] Another of Taylor's objec-

[90] MKE, 340-3.
[91] MKE, 390, 457, 461, 476ff.
[92] ASA, 507-8.
[93] ASA, 512.
[94] MKE, 767.
[95] ASA, 539ff.
[96] ASA, 582.
[97] ASA, 627.
[98] ASA, 771.
[99] My book, Nikolaos Loudovikos, *Closed Spirituality and the Meaning of the Self. The Mysticism of Power and the Truth of Nature and Personhood* (Athens: Ellinika Grammata 1999, in Greek), was mainly

tions is that 'the link has been made between nominalism and the rise of mechanistic science, as also the growing force of the new instrumental stance of human agency […] All these help generate the powerful modern ontic dualism: Mind over against a mechanistic, meaning-shorn universe, without internal purposes such as the older cosmos had', says the author, drawing upon Milbank's and Pickstock's work. The same authors inspire Taylor's final proposal: to re-discover the hierarchy of being and a philosophy of analogy that can re-open the way 'for a certain understanding of our (limited) access to a knowledge of God'.[100]

The problem is how we are going to achieve this analogy? Is this merely an *analogy of essence* leading simply to a limited knowledge of God, or it is an *analogy of energy*, as I have claimed elsewhere, leading, through the ascetical struggle against *philautia/narcissism,* which is the presupposition of *synergy*, not only to a knowledge, but also to the transference of God's mode of existence, as a *dialogical analogy of consubstantial life*, in creation—man actively realizing, in Christ, divine consubstantiality within creation.[101] Cabasilas' Theotokos seems, in my view, to move towards this direction.

Let us now switch to the other book. Brague, in his own way, sheds a different light upon Taylor's story. What constitutes man in modernity is, according to him, first, 'the construction of concepts' (Kant), and then the imagination (Eriugena, Cusanus, Paracelse),[102] leading to the domination of nature,[103] where man becomes 'a god on earth' (G. Bruno);[104] we thus have the 'kingdom of man', according to Bacon, [105] where man, according to Descartes, is the 'master and possessor' of nature,[106] while, according to Kant, the ego is the proprietor of the world, and, according to Fichte, man is the lord of nature, which is his servant.[107] *Progress* is the fundamental dogma of this new human, both theoretical and practical, wisdom, which is given a scientific basis by both Darwin and Marx;[108] the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment do away with original sin, grace, and salvation,[109] thus culminating through Comte with the 'religion of humanity',[110] while, according to Vico, history is the kingdom

dedicated to the discussion of the roots of excarnation in East and West and the ways the patristic tradition has to overcome this. It is only in this light that the discussion of what Christian selfhood really is can start. The book will appear in English soon.

[100] ASA, 774.

[101] See Study Five of my work, *A Eucharistic Ontology: Maximus the Confessor's Eschatological Ontology of Being as Dialogical Reciprocity* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2010), 217-229; see also Loudovikos, *Church in the Making*, 213-33.

[102] Brague, *Le Règne de l'Homme*, 54-5.

[103] *Ibid.,* 63

[104] *Ibid.,* 71.

[105] *Ibid.,* 92.

[106] *Ibid.,* 102.

[107] *Ibid.,* 134-6.

[108] *Ibid.,* 157.

[109] *Ibid.,* 116.

[110] *Ibid.,* 120.

of human creation.[111] Humanism becomes pragmatism, materialism, empiricism, realism, and ultimately it is identified with atheism.[112] Man becomes, in Péguy's words, 'autotheos' (*autothée*).[113]

Curiously enough, this leads, according to Brague, to despising the human being as an imperfect being,[114] and, on the other hand, the supposed domination of nature turns into a domination of man over man.[115] This leads ultimately to a 'transhumanisme', the need for re-constructing human nature and thus correcting its inherent imperfections.[116] Predicted by Nietzsche, this starts on the social level with Fascism, Nazism, and Communism[117] and concludes with the temptations of modern genetic technology;[118] man is something that must be surpassed.

Now the consequences of this evolution are noteworthy. On the one hand, it is nihilism, a divorce of Being from Good. The Enlightenment protested in the name of nature, but the nature thus discovered was not the paradise of harmony but a battlefield of sheer antagonism and indifference. This created modern pessimism, along with an inclination towards correcting, surpassing, neglecting, disobeying, and experimenting with nature.[119] On the other hand, since nature resists human interventions, this culminates with an irresistible new domination of nature over man as instinct, pleasure, death. From humanism we ultimately reach anti-humanism, arriving at man's private surrender to the dark sides of nature.[120] According to Sartre, human nature no longer exists, since God, the one capable of thinking of this nature, does not exist and suicide thereby becomes an 'absolute necessity' (Hartmann, Dostoyevsky) since no eternity is waiting for us.[121] The final drama of the modern Western secularized man, consists in not admitting either a wise external *Physis,* which could dictate its wisdom to man, as it was for the ancient Greeks, or the Biblical God, who acts in history, transforming it into his own kingdom. Modernity destroys both the above sources of truth, claiming an unwise *autonomy* for man as a decisive and pernicious independence from both.[122] However, in order for man to survive, Brague concludes, he needs someone who can affirm his value and dignity, and this cannot be just a perishable human being; in other words, he needs the One who declared, in the sixth day of creation that everything was 'very good'.[123]

[111] *Ibid.,* 127.
[112] *Ibid.,* 156.
[113] *Ibid.,* 174.
[114] *Ibid.,* 193.
[115] *Ibid.,* 203.
[116] *Ibid.,* 213.
[117] *Ibid.,* 221.
[118] *Ibid.,* 237.
[119] *Ibid.,* 243ff.
[120] *Ibid.,* 248ff.
[121] *Ibid.,* 258ff.
[122] *Ibid.,* 267ff.
[123] *Ibid.,* 270.

Brague is remarkable precisely for having so convincingly shown that human value can be obtained and secured only through and in God. Anthropocentric humanism ends up with anti-humanism, exclusive love for humanity turns out to disdain humanity, and autonomy results in sheer heteronomy, either as struggle for domination or as submission to the techniques of correcting or surpassing nature. Both Taylor and Brague agree that the drama of modern secularized Western man consists in the lack of transformation through participation in a reality that surpasses createdness and gives it eternal meaning and life. Both are against modern individualism, though it is not, as I believe, individualism that harms modern man, but rather a certain mode of individualization, which precludes what I have called *dialogical reciprocity* (*i.e.*, a way of changing narcissism into desire for consubstantiality). The opposite option is what I have recently called *the self-referring subject,* which submits the other's otherness to his own conception and use of it, thus creating *non-real* relationships with the other. However, dialogical reciprocity is a way which cannot be psychological, but must be spiritual and ecclesial. Furthermore, the degradation of the social in the West has also some other deep theological and philosophical roots, much older than Reformation, as I have attempted to show elsewhere.[124]

The human bodily dimension is essentially absent from Western Christianity, and the (wrongly) so-called 'spiritual' life has become an 'intellectual' life, which modern neuropsychology has shown to be imaginary, as Gregory Palamas also claimed some centuries ago. But if Thomas Aquinas—strangely enough, after his affirmation of the meaning of body *in this life*—has so strongly supported the view that it is impossible to see God in this life, precisely because of the existence of the body,[125] and if Augustine has defined man as willing thought[126] many centuries ago, then how can modern Western man theologically conceive of corporeality in an absolutely positive way? It was only psychoanalysis, Nietzsche and Phenomenology, and, of course, modern Neuro-psychology, which allowed for something like that to happen in the West.

This decisive spiritual corporeality, along with the consubstantial understanding of individuality in a context of divine participation and dialogical reciprocity, is the great theological and anthropological gift of Cabasilas' Mariological humanism for today's world.

[124] See Loudovikos, 'Being and Essence Revisited: Reciprocal Logoi and Energies in Maximus the Confessor and Thomas Aquinas, and the Genesis of the Self-referring Subject', *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 72. 1 (2016), 117-146. See also Loudovikos, the Third Study in *Church in the Making,* 161-70.

[125] See my work, Nikolaos Loudovikos, 'Striving for Participation: Palamite Analogy as Dialogical Syn-ernergy and Thomist Analogy as Emanational Similitude', in *Divine Essence and Divine Energies. Ecumenical Reflections on the Presence of God in Eastern Orthodoxy,* ed. C. Athanasopoulos and C. Schneider (Cambridge: J. Clarke, 2013), 122-48.

[126] See Loudovikos, *Closed Spirituality,* 33-50.

# The Dormition of the Theotokos and Dionysios the Areopagite

ANDREAS ANDREOPOULOS
*Reader in Orthodox Christianity, University of Winchester, UK*

Much of the hymnography and the tradition surrounding the Dormition of the Theotokos have been based on a passage from the *Divine Names* of Dionysios the Areopagite, which includes the phrase *ζωαρχικόν καὶ θεοδόχον σῶμα*. This phrase was read by John of Scythopolis as a reference to the Dormition, and subsequent scholarship never questioned this until recently. In recent years, however, this reference has been questioned repeatedly. This article examines the significance of this issue and this confusion for Eucharistic and for Marian theology.

Strange as it may sound, we derive much knowledge by accident and error. We can sometimes receive an insight on a certain process by noticing what it is being confused with, as it develops. Inscriptions or documents with misspelled words for instance, allow us to understand how pronunciation is changing, and how when we start finding the name of Matthew the Evangelist spelled as *Ματθέος* instead of *Ματθαῖος* (such as in the sixth-century mosaic of St Catherine's on Sinai), we realize that there is no phonetic difference between *ε* and *αι* anymore. Naturally, we can find many such examples in the manuscript tradition, some of which may not be very important or meaningful, whereas others sometimes lead us to serious mistakes.

In a strangely similar way, what I am going to talk about here is largely what can be thought of as a theological misspelling, which may likewise allow us to make some observations about the development of early Christian spirituality and the developing cult of Mary.

Before we proceed with the study of the historical or theological misspelling though, let us take a wider look in order to establish the field. Our field of observation starts with the feast of the Dormition. Much work has been done on the textual and theological origins of the feast itself (mostly the impressive work of Stephen Shoemaker on the subject[1]), and we have a fair idea of the way the significance of the feast developed from a more general Marian celebration to a feast that focusses on the historical—even if apocryphally attested—death of Mary, even if the theological implications of that particular death transcend history. The Dormition in the iconographic tradition is often portrayed on the western wall of a church, as the last

[1] Stephen J. Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

image that the faithful see on their way out, a reminder of their own mortality and the hope of their salvation by Christ. In this way, Mary is presented as a model for all humanity, even in her death.

In addition, the Dormition is a rather problematic issue from an interdenominational point of view, because not all Christian traditions wish or are able to engage with it in the same way. The problem here is not restricted to the discussion of the validity or canonical status of the sources, although this is certainly part of it. As the Marian material developed after the canonical Scriptures (even if one of the reasons for the composition of the text that describes the life of Mary and the infancy of Jesus, known as the *Protevangelion of James*[2] was to safeguard the authority of the canonical gospels, and explain some of their discrepancies), several Protestant traditions dismiss it on the basis of this ambiguity, arguing that there is very little in the canonical gospels on Mary and her life. However, it needs to be stressed that the nature of the interest of the denominations who take it seriously is almost completely theological rather than historical—and by this I mean that most of the arguments surrounding the question of whether Mary died and was subsequently raised from the dead before she was taken up to heaven, or whether she was spared the fate of humanity by being assumed before she tasted death, concentrate on what this death meant for Christianity two thousand years ago and what it means today. As Shoemaker notes in his work on the Dormition, the relevant Roman Catholic doctrine is less than clear.[3] Anglican theologians have an even more equivocal approach, as some tend to follow the quests and questions of the Roman Catholic tradition, while others take a Protestant view more extreme than Luther's. The difficulty here has very much to do with the fully human nature of Mary, and whether her fate (the reception of her soul by Jesus Christ at her death) may be shared by the fate of any other Christian. It is for this reason, as Brian Daley reminds us in an article dedicated to the subject, that in the Western tradition especially (although also in the Eastern) Mary's intercession anticipates 'the hour of our death'.[4]

In addition, as John Romanides has demonstrated in his finest work on the Ancestral (rather than Original) Sin,[5] the different approaches and arguments for or against the death of Mary touch on the systematic problematics of sexuality as the vehicle through which the sin of Adam is transmitted, and whether Mary herself needed to be protected from the effects of the rotten fruit, by being conceived in an immaculate way herself. The implication here, however, is that if her nature was not corrupted by Original Sin, it would not be necessary for her to be protected from its effects, and therefore it would not be necessary for her to die. Nevertheless,

[2] The most recent critical edition can be found in Ronald Hock, *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas* (Polebridge Press, 1995).

[3] Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 1.

[4] Brian Daley, '"At the Hour of Our Death": Mary's Dormition and Christian Dying in Late Patristic and Early Byzantine Literature', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 55 (2001): 71-89.

[5] John Romanides, *The Ancestral Sin* (Ridgewood, NJ: Zephyr Publishing, 2002).

the rationale for this connection is highly problematic. To be fair, it is possible to find even among Eastern Christian theologians similar attitudes about the transmission of sin through sexuality, although this could certainly not be said to be the normative Orthodox position.

The feast of the Dormition underwent several stages of development since its origins, which shaped its current form in an unusual way. First, because of its proximity to the feast of the Transfiguration, what used to be two separate fasts preceding the two feasts, at some point were combined into one, which became known as the fast of the Dormition, as if the intent was from the beginning to establish an unusually long fast for the Dormition, surpassed only by the fast of the Nativity and Easter. Moreover, because of the daily chanting of the Paraklesis service since the beginning of August, the Biblically based Christological feast of the Transfiguration is experienced as a slight interruption in the two-week long preparation for the feast of the Dormition. This fast is, incidentally, as strict as the fast of Great Lent, rather than the lighter fast of the Nativity, and this adds more gravitas to the feast of the Dormition—once again, in the way it is experienced.

In addition, in some ways the Dormition 'behaves' like a Christological feast: it is the only non-Christological feast that gets a full liturgical octave (eight days) rather than four days, as the Nativity of Mary, or one day, as the Annunciation. The Christocentric message of the epistle reading (Phil 2:5-11) mentions the Incarnation of Jesus with no further reference to Mary, and the Gospel reading from Luke 10 and 11 (the same as the one read in her Nativity) ends by drawing a connection between her womb and the Word of God. There are several other minor peculiarities, such as that the tone of the feast is not the fourth, which is usual in Marian feasts, but the first, which makes the canon of Matins sound similar to the canon of the Resurrection or of the Nativity of Christ. There are certainly different bits and pieces that were added at different times and shaped the hymnology of the feast as it is now, making the end result look quite strange, since there is no strong connection and coordination between these parts. In addition to the aforementioned liturgical amalgamation or rather absorption of the fast of the Transfiguration by the fast of the Dormition, we can see another strand that connects (and perhaps confuses) the feasts, as they both include a celebration of the glory of God as light: in the case of the Transfiguration the entire event revolves around the brightness of the face and the garments of Christ, while the Dormition recalls the appearance of Christ in a flash of light. The icons of the events demonstrate this very clearly, as they both feature large and elaborate mandorlas around the body of Jesus Christ—two of the four icons that are made in a similar way. When we consider all these connections and similarities, it is hard for us to tell precisely how much interaction there has been between the two feasts, but it is clear that in certain cases the celebration of the Dormition was built on the celebration of the Transfiguration, which has been marginalized.

All this is important in order to demonstrate the magnitude of the context of the feast of the Dormition. To return to the historical misspelling that we mentioned earlier, the hymnography of the feast includes an expression that is taken from the *Divine Names*[6] of Dionysios the Areopagite: '*ζωαρχικόν καὶ θεοδόχον σῶμα*'—which could be translated as 'life-principled and god-receiving body'.[7] While at first glance the whole passage of DN 3:2 appears problematic or cryptic, to say the least, John of Scythopolis read this as a reference to the presence of Dionysios at the death and burial of Mary,[8] and subsequent tradition accepted this reading unequivocally. 'Tainted' by this tradition as it were, the two most popular translations of the *Divine Names* to English—the 1920 translation by C. E. Rolt[9] and the 1987 translation of Liubheid[10]—approach this passage with the conviction that it refers to the Dormition of Mary, and in order to make this more evident, add the word 'mortal' in their translation, although no such word appears in the original text.

Overall, Dionysios does not say much about Mary. The entire Corpus Dionysiacum contains only one reference to her (if we assume that the passage from *Divine Names* does not refer to her), in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. To put it like this, the philosophical and liturgical direction that Dionysios has taken throughout his work does not really need Mary.

Let us proceed by reading the problematic section:

> As you know, we and he and many of our holy brothers met together for a vision of that mortal body, that source of life, which bore God. James, the brother of God, was there. So too was Peter, that summit, that chief of all those who speak of God. After the vision, all these hierarchs chose, each as he was able, to praise the omnipotent goodness of that divine frailty. But next to the sacred writers themselves was my teacher. He surpassed all the divinely-rapt hierarchs, all the other sacred-initiators. He was so caught up, so taken out of himself, experiencing communion with the things praised, that everyone who heard him, everyone who saw him, everyone who knew him (or rather, did not know him) considered him to be inspired, to be speaking divine praises.[11]

[6] The most recent critical edition of the works of Dionysios is in Beate Regina Suchla (ed.), *Corpus Dionysiacum*, 2 vols (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1990–1).

[7] These words appear separately in several places. As an expression in its most complete form it can be found in the Doxastikon of the Dormition Vespers.

[8] John of Scythopolis, *Commentary on the Divine Names* (PG 4:236-237).

[9] Rolt, CE, *The Divine Names and the Mystical Theology*, (London: SPCK, 1920).

[10] *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987)

[11] This is the text as it appears in Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to their Influence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 146-147. Rorem maintains the insertion 'mortal' referring to the body, which can be found in earlier translations, such as in John Parker, *The Works of Dionysius the Areopagite* (London: James Parker, 1897), 30, and does not question the 'traditional' reading of the passage as referring to the body of Mary.

And here it is in the original:

*Ἐπεὶ καὶ παρ᾽ αὐτοῖς τοῖς θεολήπτοις ἡμῶν ἱεράρχαις, ἡνίκα καὶ ἡμεῖς, ὡς οἶσθα, καὶ αὐτὸς καὶ πολλοὶ τῶν ἱερῶν ἡμῶν ἀδελφῶν ἐπὶ τὴν θέαν τοῦ ζωαρχικοῦ καὶ θεοδόχου σώματος συνεληλύθαμεν, παρῆν δὲ καὶ ὁ ἀδελφόθεος Ἰάκωβος καὶ Πέτρος, ἡ κορυφαία καὶ πρεσβυτάτη τῶν θεολόγων ἀκρότης, εἶτα ἐδόκει μετὰ τὴν θέαν ὑμνῆσαι τοὺς ἱεράρχας ἅπαντας, ὡς ἕκαστος ἦν ἱκανός, τὴν ἀπειροδύναμον ἀγαθότητα τῆς θεαρχικῆς ἀσθενείας, πάντων ἐκράτει μετὰ τοὺς θεολόγους, ὡς οἶσθα, τῶν ἄλλων ἱερομυστῶν ὅλος ἐκδημῶν, ὅλος ἐξιστάμενος ἑαυτοῦ καὶ τὴν πρὸς τὰ ὑμνούμενα κοινωνίαν πάσχων καὶ πρὸς πάντων, ὧν ἠκούετο καὶ ἑωρᾶτο καὶ ἐγιγνώσκετο καὶ οὐκ ἐγιγνώσκετο, θεόληπτος εἶναι καὶ θεῖος ὑμνολόγος κρινόμενος.*[12]

Stephen Shoemaker gives us the history of the confusion of this passage in recent years,[13] since the earliest challenge of the traditional view, by Martin Jugie in 1944, who argued, not without disagreements, that this passage refers to the Eucharist rather than to the Dormition of Mary.[14] I do not think it is easy to get to the bottom of some of the most problematic expressions, but I am nevertheless likewise convinced that the correct interpretation of the passage points towards a Eucharistic rather towards a Marian direction.

At any rate, while this obscure reference may not be of tremendous importance to Marian scholarship, it presents a different kind of interest for Eucharistic theology. Although most of the research and public dialogue about the significance of the Corpus Dionysiacum—the work of the unknown writer who composed several treatises in the fifth or sixth century—has read it in the context of the dialogue of ideas between the Christian and the pagan world, I would tend to situate this dialogue in the framework of the experiential and cultic (as opposed to an only philosophical) context of these ideas. In other words, I think of Dionysios as a mainly liturgical theologian.

To return to the text itself, one of the difficult expressions here is *θεοδόχον σῶμα*, or god-receiving body. This looks straightforward if we took it as a reference to Mary—which is probably the main reason for the Marian reading of the passage—and a little less typical if we look at it as a reference to the Eucharistic body.

Nevertheless, the same expression can be found in Gregory of Nyssa's *Catechetical Oration* 37, where he talks about the Eucharistic body. Therefore, the use of this expression in the *Divine Names* seems to me as a direct use of Cappadocian, or rather specifically Nyssene theology, to the extent that it could urge us to suspect

[12] *Διονυσίου Αρεοπαγίτου*, *Περί Θείων Ονομάτων* 3:2, 681D, 70.

[13] Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 25-30.

[14] Martin Jugie, *La Mort et l'assomption de la Sainte Vierge: Étude historico-doctrinale, Studi e Testi*, 114 (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1944).

a correspondence between the person of Hierotheos, who appears as the teacher of Dionysios, and Gregory of Nyssa—if not a complete correspondence between the two characters, at least a partial one. The catechetical-level titles of the works of Hierotheos that precede the passage in question, along with the admiration for the depth of his thought, certainly fit with the content of Gregory's *Catechetical Oration*. Names play a symbolic role in the entire work of Dionysios, and the name of Hierotheos (sacred + God) shows an unparalleled admiration for Gregory's source of inspiration, which may or may not correspond to a single person. At the very least we could say that while it may be possible that this particular passage has been inspired by Gregory of Nyssa, this may not be true for other references to Hierotheos.

The point is nevertheless that there is a solid and well- known precedent for calling the Eucharist 'god-receiving'. In addition, the focus of the entire section in the *Divine Names* is the eloquence of Hierotheos in a gathering of bishops. The narrative continues and in the same section Dionysios mentions how Hierotheos, as he was celebrating the mysteries (the Eucharist), was 'wholly entranced, wholly raised from himself'. And further on, he writes that 'we were not able to look at his spiritual radiance'.[15] This resonated with a favourite Nyssene theme, of the correspondence between the personal and the liturgical ascent.

The text refers to a gathering of bishops, which could be taken to mean a Eucharistic service or the Dormition. As the gathering, the synaxis of the celebrants points naturally to the Eucharistic service, it would seem clear that this is the celebration of the Eucharist, but what makes the interpretation unclear is how and why the aforementioned bishops were gathered in order to look at the body in question. Although this could be taken more easily as a reference to the dead body that is placed in the middle of the church during the funeral service, rather than to the celebration of the Eucharist, the act of active viewing ('we gathered *to look* at the body') does not naturally correspond with either one. However, the whole section includes comments about the transcendence of physical vision, and an ecstatic spiritual radiance. The presence of Hierotheos here has to do precisely with seeing beyond looking, and with recognizing what is beyond physical vision.

Now, this actually makes the connection with Gregory of Nyssa even stronger. The sacramental analysis that Gregory does in the aforementioned section of the *Catechetical Oration* discusses the Eucharistic body and its identification with the body of Christ. While the expression *θεοδόχος* in this context would imply that the reception of God refers to the Holy Spirit—consistent with Cappadocian theology and hymnography—the Eucharistic analysis of Gregory is decisively Christocentric. This, according to some theologians, reflects a problematic step, and it marks the time when Christian liturgy shifted from the model of the Lord's Prayer, which is

[15] *Divine Names* 3:2, 681D.

addressed to the Father in a clearly corporate manner, to the historization of the institution narrative and the Passion of Christ.[16]

What are we talking about, precisely? Although little changes at the surface, much changes underneath. The earliest Christian communities were gathering around the Table of the Lord, and were sharing the one loaf and the one chalice, but the spiritual struggle had to do with the community itself which addressed the Father by becoming part of the Body of the Son, through the operation of the Holy Spirit. The emphasis that we find in the church of the Pentecost and in the early writings of Justin Martyr or Ignatios of Antioch has to do with the much-researched unity of the people who were gathering in the same place under the same celebrant. The bread and the wine provided the indispensable focus for this gathering and the transformation of the people, but it is hard to find any reference in the early church that describes the sacramental sanctification of the people and their union with the Godhead without a strong reference to this gathering. The role of the Son is to provide the locus where the people of God can meet and be united with the divinity that originates from the unoriginate Father, and the whole dispensation of the Incarnation, the Passion, and the Resurrection are understood according to the sacramental model of the Lord's Prayer, with a clear focus on the bread that is identified with Jesus. In addition, the theological analysis of the sacrament itself is given in John 14-17, the long narrative before the Passion and the Hierarchical prayer of Jesus, which, in contrast to the synoptics, downplayed the historical context in favour of the analysis of the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son, and also the mutual indwelling of the people and the Son. The image that we can reconstruct from the importance that is given both to the nature of the gathering and the rite itself is that there is no difference between the Eucharistic elements and the people, as the transformation takes place in both of them.

The *Great Catechetical Oration* of Gregory of Nyssa is perhaps the first text where we see that the focus of the Eucharist has shifted from the community to the bread and the wine.[17] Gregory here has either actively avoided or has not found it necessary to mention a single word about the gathering, and speaks instead about the change of the bread and the wine. His main question is how it is possible for the one Christ to be present and to sanctify the entire Church, to be broken and not divided, eaten and not diminished. His approach is a top-to-bottom theology of the Incarnation, a sanctification of the Bread and the Wine through the blessing, and the *μεταστοιχείωσις*—a word that Gregory of Nyssa uses in several other places,[18] and it anticipates the word transubstantiation, even if it does not try to take the technical

[16] Cf. Thomas O' Loughlin, *The Eucharist: Origins and Contemporary Understandings* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 105-118.

[17] Gregory discusses the Eucharist as the real Body and Blood of Jesus Christ in the 37th chapter of his *Great Catechetical Oration*, PG 45: 93C-98B.

[18] Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *Sermon on the Resurrection,* PG 46:604C and *Refutation to Eunomios* 4, PG 45:468D, in addition to the *Great Catechetical Oration* PG 45:98B.

weight that transubstantiation later carried—of what is natural to what is immortal. It has to be noted that Gregory's use of *μεταστοιχείωσις* refers both to the Bread and to the people though, even if this is not evident in the *Catechetical Oration*.

The approach is clearly Christocentric, grounded in the historical Last Supper, which Gregory mentions in connection with the blessing of the Bread and the Wine, and implies a personal, rather than collective way to salvation, although it has to be said that this is mostly a difference of emphasis. Most of the *anaphoras* of the fourth century maintain their orientation towards the Father, although the anaphora that bears the name of Gregory the Theologian is addressed to the Son, and in some places recalls the *μεταστοιχείωσις*. Nevertheless, for Gregory it is the words of the institutional narrative that bring about the change. The words of the Last Supper, which are extended as a historical memory, above and beyond the meaning of the timeless offering and sharing between the Father and the Son and also between the Son and the people of God, perhaps are sufficient to demonstrate that a change does take place somewhere in the church (in the people and/or in the bread), but they limit the explanation for the change to the divine commandments, as if what is happening is something similar to the miracle of the Wedding in Cana.

One of the difficulties that the *Catechetical Oration* addresses at some length is the distance between what we see in the Bread and the Wine and what it actually is. Gregory argues this along the lines that will later develop into the arguments of the defenders of icons: we see the bread as bread, in precisely the same way Christ was seen because he was fully human. The Incarnation helped the defenders of icons to develop the argument of the legitimacy of representation, by recognizing that while the divine nature cannot be limited in a physical form, the voluntary emptying of the divine nature into the human nature, and their union into one hypostasis, made it possible for us to behold Jesus Christ, either in person or in representation, and consider the presence of the divinity in him. Gregory's justification of the presence of the divinity in the Eucharist, in what is also Bread and Wine, anticipates the same argument.

However, the additional difficulty we face here is that the Bread and the Wine, originally used in the context of a Passover *seder*, and given the legitimacy of the divine nature through the sharing of the common meal, are not natural symbols of the divine, especially if they are taken out of the context of this sharing, even if there is a long background to the concept of the ritual sacrifice and common meal. The historical background of the animal sacrifice as an offering to the gods, was too far removed from the Eucharistic practice to be able to explain the symbolism. In addition, in the absence of an animal sacrifice that tried to please the gods, what makes these symbols capable of carrying the presence of God and invoking the Holy Spirit, is the act of gathering and sharing in the name of God, the name of Jesus Christ. The focus of the Christian ritual has been removed very far from the pagan sacrificial offering, and what gives the Eucharist meaning is not only the presence

of the Holy Spirit and act of the offering, however it is understood, but also the gathering of the community in the name of Jesus Christ, which initiates it. The ritual, to put it in another way, focuses on the Bread and the Wine, but the meaning of the transformation necessarily includes the gathering of the community as a *sine qua non*.[19] To understand this is a challenge in looking and discerning, something that the *Catechetical Oration* addresses several times. One of the main concerns of Gregory is to explain that what looks like bread is not just bread, and what looks like wine is not just wine.

When Gregory refers to the body of Christ as *θεοδόχος σάρξ* (god-receiving flesh), he points to the union between the two natures. In the same sense, the Eucharistic bread is the Body of Christ because it, too, consists of two natures. The same term is used by early writers such as John Cassian, Theodoret, and Pachomios of Gaza, with the meaning of the Eucharistic body, but Gregory, and several other writers also use it in order to refer to Mary, encouraging the development of a Marian liturgical theology, or, more correctly, a liturgical theology which includes a central role for Mary. Therefore, by the time of Dionysios, there was enough background for both possible meanings of this word, and this indicates that the confusion at hand is a symptom of this growing Marian liturgical theology.

Nevertheless, everything else in the paragraph from the *Divine Names* discourages the Marian reading. The gathering of the bishops, the admiration for the eloquence of Hierotheos, which would sound anywhere between inconsiderate and gruesome if it were understood in the context of Mary's death and funeral, and the place of this reference in the *Divine Names*, in the section that examines the power of prayer, point towards the interpretation of the body as the Eucharistic body. What makes this more difficult is the expression *θέα τοῦ σώματος*—the beholding of the body—which does not resonate clearly with anything in the sacrament. It is certainly too early in the sixth century to try to look for the roots of the Roman Catholic ritual of the Adoration of the Eucharistic Body, even if the practice of the reservation of the Eucharist is attested since at least the time of St Basil. It may be possible that Dionysios here understands the elevation of the Eucharistic bread as an act of presentation, whereby the main celebrant elevates the body in order to present it to his concelebrants, something that seems consistent with Dionysian theology since this presentation would be restricted to the celebrating bishops and not to the laity. This also seems more consistent with the earlier liturgical instincts, which make more sense in the context of the continuous revelation of God in the community of the faithful rather than as a historical memory of the life of Jesus Christ. The elevation, by the time of Germanos of Constantinople, is only understood as a memory of the ascent of Jesus to Calvary, but this historical interpretation is probably a later development of an act that started with a different meaning—and here the 'viewing

[19] Cf. Andreas Andreopoulos, *Gazing on God: Trinity, Church and Salvation in Orthodox Thought and Iconography* (Cambridge, UK: James Clarke, 2013), 39-58.

of the body' that Dionysios mentions seems to fit, although it is risky to think of this as anything more than a hypothesis. Of course, 'viewing' the body here could then be taken in the meaning that is implied in the *Catechetical Oration*, as a contemplation of the significance of the Eucharist, which is also consistent with Dionysian thought. It is nevertheless an unusual and problematic expression. What follows is equally cryptic, and it may refer to a number of occasions, from the Incarnation to the Dormition, or simply the contemplation of the mystery of the Eucharist itself: the praising of the 'Omnipotent Goodness of the supremely Divine Weakness' by each bishop.

The difficulty of interpretation remains. Of course, this difficulty does not give more credence to the Marian reading, since the main act of any such gathering of bishops for that purpose could be described as a celebration, a mourning, a contemplation of death, but not as a 'viewing'.

As argued so far, I believe that the difficult passage contains echoes of the *Catechetical Oration* of Gregory of Nyssa, and perhaps takes them one step further in his particular way. Either way, despite the fact that some phrases and words are difficult to interpret here, there are many reasons to take it as a reference to the Eucharist rather than as a reference to Mary. But the theological misspelling that we mentioned in the beginning is precisely that: it was possible for John of Scythopolis to read—or rather to misread—this reference in connection to Mary, and this reading was not seriously challenged for many centuries.

The fact that the Eucharistic reference was mistaken for a Marian reference demonstrates that the transition from a community-based sacramental theology to a Christological one, is fairly complete by the sixth century, and by the same token Mary was becoming more central in theological thought. If the most obvious way for the interpreters of the Dionysian corpus was to miss the consideration of the Eucharistic body in favour of a historical moment in the life of the early Church, it clearly shows that sacramental subtleties like that had given their place to historical memories.

Can we infer a Eucharistic role or analogue for Mary, precisely on the basis of this confusion? The significance of Mary has always been to stress, or rather to confirm, the truth and the fullness of the human nature of Christ. Looking at, or contemplating her body, is similar in many ways to the contemplation of the Eucharistic body, in the sense that in both cases there is something else that goes on beyond the visible part. This proved to be an effective defence against iconoclasts for whom the humanity of Christ was not enough to make his divinity expressible in a concrete manner, but in this case it is most likely a symptom of the increasing tendency to historicize the Liturgy. If by the time of Gregory of Nyssa we can attest to the transition from a community-based Liturgy that is addressed to the Father to a Christocentric Liturgy that provides individual pathways of connection with the Saviour, the confusion with the mortal body of Mary implies that historical Christology takes over (as opposed to a higher Christology which can be understood as the presence of the eschaton in history).

# The Palamite Background in the Marian Theology of Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh*

NIKI TSIRONIS
*Faculty Member, Institute for Historical Research, National Hellenic Research Foundation, Greece; Associate in Byzantine Studies, Centre for Hellenic Studies, Harvard University*

Perceptions of the Mother of God have always reflected theological and pastoral concerns of Orthodox theologians and thinkers in Byzantium and beyond. Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, one of the emblematic figures of the Russian Diaspora, treats the Virgin in a way that reflects the main concerns of his generation, marked by the political developments in Russia in the beginning of the twentieth century and the subsequent movement of the Russian Diaspora. The hardship of the loss of their homeland and the harsh reality of poverty, as well as the two world wars, greatly influenced the theological approach of Metropolitan Anthony and his generation. In his talks and homilies, Anthony of Sourozh focuses on the human person cut off from the community and its rituals. He speaks about the encounter of the individual with God on a one-to-one basis. He refers extensively to the agony man experiences when faced with the silence of God. He sees the Virgin as the model of the obedient but not passive disciple, the model of the dynamic surrender to God in freedom and sorrowful joy. Anthony's approach to the Mother of God is paralleled and compared to that of Gregory Palamas, who in the fourteenth century saw Mary as the model of perfect Hesychast.

Throughout Christian history, the Mother of God has been the vehicle for the expression of various aspects of Christian theology, formulated in literature, homiletics, and art. Her reception from the early Christian era down to our times reveals aspects of contemporary concerns and approaches to Christian doctrine. A great figure of the Russian Diaspora, Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, is one of the eminent personalities who have marked Orthodox theology with their work in the 20th century. His approach to Patristic theology has been very different from the approach of other theologians of his era, like Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, Metropolitan John Zizioulas, Christos Yannaras, Fr Andrew Louth, and others. Each of the aforementioned figures contributed a distinct understanding of Christianity that enriched Orthodox theology and its reception in modern times.[1] Metropolitan Anthony rep-

* This paper was originally written for the conference, *Unwedded Bride: The Mother of God in the Hymns of the Eastern Churches* (University of Winchester, 18th-20th August, 2015), organized by Sarah Jane Boss and Andreas Andreopoulos. It was revised for publication in *Analogia*.

resents a very interesting figure of the 20th century, as he was a person deeply rooted in the Russian tradition who, nonetheless, was born, grew up, was educated, and worked in Western Europe. He was born as Andrei Bloom in Lausanne, Switzerland but some of his earliest memories were of Persia where he found himself as a result of Boris Bloom's diplomatic career.[2] In later years, Andrei took the name Anthony when he was secretly tonsured monk during the Second World War in Paris. His presence exercised great influence in France and especially in England where he became vicar and later bishop and metropolitan of the Diocese of Sourozh, based at Ennismore Gardens, London.[3]

Metropolitan Anthony started his career in France as a medical doctor with a PhD in the field but with no academic background in theology, though he was subsequently given four honorary doctorates, one from the University of Aberdeen for 'preaching the Word of God and renewing the spiritual life of this country', the second from the Moscow Theological Academy for 'his theological, pastoral and preaching work', the third from the University of Cambridge, and the fourth from the Kiev Theological Academy.[4] He never wrote theological academic papers or books. He was an exquisite orator with a deep understanding of the Scriptures as well as of the Fathers. His theology was expressed in his talks and sermons and most of his books are transcripts of talks and sermons. Those that circulate in English, French, Russian, and Greek today consist of compilations of sermons and talks delivered on various occasions in Western Europe and Russia. His works were republished repeatedly and in various forms: as articles in journals, in the cathedral newsletter, as book chapters or individual works with introductions, forewords and commentaries by various people and in various languages. As a result, citing his works is not an easy task.[5]

[1] Andrew Louth, an eminent figure of Eastern Christian Studies himself, is the author of the book *Modern Orthodox Thinkers: From the Philokalia to the Present* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2015). Most of the names mentioned above are included in this book, whose focal point is the Russian Diaspora and the thinkers influenced by this current of thought. Interestingly enough, Fr Andrew does not include Metropolitan Anthony in his book.

[2] Metropolitan Anthony was a nephew of the composer Scriabin from the side of his mother. An unofficial but rich and interesting biography is given by Gillian Crow in her work, *'This Holy Man': Impressions of Metropolitan Anthony* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2005). For his background and early years see 3 ff.; See chapter 8 in Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, *Encounter* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2005), 165-217. *Encounter* was first published in Russia in 1999, and was compiled and edited by Elena Maidanovitch.

[3] The Diocese of Sourozh has been a child of the Russian Revolution. For its intricate relationship with the Russian Diaspora, the communities of Western Europe, and its relationship with the official Church of Russia, as Bishop Basil of Sergievo writes in his introduction 'Metropolitan Anthony and the Diocese of Sourozh', in *Encounter*, v-xii. See also the official site of the Diocese: www.sourozh.org

[4] For his impact in the West and with special reference to his honorary academic degrees see the obituary published in the Guardian in 2003. https://www.theguardian.com/news/2003/aug/06/guardianobituaries.russia

[5] Articles and interviews appear in various collections that circulate especially in the English language. Among his various collections one may single out the following—all appearing under his name—: *Encounter*; *Meditations on a Theme* (New York and London: Continuum, 2003); *The Messenger: Journal of*

Admittedly, his greatest talent, virtue, and quality was the way in which he related theology to issues preoccupying his contemporary society. The confrontation of faith and atheism is one of the topics which reveals his concern about his homeland and the destruction of the Christian tradition by the Communist regime. Forgiveness of one's enemies is another topic relevant to the historical circumstances in Russia. His most favourite topic, however, is prayer as a personal, unique encounter with God.

The structure of his talks and sermons, which has not been systematically studied yet, follows a pattern that deserves to be examined in relation to the tradition of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine homilies. The Virgin was not among his common topics, but the views he expressed on the Mother of God offer us a distinctive understanding of the figure of Mary and her contribution to soteriology. Metropolitan Anthony's Mariology is linked to and reflects concerns of the twentieth century, proving that—as always in Christian history—the Marian cult echoes questions, difficulties, worries, and doubts people experience in theology and in real life. Metropolitan Anthony's sermons and talks have been so uniquely popular precisely because they tackled issues of importance for theology in a way accessible to modern man, a way that was enriched by a personal understanding of the Scriptures and of everyday life.

Ever since the beginning of Christian history, the Mother of God has been linked to Christian devotion. We have gradually come to realize how multifaceted and complex the cult of the Virgin is and how many distinct strands underlie its development in Byzantine and Post-Byzantine centuries.[6] In specific geographical areas, the Virgin has been used in order to gain a deeper understanding or promote theological trends, doctrines, and virtues through their association with her person. Let me

*the Deanery of Great Britain and Ireland* 24 (November 2013); *Our Life in God. Talks on the Holy Spirit and the Trinity*, Oxford: Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh Foundation, 2007; *School for Prayer,* first published in London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd in 1970 and reprinted 15 times before the appearance of the second edition in 1986 which is included in the volume *The Essence of Prayer* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 1989). In this volume one can also find the *Living Prayer* (first published in London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 1966 and circulating independently), his famous essay 'God and Man', a revised transcript of his interview with Jewess Margharita Laski for BBC in 1971, as well as his *Courage to Pray*, originally published in French as *La Prière* (Paris: Maison Mame, 1971). The English translation of this book (which is a discussion with Georges LeFebvre) was published in London (Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973). An anthology of his writings under the title *Essential Writings* (including short excerpts on various topics, like faith in the Gospel, the Creation, Prayer, Orthodox Spirituality etc.) was compiled by Gillian Crow (New York: Orbis Books, Modern Spiritual Masters Series, 2010).

[6] Until the year 2000, the studies on the Virgin were scarce and mainly focused on issues related to Catholic scholarship. Best known are the editions and studies by Martin Jugie, or the study of Wenger on the Assumption; A. Wenger, *L'Assomption de la trés Saint Vierge dans la tradition byzantine du Vie au Xe siècle* (Paris: Archives de l'Orient Chrétien, 1955). Averil Cameron was one of the first to tackle the topic of Marian cult in relation to her relics in Constantinople; see the articles published in her *Continuity and Change in Sixth-Century Byzantium* (London: Variorum reprints, 1981), esp. articles XIV, XVI, XVII. Since the year 2000 a number of important volumes have appeared throwing light to the study of Mary in Byzantium and the various aspects of Marian cult; see, for example, M. Vassilaki,ed. *Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art* (Milan: Skira, 2000); M. Vassilaki, *Images of the Mother of God* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); L. Brubaker and M. Cunningham, eds., *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium: Texts and Images* (Farnham: Ashgate 2011), and many other studies that appeared in the past decade.

mention just few milestones: Mary's first representations emphasize her connection to the female deities of the Eastern Mediterranean and especially Isis. Already in the second century, concerns related to the relationship between the Old and the New Testament and the typological reflection of persons and events of the Old Testament in the New give rise to the Virgin as Second Eve. In the fourth century, the ideal of virginity associated with the growth of monasticism is reflected in the additional emphasis laid on the sanctity and purity of Mary. In the fifth century, the trend of allegorical interpretation propounded by the School of Alexandria is expressed in the debate over the use of the paradoxical title, *Theotokos,* which emphasizes and summarizes the reality of the Incarnation of the Word. At the same time, her cult in Constantinople spreads and numerous shrines are dedicated to the Virgin while during the same period her relics become a focal point of her veneration. Between the fifth and the seventh century, Mary is associated with the imperial city and possibly—as it has been argued—with female imperial authority. As defender of the City, she appears walking on its walls, forcing back its enemies. Doctrinal concerns of the Dark Ages pave the way of her association with the Passion. The Iconoclastic period witnesses an unmatched flourishing of Marian devotion. Mary as the gateway of Christ's Incarnation is used in a metonymic fashion in Iconophile argumentation for the defence of matter and hence of icons and the relics of the saints.[7] In the centuries that followed, Marian devotion was consolidated with her hymns being officially incorporated in the liturgical books of the Church. It is impressive that Mary remained a means of expression of Christian doctrine even after the seventh Ecumenical Council in 787.

A striking example is provided at the time of Hesychasm, in the fourteenth century, when Mary was portrayed as the ideal Hesychast in the homily of Gregory Palamas on the Presentation to the Temple.[8] Therein, Palamas addresses his audience as a 'sacred theatre' (*θέατρον ἱερόν*) and calls the Virgin an animated statue (*ἔμπνουν ἄγαλμα*) and living icon of every virtue (*πάσης ἀρετῆς ἔμψυχος εἰκών*), the centre of divine and human graces (*θείων τε καὶ ἀνθρωπίνων χαρίτων ἑστία*). She was the one, Palamas says, 'who made all humans inhabitants of heaven, proving them to be spirit rather than flesh making them children of God' (*πάντας οὐρανίους καταστήσασα, πνεῦμα ἀποδείξασα ἀντὶ σαρκὸς καὶ Θεοῦ ποιησαμένη τέκνα*).[9] The Mother of God, mediator, the Mother of God, queen of every creature of this and the other world; a universal queen (*παγκοσμίου βασιλίδος*) without crown, without precious stones,

[7] N. Tsironis, 'The Mother of God in the Iconoclastic Controversy', in *Mother of God. Representations of the Mother of God,* ed. M. Vassilaki, (Milan: Skira, 2000), 27-39 and M. Vasilaki and N. Tsironis, 'Representations of the Virgin and their Association with the Passion of Christ', in *ibid*., 453-463; see also, N. Tsironis, 'Emotion and the Senses in Marian Homilies of the Middle Byzantine Period', in *The Cult of the mother of God in Byzantium,* ed. L. Brubaker and M. Cunningham (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 179-196.

[8] Gregory Palamas, Homily on the Entrance of the Virgin to the Temple, in *Έλληνες Πατέρες της Εκκλησίας, Ιρηγορίου Παλαμά έργα* 11, ed. P. Christou and Th. Zisis (Thessaloniki: *Πατερικαί εκδόσεις 'Ιρηγόριος ο Παλαμάς'*, 1986), 260-347.

[9] *Ibid*., 266.

colours, and luxurious garments. Her insignia are the virtues of the soul, the visit of the Holy Spirit that covered her.[10]

The beauty of the Virgin serves as an agent linking the visible with the invisible world and directing people's mind towards God.[11] The Virgin is thus called the living (breathing / *ἔμπνους*) throne of God, adorned with virtues befitting the King sitting on it (the throne). The Virgin is said to have made the whole earth heaven through the Incarnation, uniting the *nous* with God, uniting God with the flesh, making God the son of man and man the son of God.[12] 'You gave us the possibility to perceive through the senses the one invisible in kind and our own in shape, to touch in matter the immaterial […]' The Virgin is presented as the model of Hesychasm: 'Setting aside the concerns of everyday life she turned towards herself and to the unceasing prayer.'[13] The whole divine plan of the Incarnation is understood as provoked by Mary as part of her *mesiteia* (intercession) on behalf of mankind: 'Out of pity for the human race and in an effort to find a remedy [against death and Hades] she took up the mission to urge towards us the one who cannot be urged and to draw Him towards us faster, in order that He pushes away the curse, to stop the course of flame that burns the souls, to weaken the enemies, to return the blessing, to make the unsetting light shine and curing the illness to unite the creature to himself.'[14] '*Αὐτοχειροτόνητος*' is the word that Gregory uses for the Virgin. The one who has taken upon herself the sacerdotal role of mediator on behalf of humanity, thus proving that the disposition of her soul urged her to become the one who would unite spirit and matter.

In Gregory Palamas, whom I have chosen to parallel Metropolitan Anthony, the Virgin is the most holy, *πάγκαλη*, most beautiful and virtuous with qualities which reflect her inner life and disposition. The point I would like to stress is that Palamas' Mariology reflects his theological concerns with monastic life, retreat from the world, and unceasing prayer, but also the dialectic relationship between spirit and matter, that is, the main issues that preoccupied him and dominated his day.

Spirit and matter—what he has often called Christian materialism, prayer and a vigilant attitude pertaining to spiritual life—were also the main axis of Metropolitan Anthony's thought as expressed in his talks and homilies and edited by people devoted to him throughout his life but also after his death in August 2003. The offspring of a high-ranking family with a father who served Russia as a diplomat in the years preceding the October Revolution, Metropolitan Anthony was among the people who experienced an abrupt change in their lives with the Revolution.[15] This

[10] *Ibid*., 266-268.
[11] *Ibid*., 272-281.
[12] *Ibid*., 342-344.
[13] *Ibid*., 338.
[14] *Ibid*., 324.
[15] Crow, '*This Holy Man*', 3-38, 137-153 and *passim*. See also T. Wilson, 'Interview with Metropolitan Anthony', in Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, *School for Prayer*, 3rd ed. (London: Darton, Longman and

breach would not start to be healed before the 1990s when gradually the former Soviet Union started becoming once again Russia, while at the same time it was losing parts of its former lands which were now seeking their independence from the central government of Moscow. With a rich spiritual tradition behind him, Metropolitan Anthony was a child of many cultures, moulded in the hardship of *challenging times*, 'a curse' as the Chinese say, but also a blessing if one considers how much the Russian Diaspora has offered to the West in the twentieth century. His personality alone would be worth analysing in monographs; this personality set against the backdrop of such challenging times is a fascinating topic worth looking into from the perspective of modern history, but even more importantly from the perspective of Orthodox theology and its reception in the twentieth century. From the wealth of material that is available in back issues of *Sourozh* and other publications, as well as the Metropolitan Anthony Foundation archive,[16] I shall concentrate on Metropolitan Anthony's Mariology and more specifically on the way in which he treats the Virgin in his talks and homilies and the relationship of his Mariological views to his theology.

The main theological points of his Mariology focus on the person of the Virgin as an ideal model of what we should be as Christians. Interestingly enough, Metropolitan Anthony portrays Mary as the image (an ideal image) in a way reminiscent of Gregory Palamas' living image adorned with virtues. In Metropolitan Anthony, the idea of the Virgin as a prototype and model for humans couples with typological concerns, but which do not replicate the Second Eve vocabulary. What makes Mary unique, is the perfection of her gift of self to God, her transparency to God, her suppleness in the creative hands of God.[17] It is in this context that the obedience of the Virgin occupies a central place in Metropolitan Anthony's Mariology.[18] Obedience, however, is clearly and sharply contrasted to a passive acceptance of God's will: 'The Mother of God has not been a passive instrument of the Incarnation; without Her 'Amen' the Incarnation would have been as impossible as without the will of God'.[19] In a number of instances, he quotes Charles Williams who says that 'when the time was right, a maiden of Israel proved capable of pronouncing the name of God with all her mind and all her will and all her flesh, and the Word became flesh. It is a gift of self, and it is at the same time an unreserved and heroic acceptance: a gift of self in humility, and a heroic acceptance because of what

Todd, 1999), 7-22.

[16] http://masarchive.org/Sites/Site/Texts-E-Sermons.html but also the bibliography in http://www.mitras.ru/eng/eng_publ.htm.

[17] Homily on the Mother of God and the Departed preached on Saturday 2nd September 1989, *Cathedral Newsletter* 216 (February 1989), 1-2.

[18] Talk given at the Church of St Mary, in Oxford and published under the title 'Discipleship, Obedience, Freedom', in *The Messenger: Journal of the Deanery of Great Britain and Ireland* 24 (November 2013), 2-9.

[19] Sermon preached on Sunday 28th August 1986 for the Feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God, *Cathedral Newsletter* 253 (September 1992), 1-2.

it could have been, what is meant humanly speaking'.[20] Humility is not understood as a meek or docile way of existence. Anthony of Sourozh reverts in etymology in order to emphasize the meaning of humility when applied with reference to the Virgin: 'Humility is a condition of the earth, lying completely open and surrendered: the earth which is open to all actions, of mankind, of the rain, accepting the refuse and accepting the furrow and bringing fruit, surrendered, offered and given. This is the essence of humility and this is the kind of humility which we see in the Mother of God.'[21] Mary's humility is associated with her motherhood, the Incarnation, her spiritual and moral attitude towards God. Furthermore, it echoes an understanding of the relationship with God that is very often emphasized in Anthony's words. It emphasizes the reciprocity of the relationship with God, the responsive nature of this relationship that is one of absolute and deep love.

In his ever subtle and rich imagery, he describes Mary's attitude as one of great suppleness and flexibility, using the image of the child's hand guided by the mother in the process of learning how to write, or the supple surgeon's glove that protects the patient while at the same time adapted to his hand, following his movement and allowing him to operate. 'Replace', he says, 'the frailty [of the glove] by the strength of an armour's gauntlet and nothing will be possible'. Lastly, Anthony refers to the sail of the sailing ship that changes shape according to the wind, thus serving its scope in the best possible way. Suppleness is linked to humility and humility to surrender and frailty, which Bishop Anthony exalts by citing the words of the Lord in 2 Corinthians (12:9): 'My strength is made manifest in weakness'.[22] In his talk on 'Discipleship, Obedience, Freedom', he speaks of the way in which discipleship is achieved only on the basis of a relationship of deep trust.[23] Listening plays an important role in his understanding of discipleship, and this is the quality of the Virgin he mostly praises the most in his treatment of the Cana miracle: her ability to listen and by listening we are convinced that effectively he means her ability to perceive.[24] For Bishop Anthony, Mary's obedience is not submissive. In another text, where he refers to the role of Mary at the Cana marriage, he speaks about silence as a virtue of the disciple, saying:

> Discipleship begins with silence and listening. When we listen to someone we think we are silent because we do not speak; But our minds continue to work, our emotions react, our will responds for or against what we hear, we may even go further than this, with thoughts and feelings buzzing in our heads that are quite unrelated to what is said. This is not silence as implied in dis-

[20] Homily on the Mother of God preached at the University Church of Great St Mary's, Cambridge, on 19 May 1985 and published in *Sourozh* 21 (1985), 22-33.
[21] *Ibid*., 23.
[22] *Ibid*., 23-26.
[23] 'Discipleship, Obedience, Freedom', 2-9.
[24] Homily on Listening preached on 4th February 1973, *Cathedral Newsletter* 36 (February 1973), 1-2.

> cipleship. The real silence towards which we must aim as a starting point is a complete repose of mind and heart and will, the complete silence of all there is in us, including our body, so that we may be completely aware of the word we are receiving, completely alert and yes, in complete repose. The silence I am speaking of, is the silence of the sentry on duty at a critical moment: alert, immobile, poised, and yet alive to every sound, every movement.[25]

This is precisely the way Anthony of Sourozh describes the attitude of the Virgin: alert, immobile, poised, and yet alive to every sound and every movement.

Metropolitan Anthony has the gift to speak about the Scriptures, making the Gospels' narrative jump out of the page and become a real event.[26] He uses the narrative, removing the stereotypical expressions that deprive it of its immediacy and making it relevant to present day concerns. The fear of persecution and death that Metropolitan Anthony experienced in his early years as a refugee in Paris, as well as in World War II, inform his description of the Annunciation.[27] He stresses that the obedience of the Virgin is not a simple thing to do and say. It is consent to an act that according to the Jewish Law could have resulted in her death, as an unmarried girl who bore a child was condemned to stoning.

The cruelty and reality of death is also brought out in the parallel he draws between the consent of the Virgin at the Annunciation and the Sacrifice of Abraham, both of which show unconditional trust to God. Recently, Fr Maximos Constas analysed ingeniously the association of the Annunciation and the *Hypapante* with the Crucifixion in the context of the fulfilment of the prophecy regarding the sword that would pierce the Virgin's heart in his *"And a Sword Shall Pierce Your Own Soul" (Lk 2:35): The Kenosis of Christ and the Mother of God*.[28] In this insightful work, we find similarities with the theological approach of Metropolitan Anthony, who sees Mary as the 'one human person [in which] the fullness of humanity was achieved and revealed'.[29] However, this was not only a joyful event: 'When she accepted to become the Mother of the incarnate Son of God, she not only accepted honour and glory; she was confronted with awe, indeed with terror'.[30] The saints of the Old Testament, who saw the inaccessible, unsearchable and inapproachable God, perceived him as a consuming fire that made them want to die after having approached him. The

[25] Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, *The Essence of Prayer*, 303.

[26] See for example the Guardian obituary cited in *note* 5.

[27] See sermon on the Mother of God and the Departed, *op.cit.*; Crow, '*This Holy Man*', *passim* and esp. 11-36.

[28] Fr Maximos Constas, *'And a Sword Shall Pierce Your Own Soul' (Lk 2:35): The Kenosis of Christ and the Mother of God* (Massachusetts: Holy Resurrection Orthodox Church, 2014). On the same topic, expanded and with notes, see Fr Maximos Constas, *The Art of Seeing: Paradox and Perception in Orthodox Iconography* (Alhambra, Calif.: Sebastian, 2014), *passim* and esp. ch. 2.

[29] Sermon preached on the 26th December 1988 (its title in the MA archive reads: On the Feast of the Mother of God) and was published in the *Cathedral Newsletter* 216 (February 1989), 1-2.

[30] *Ibid*., 1.

Virgin did not die as a result of her contact with God because she was the answer of the whole of mankind to the love of God. In one of his talks on Orthodoxy and the veneration of images, delivered at the Cathedral of Ennismore Gardens, Anthony of Sourozh refers to an icon that has struck him: an icon of the Virgin portrayed alone, as a young peasant girl without veil, with her hair falling to the right and left of her face and her hands clasped in a gesture of agony. A curious icon, as Metropolitan Anthony notes, as one realizes that in the background there is a Crucifixion painted in pale yellow. Contemplation of the Crucifixion is the reason why Mary is portrayed in agony and distress.[31] Bishop Anthony goes through the steps of the Virgin's life, one by one, emphasizing her emotions, her response to the events that followed the Annunciation, which were full of agony, stress and torment. The Annunciation, he says, was followed by the rejection of the villagers of Bethlehem, her loneliness, the danger at the hands of the soldiers of Herod, the flight, the long journey far away from what was home to her. In a unique manner, he recounts the Presentation in the Temple, stressing the consent of the Virgin to the sacrifice of her Son, who was brought to the Temple as a living sacrifice, as a blood-offering, according to the commandment of Old Testament. The Presentation is mirrored by the Crucifixion, where once again Metropolitan Anthony sees the Virgin,

> […] wrapped in silence, totally at one with the Will of God and the Will of her Divine Son, giving Him for our salvation, accepting His death that to her was, as it is for every mother, more than her own death. In this she acted, one may daringly but truthfully say, as a priestess; because we all can offer to nothing to God but our souls and bodies, our own selves, and she was offering the life and death of the Son of God incarnate.[32]

The way in which Anthony of Sourozh perceives the Incarnation and all the events of the New Testament is extraordinary in that it bridges history and theology, reality and inner meaning, thus annulling the boundaries between the historical and the eternal present.

The shadow of death and the sacrificial dimension of the narratives are accentuated in Metropolitan Anthony's words: 'This is something that very few of us will ever have to face in life, or at least I hope so; but it happens all the time in various parts of the world, and it has happened throughout history when one person has allowed another to give his or her life for a cause, for God or for men. Without a

[31] The icon belongs to a type common in Russian iconography: the Mother of God of the Passion, in which the Virgin is portrayed with loose hair, the hands folded on her chest and at the background there is a depiction of the Crucifixion. Unfortunately, I have not been able to identify the specific icon Metropolitan Anthony was referring to. Nonetheless, I would like to thank Maria Lidova for her effort to throw light on the question. For the text, see Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, *Essential Writings,* ed. by Gillian Crow (Orbis Books: New York 2010), 62.

[32] On the Feast of the Mother of God, *Cathedral Newsletter* 216 (February 1989), 1.

word of protest, sharing in the heroic offering [sic].'[33] The understanding of Mary's consent as a heroic offering certainly appealed to his audience in the West, but imagine how relevant it sounded to the Russian people who received his sermons in tapes and translations. The traumatized twentieth century knew only too well the meaning of sacrifice for God or for men. It knew too well the weight and the smell of death, which is laconically insinuated in the imagery that Metropolitan Anthony employed in his sermons. The suffering he experienced during the early years of his life, together with the feelings fired by the circumstances of the Diaspora, influenced to a great extent his understanding of Christianity, persecution, sacrifice but also man's relationship with God. His distinct way of approaching the Scriptures not as narrative but as a reality that could be identified with people's experience is echoed in his treatment of Good Friday, the Crucifixion, and the death of Christ on the cross as a sharing of the tragedy of human condition.[34] He lays emphasis on the ways Christ experienced human feelings: loneliness, humiliation, betrayal, hatred. And he extends this even further by saying that Christ's death was a proof of his solidarity with mankind. He takes the hymn of Thursday in Holy Week 'O Life eternal how can you die; O light, how can you be quenched?', asserting that what we are reading is not rhetoric. 'It is not an allegory or a metaphor', he says.

> He [Christ] died on the Cross, and the operative words are the most tragic words of history. He, who is the Son of God, because he had accepted total, final, unreserved and unlimited solidarity with men in all their conditions, without participation in evil but accepting all its consequences; He, nailed on the cross, cries out the cry of forlorn humanity, 'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? '[35]

It has been occasionally argued that Metropolitan Anthony had no theology. I would like to argue that he was definitely not a theologian in the technical sense of the term. This becomes evident in the way he resents systematic theology. As a true oral composer, he draws freely from Patristic literature, hymnography, and his wider reading, constructing his homilies and talks with building blocks that remind us of the theory of orality and performance.[36] Epistemological tools of research were

[33] Metropolitan Anthony, Talk on Forgiveness, Russian Cathedral, Ennismore Gardens, October 1993. The typescript was kindly made available to me by Veronique Magnes.

[34] Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, *The Essence of Prayer*, 256.

[35] *Ibid*., 257. Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, 'Lent, Holy Week, and Easter', in *Essential Writings,* 183. See also his treatment of the subject in 'the Resurrection and the Cross', in Anthony Bloom, *Meditations on a Theme,* London, New York: Continuum, 2003, 111-125.

[36] The theory was originally formulated for the study of Homeric poetry by Milman Parry and Albert Lord in the 1930s and was subsequently developed in a theory of performance by the distinguished classicist Gregory Nagy. See A. Lord, *The Singer of Tales,* Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature 24 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000); G. Nagy, *Poetry as Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

irrelevant to his way of transmitting the message of the Gospel as a real experience. Instead of analysing words and images, methods and techniques, Anthony of Sourozh proceeds to a reading of the Gospel that is reminiscent to that of the Church Fathers. Worth noting is the great fascination and pleasure he takes in reverting to etymology in order to discover deep mystical sense in the words, as for example his etymological approach to the word 'intercession', which in Latin means to take a step which puts us at the heart of a situation, like a man who stands between two people ready to fight, or the etymology of 'God' whose Gothic root means the one before whom one prostrates in adoration.[37] In his weighty talk, included in the book, *God and Man*, he speaks about the last words of Christ on the Cross resenting their typological understanding, or rather going beyond that level of meaning. 'People who are keen on exegesis', he says, 'explain to us that at that point [when Christ utters the words "My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me"] he was rehearsing a verse of a prophetic song.'[38] The manner in which he refers to typological exegesis is rather pejorative. He ironically asks his audience whether anyone has seen someone dying while rehearsing a prayer he had been taught as a boy. And he continues: 'Besides, it is an error of vision—for it is a prophecy that is turned towards its fulfillment, not fulfillment that is supposed to recite words of prophecy. *No, it was something real* [*my emphasis*]'.[39] Already the vibrant emphasis on the reality of the events shakes and alerts his audience, seizes it and transports it to the place where the events were actually taking place. 'God is not someone about whom one can have notions, God is someone whom one encounters'. I quote from the same Good Friday text:

> When Christ said '*My God, my God why hast Thou forsaken me?* '—and the repetition of the very words is certainly not accidental—He was crying out, shouting out the words of a humanity that had lost God, and he was participating in that very thing which is the only real tragedy of humanity—all the rest is a consequence. The loss of God is death, is forlornness, is hunger, is separation. All the tragedy of man is in one word, 'Godlessness'.[40]

Christ's descent to Hell is thus described precisely in these terms: as a descent to a place where God is not, a place of final dereliction. Hell is destroyed because the man who descended therein is both man and God. There is no longer a place where God is not. The destruction of Hell is a proof of Christ's solidarity to mankind. In his conclusion, the point I made above regarding the way Metropolitan Anthony links his theology to concerns of his times, is spelled out in a most original way:

[37] Metropolitan Anthony, 'Courage to Pray' in *The Essence of Prayer,* 384.
[38] Idem., 'Man and God' in *The Essence of Prayer,* 257.
[39] *Ibid*., 257.
[40] *Ibid*., 257.

> This is the measure of Christ's solidarity with us, of his readiness to identify himself, not only with our misery but with our godlessness. If you think of that, you will realize that there is not one atheist on earth who has ever plunged into the depths of godlessness as the Son of God, become the Son of Man, has done. He is the only one to know what it means to be without God and to die of it.[41]

Metropolitan Anthony relates his talks and sermons on the Virgin to the Crucifixion. He views the two topics in absolute interdependence as it becomes evident in some of the examples we saw above. He describes the pain of the Virgin at the Crucifixion entirely stripped of its ritual context. The lament of the Virgin, in the eyes of Metropolitan Anthony does not resemble the mourning of other women. She does not faint and does not weep; her grief is expressed as a silent lamentation, deep and mute; it makes her turn inwards and apprehend the events that are taking place in front of her eyes in a way that is in accordance with the sobriety she showed at the Annunciation and the Presentation to the Temple. Pivotal instants of human lives such as birth, puberty, marriage, death, encountered in all religions throughout centuries, today gradually disappear. This is probably related to the desacralisation of society which has a tendency to share the celebration of a pleasant event but to keep private events related to death and bereavement. We may suggest that the non-ritual description of Mary at the foot of the cross is linked to the non-ritual context of France and England, where he lived and for the people of which he composed his homilies.

In a homily on Palm Sunday [April 1993, Encounter 175] the Virgin is portrayed as the ideal disciple, standing at the foot of the Cross in silence, accompanied by John the Beloved disciple. She is said to be offering his death for the salvation of mankind, silent and dying with him hour after hour. The disciple was standing by in horror, seeing his master die and the Mother in agony. Mary's philanthropy is brought to the fore, where Bishop Anthony encourages us to pray to the Mother of God, identifying ourselves with the crucifiers, trusting she will mediate for our salvation to her son and God.[42] Mary, the maiden of Israel, who made possible the Incarnation of the Word, not as an instrument but as an accomplished human being, conscious of her role in history and salvation, is praised here for the openness of her heart, her personal surrender. In his talks and homilies on the Creation, Metropolitan Anthony clearly speaks of woman as the alter ego of man created through God's philanthropy for the cure of his 'aloneness' (sic).[43] Anthony coins this word to transmit the discovery of the ultimate loneliness of Adam at the time he gives names to all creatures who are

[41] *Ibid*., 257 but also *Idem*., 'I Believe in God', in *We Believe in God, ed.* Rupert Davies (London: 1968) as reproduced in http://www.mitras.ru/eng/eng_04.htm.

[42] Metropolitan Anthony, *Essential Writings,* 112-113.

[43] *Ibid*., 86-89.

presented to him in couples, male and female. The person God creates is not a helper but a full human being that came out of Adam who contained within him too much and yet enough. God calls out a companion from this complex human chaos of pure, innocent, and yet incomplete potentialities.

As I said above, Metropolitan Anthony encounters God as a person, as a living being and not as a notion. In this very same way, he describes his vision of the Virgin Mary: not as a submissive female but as a person with deep consciousness, an accomplished human being whose greatest virtue was her ability to be silent, perceiving deeply in her heart the whisper of God. Metropolitan Anthony used to say that often as humans we expect God to reveal himself in awe and thunder. But in fact God reveals himself in frailty, in weakness and this weakness Metropolitan Anthony associates with the Virgin. At the same time, he stresses the fullness of her humanity and her role in the Incarnation and death of Christ.

Summarizing the points I have made, I wish to stress the way in which the Mother of God from the first Christian centuries to the present day served as a means for the expression of theological currents and trends. Just like Gregory Palamas sees in Mary the ideal Hesychast, similarly Metropolitan Anthony, one of the most important and acclaimed preachers of the 20th century, employed Mary in order to express his own world view and the concerns that preoccupied him at the time of his service at the Russian Cathedral in London in the post-World War II years. His teaching focused on the personal understanding of Christianity and the personal relationship to God, stripped of rituals and diversions. It was a relationship that answered the needs of a broken people faced with the threat of a Godless world. His answer to that was given through his sermons and writings. Therein the Mother of God is portrayed as the ideal disciple of Christ, the one who made the Incarnation possible through her conscious and full acceptance of God in virtue and sacrificial love. Her fullness of being points to an ethos that makes her unique the creation. In a way that is reminiscent of Palamas, Mary somehow takes the initiative to pave the way for the Incarnation of the Word. It was Palamas who referred to the Virgin as the door keeper of the kingdom. But, contrary to what doorkeepers normally do, Mary does not prevent people from entering but urges them to enter and share the kingdom of God. Likewise, Bishop Anthony quotes St John Chrysostom: 'When you discover the door of your heart you discover the gate of heaven.' And he adds: 'This discovery of our own depths goes together with the recognition of the depths in others […] The immensity of our vocation is to share the divine nature, and in discovering our own depths we discover God […]'[44]

[44] Metropolitan Anthony, 'Courage to Pray', in *The Essence of Prayer,* 336.

# BOOK REVIEWS

## *Gateway of Life: Orthodox Thinking on the Mother of God*

BY MARY CUNNINGHAM

Yonkers: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2015, pp. 197. ISBN 987-0-88141-524-7.

Following the precedents of the other monographs in St Vladimir Seminary Press's *Foundation Series, Gateway of Life* constitutes a comprehensive overview and critical evaluation of the tradition and doctrine pertaining to the Mother of God. The distinguishing strength of this book is Cunningham's ability to treat succinctly and synthesize the vast and sometimes disparate array of sources and theological developments that inform both ancient and modern expressions of Mariology. While delving with scholarly dexterity into historical and philological particulars and not shying away from addressing the inevitable difficulties that arise from such inquiries, she is careful not to let the reader lose sight of the core intention of the work: to demonstrate that the sources for Mariological doctrine and tradition indicate first and foremost the ineffable and mysterious quality of Mary's role as the Theotokos or God-bearer. Though this work discloses the steady hand of an accomplished scholar, it should be regarded chiefly as a book by a person of faith for an audience of the faithful. As Cunningham explains in her introduction to the *Gateway of Life*, her purpose in writing the book is to provide an Orthodox voice in the midst of a revival of Catholic literature on the subject of Mariology. A method that uses scholarly tools to evaluate constructively and elucidate a beloved aspect of Christian tradition is decidedly refreshing, and, though conveyed via a historical approach, reflective of an underlying theological consciousness. It is precisely in this sense that the book succeeds in fulfilling Cunningham's self-stated purpose.

In keeping with her comprehensive approach, Cunningham begins her study with an examination of the Old and New Testament sources. Of particular note is her discussion of the Old Testament typology that would figure so prominently in the patristic and liturgical texts dedicated to the Mother of God. The material from the New Testament is somewhat familiar ground. Nevertheless, its inclusion is indispensable to a study that is intended to be comprehensive in its scope. Moreover, Cunningham's discussion of the New Testament passages concerning the Mother of God helps to establish and buttress the recurring theme of the mysterious and ineffable quality of her role as God-bearer. As Cunningham argues, there is continuity between the New Testament authors' reticence to provide a thorough elaboration of Mary's role in the Incarnation and the tendency of later liturgical and patristic writers to rely upon typology and metaphor to articulate her place in divine

*oikonomia*. Cunningham further affirms this in the latter portion of the book when she observes that, with the exception of the Council of Ephesus in 341 A.D., ecclesiastical writers and theologians have preferred the use of typology to extensive dogmatic formulae to describe the Mother of God's conception of and subsequent birth to the incarnate Logos. In following this line of argument, Cunningham does not ignore or minimize the dogmatic aspect of the tradition. Indeed, she dedicates an entire chapter to the historical events and the theological tensions that led to the dogmatic declaration that firmly establishes Mary as the Theotokos. Rather, she seeks to show how the dogmatic contribution constitutes only one element of the tradition. Liturgical and hymnographic sources have contributed as much or more to the Church's understanding of the Mother of God, facilitating the faithful's recognition of her centrality in the Incarnation and her essential role in everyday spirituality.

Cunningham's study of the apocryphal writings that inspire the liturgical tradition is one of the most original contributions of this book and serves to fill in gaps for scholars and interested lay readers alike. These are works that are unfamiliar or even unknown to non-specialists, yet they are sources that provide the majority of the material for the Marian feasts. In addition to summarizing the narratives found in apocryphal texts like the *Protevangelium of James*, Cunningham explicates the central themes and connects them to the historical establishment of the feasts. The theme of Mary's role as the second Eve warrants enough attention that Cunningham dedicates an entire chapter to its historical development and standardisation within the homiletic and hymnographic traditions. The complexity and significance of these elements for Marian theology as well as their equal relevance in relation to more explicit dogmatic assertions are thereby further confirmed. An entire chapter is also dedicated to the significance of the ever-virginity of the Mother of God, a doctrinal point that has resonance for both East and West. Though not explicitly polemical, this chapter functions as an *apologia* against the standard Protestant view, which would regard the ever-virgin status of the Mother of God as being only relevant in relation to her role in the conception and subsequent birth of Christ. Cunningham traces the unfolding realization of Mary as an exemplar of moral purity and the ascetic ideal within the ecclesial consciousness, becoming in particular the archetype for those of a monastic vocation. In the same chapter, she notes the rather recent tendency of some modern theologians to regard Mary as the perfect expression of the 'royal and universal priesthood'. The two primary sources she provides as paradigms for this theological thread are Kallistos Ware and Elizabeth Behr-Segel. It is evident that Cunningham regards the concept of the Mother of God as the exemplar of the 'royal priesthood' as an interesting and fruitful theological development. Nevertheless, her discussion comprises a very brief excursus in an otherwise thoroughgoing chapter, which suggests that this is a development that requires further study before it can be can be regarded as an indispensable aspect of the liturgical and theological tradition.

In the final chapters of the book, Cunningham further covers modern theological appraisals of the Mother of God and the doctrinal disagreements between the Orthodox East and the Catholic West. Of notable mention is her discussion of Bulgakov. Cunningham argues that despite Bulgakov's tendency to diverge from the more traditional expressions of Mariology, his essential intentions are in agreement with those of his forebearers. Nevertheless, Cunningham is also careful to note that not everyone would necessarily agree with this line of argument and would prefer to dispense with Bulgakov's articulation *in toto*. Regarding the East/West divide in relation to the Mother of God, Cunningham affirms that there are indeed differing theological presuppositions that give rise to disagreement, theological presuppositions that should not simply be explained away in order to achieve the appearance of agreement. She suggests that fruitful ecumenical discussions require eirenic yet honest discourse regarding differences of opinion, instances of which, Cunningham argues, already exist.

This book will be particularly convenient for non-specialists and for anyone who is interested in a thoroughgoing introduction to the Orthodox approach to the mystery that is the Mother of God. Clergy and ecclesiastical teachers will find it to be an especially valuable catechetical resource. Scholars and specialists will find it useful as a synopsis of recent developments in the field of Mariology and an appraisal of the trajectory of ongoing research.

***Demetrios Harper***
Assistant Editor, ***Analogia***
Visiting Research Fellow,
University of Winchester, UK