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The Ancient Worship of the Theotokos in the Christian Church Mariology in Christian East and West

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Abstract

At the beginning, the present study refers to the old age of the Theotokos worship in the Christian Church, and then, in its second part, it presents in summary the entire Mariology as it was outlined in the Eastern Orthodox Church. It insists on the foundations of the supra-veneration worship of the Mother of God in Eastern patristic theology but also in the hymnography and liturgical life of the Orthodox Church. In its last part, the study refers to the teaching about the Mother of God in the Christian West, to the doctrinal innovations introduced by Roman Catholicism after the 15th century and until the 20th century, but also to the Reform teaching very close to Orthodoxy at the beginning of this Western movement, from the 16th century. At the end, some conclusive ideas are presented that highlight the reasons for researching this sensitive subject.

Keywords

ancient, worship, Theotokos, Church, Christian, theology, Mariology, East, West

I. The Ancient Worship of the Theotokos in the Christian Church

There is no other saint in the Church Synaxarion to be given a greater honor than that which is given to the Most Holy Theotokos. The Mother of God occupies a central place in the life of the Church, together with Christ

her Son. This is revealed in all the services of the Church, but especially in the Divine Liturgy. And this is because, according to Father Dumitru Stăniloae, the Theotokos is “the highest peak to which mankind has risen to meet God”¹. According to Leontius of Byzantium, her veneration derives from the sanctity of her life, and the sanctity of her life comes from the Holy One, because “she did not give birth to a saint, but to the Holy One who sanctified her”².

The Mother of God veneration was expressed in the worship and liturgical life of the Church, since its beginning, that is, since the early period. New Testament exegetes and liturgical theologians unanimously accept that the Blessed Virgin Mary has been honored by the Apostles, disciples, and relatives of the Savior since her earthly life. “Her person has always been naturally associated with that of her divine Son and surrounded by the love and respect of those around Him”³. The presence of the Mother of God in the first Christian community in Jerusalem is admirably expressed in the icons of the Ascension and Pentecost, in which she appears depicted in the midst of the Holy Apostles⁴.

Although the Mother of God has been honored since the beginning of Christianity, in the first three centuries her veneration was manifested in discrete forms, especially in the private worship of every faithful in the early Christian community, the Church of Jerusalem, around her tomb in Gethsemane⁵. Apocryphal writings such as the *Protoevangelion of James*, which appeared in the life of the Church very early, in parallel with the writings of Holy Scripture, prove the popular piety towards the Theotokos, since she occupied a special place in the life of the early Church. Another recently discovered writing is the papyrus *Sub tuum praesidium*, which proves that the early Christian Church prayed to the Virgin Mary, believing in the special power of her prayers and intercessions beside His Son, for the faithful of the Church⁶. The piety of the first Christians towards the

¹ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Învățătura despre Maica Domnului la ortodocși și la catolici”, in: *Ortodoxia*, II (1950) 4, p. 567.

² LEONȚIU DE BIZANȚ, *Adversus Nestorianus*, PG 86, 1720 D.

³ Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene BRANIȘTE, *Liturgica Generală cu noțiuni de Artă bisericească, Arhitectură și pictură creștină*, ediția a II-a revizuită și completată, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1993, p. 186.

⁴ Paul EVDOKHIMOV, *Femeia și mântuirea lumii*, Asociația filantropică creștină Christiana, București, 1995, p. 219.

⁵ Pr. Dr. Achim SĂRĂȘAN, *Viața și cinstirea Maicii Domnului*, Editura Andreiană, Sibiu, 2015, p. 217.

⁶ See Alexis KNIAZEV, *Maica Domnului în Biserica Ortodoxă*, Humanitas, București, 1998, p. 29.

Mother of God manifested itself in the church service even before the third century; there are documents that recall the prayers addressed to the Virgin from the 3rd-4th centuries⁷.

The penetration of the Theotokos veneration into the public worship of the Church and its proper development can be noticed after the freedom granted by the Holy Emperor Constantine the Great to Christendom⁸. This explains the fact that in the 4th century there was already a Mother of God worship in the Church, as evidenced by the laudatory speeches and homilies addressed to her by the great Fathers of this century, such as St. Ambrose of Milan. He asks in a Homily about the Virgin Mary: “Who is more honorable than the Mother of God?”⁹. In a similar way, Saint Basil of Seleucia rhetorically asks himself: “She is and is called the Mother of God. Who is superior to her?”¹⁰.

The Mother of God worship existing since the beginning of the Christian life in the Church, experienced an explosive development in the first half of the 5th century, due to the dioprosopist heresy of Nestorius. He argued that because in the being of Christ there would be two distinct persons (on the one hand the Divine, and on the other the human), the Virgin Mary gave birth only to the man Christ and cannot be called the Mother of God (Θεοτοκος), but only the Mother of Christ (χριστοτοκος), or Mother of man (ανθρωποτοκος). When a bishop, preaching in his Church, where Nestorius was also present, dared to blaspheme those who claim that Mary is also the Mother of God, all the people who listened to him ostentatiously left the church in protest¹¹. This fact amply demonstrates how old and deeply rooted in the conscience of believers was the belief in the Theotokos, or in the fact that the Virgin Mary is truly the Mother of God.

The Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in 431 condemned Nestorius' heresy, formulating the Orthodox teaching about the Mother of God, emphasizing the two major qualities of the Mother of God, according to which she deserves honor or supra-veneration. These two qualities of

⁷ Alexis KNIASEFF, “La Presence liturgique de la Mere de Dieu”, in: *Mariologie*, Paris, St. Serge, 1985, p. 4.

⁸ Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene BRANIȘTE, *Liturgica Generală*, p. 187.

⁹ “Qui nobilius Dei matre?”, in: Sf. Ambrozie, *De virginibus*, II, 2, 7, PL XVI, 220 B.

¹⁰ Sfântul VASILE AL SELEUCIEI, quoted by Ierotheos, Mitropolit al Nafaktosului, *Praznicele Maicii Domnului – o perspectivă istorică și teologică*, translated from Greek Mănăstirea Diaconești and Tatiana Petrache, Editura Bonifaciu, 2019, p. 532.

¹¹ See Pr. Prof. Ioan RĂMUREANU, *Istoria bisericească universală*, ediția a II-a, București, 1975, p. 249.

the Mother of God are her θεοτοκία, that is, the fact that she gave birth to God in flesh and her αιπαρτενία, that is, everlasting virginity, or her holiness. Regarding the theotokia of the Mother of God, the Synod learned that “we confess that the *Blessed Virgin is Theotokos*, who gave birth to God and also to man, through union without interference or separation, and this, because the Word became man and through His conception united to Himself the temple of flesh which he assumed from her (from Mary)¹².

Theotokia of the Mother of God is expressed to the Slavs by the term *Bogorodita*, and in Latin theology by the term *Deipara*¹³.

After the Third Ecumenical Synod, so in the 5th century, the first feasts of the Mother of God appear. In this century, it seems that each local Christian Church had its own local feast dedicated to the Mother of God. As for the dates of these feasts, they differed from one Church to another¹⁴.

In the eighth century, Saint Andrew the Critean writes: “What is greater than to call yourself and be the Mother of God?”¹⁵. At the same time, St. German of Constantinople addressed the Theotokos in the following words: “God exalted you in a great and victorious way, because you made him a Christian people in your body and you made those of a nation with you like the image of the divine”¹⁶.

In the neo-patristic period, the Mother of God worship experienced the same flowering as in the patristic ages. The main exponents of the Marian cult and theology from this neo-patristic period are Saint Theophanes of Nicaea, Saint Gregory Palamas and Saint Nicholas Cabasila. Thus, in the twelfth century, St. Gregory Palamas speaks eloquently about the Virgin Mother the following: “She became the miracle of miracles on earth, the greatest miracle of the age, for the benefit of the community... she is the culmination and perfection of all saints... and she became a treasury and a room of grace”¹⁷.

¹² From the dogmatic decision of the Fourth Ecumenical Council, quoted by Alexis KNIASEFF, *Cours de Mariologie*, Editure St. Sege, Paris, 1986, p. 47.

¹³ Jaroslav PELIKAN, *Fecioara Maria de-a lungul secolelor. Locul ei în istoria culturii*, transl. Silvia Palade, Editura Humanitas, București, 1998, p. 59.

¹⁴ See T. MAERTENS, “Le développement liturgique et biblique du culte de la Vierge”, in: *Paroisse et liturgie*, nr. 36, 1954, p. 225-250.

¹⁵ Sfântul ANDREI CRITANUL, quoted by Ierotheos, Mitropolit al Nafpaktosului, *Praznicele Maicii Domnului – o perspectivă istorică și teologică*, p. 532.

¹⁶ Sf. GHERMAN AL CONSTANTINOPOLULUI, quoted by Ierotheos, Mitropolit al Nafpaktosului, *Praznicele Maicii Domnului – o perspectivă istorică și teologică*, p. 533.

¹⁷ Sfântul Grigorie Palama, quoted by Ierotheos, Mitropolit al Nafpaktosului, *Praznicele Maicii Domnului – o perspectivă istorică și teologică*, p. 532, 540, 542.

The Mother of God was a model for the defenders of Orthodoxy in terms of reinterpreting the place of women in Christian thought¹⁸. The Mariological doctrine developed fully in the Orthodox East, where there were already ascetic and liturgical premises long before they appeared in the West¹⁹.

However, the Mother of God worship transcends the boundaries of her veneration only by believers in this world, she being praised by angels, apostles and martyrs alike, as the liturgical hymn expresses: “The hosts of the non-material angels, the assemblies of the apostles, and the dancing of the martyrs, honor thee, Mother of God, that thou hast unspeakably begotten the King of all”²⁰. The Mother of God is also honored by “all the prophets”²¹, who praise her with “righteous faith” and “serve her with honor”. The liturgical hymns thus emphasize the universal honor bestowed on the Mother of God, both by the seen and the unseen world.

II. Mariology in Christian East and West

a) The Theotokos in the teaching of the Orthodox Church

On the two qualities of the Mother of God, θεοτοκία and αειπαρθενία, are founded on her *most-veneration or supra-veneration*, as it is called in Orthodox theology. Referring to the theotokia of the Mother of God, in the eighth century, St. John of Damascus shows the following:

¹⁸ Paul EVDOKHIMOV, *Woman and the Salvation of the World. A Christian Anthropology on the Charisms of Women*, tr. Anthony p. Gytel, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, N.Y., 1994, p. 120.

¹⁹ Jaroslav PELIKAN, *Fecioara Maria de-a lungul secolelor. Locul ei în istoria culturii*, p. 70.

²⁰ *Mineiul pe Iulie*, day 28, Matins, The 6th ode, at Now and ever..., Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2002, p. 342. In another liturgical hymn we hear in the same way: “As one who is the Mother of God, to you the chief angels and the honest prophets with the apostles serve with honor, seeing you bring prayers to the Lord for the world. Save the city and the people who hope in you” (*Mineiul pe Octombrie*, Day 1, The Protection of the Mother of God Service, Matins, The 5th ode, troparion 2, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2004, p. 31).

²¹ *Mineiul pe Octombrie*, Day 12, Matins, The 8th ode, at Now and ever..., p. 177: “Let us, together with the disembodied bodies, with the armies of the martyrs, with the apostles, with all the prophets, praise in good faith the Mistress, who rules over all creatures, as one who is holier than the Cherubim and the only pure one, the Mother of God, exalting Christ forever and ever”.

“We rightly call the Virgin Mary Theotokos, because this name encompasses the whole mystery of the divine economy. For if the one who gave birth to Christ is Teotokos, then the One who was born is truly God and man at the same time. ... The name Theotokos truly means the only being and the two ways of conception and the two natures of our Lord Jesus Christ”²².

Referring to the quality of the Theotokos to be the Mother of God, Father Dumitru Stăniloae shows that her attribute

“expresses the relationship of deep intimacy that has been established between the Virgin Mary and the Son of God incarnate. If the word Virgin indicates more the divine initiative in the incarnation of the Son, the words of Mother and Mother of God give back its role and positive relationship with the One who was incarnated”²³.

Regarding the Theotokos *aeiparthenia*, that is, her quality of everlasting virginity or her perfect holiness, St. Gregory of Nyssa calls her: “Mary without spot”²⁴. In his book *Against Helvidius*, written in 383, Blessed Jerome affirms the Theotokos everlasting virginity, showing that “the mother of the Son of God, who was a mother before she was bride, continued to be a virgin even after she gave birth to her Son”²⁵. Regarding the conception of the Savior in the womb of the Mother of God and her virginal purity which she kept before, during and after the birth, Saint Ephrem the Syrian shows the following: “As the Lord made his entrance through the closed gates, so He came out of the womb of the Virgin, for she is truly the Virgin and truly gave birth without pain”²⁶. As Father Dumitru Stăniloae appreciates: “not admitting that Mary gave birth to Jesus as a

²² Sfântul IOAN DAMASCHINUL, *Credința ortodoxă*, III, 12, PG 94, 1029-1032.

²³ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Iisus Hristos sau Restaurarea omului*, p. 165.

²⁴ Sfântul GRIGORIE DE NYSSA, *Despre feciorie* 2, PG 46, 324.

²⁵ Fericitul IERONIM, *Împotriva lui Helvidius*, 2, quoted by Jaroslav Pelikan, *Fecioara Maria de-a lungul secolelor. Locul ei în istoria culturii*, p. 119.

²⁶ Sf. EFREM SIRUL, quoted by Anca Manolache, *Pași spre mântuire, Eseuri și studii teologice*, Editura Saeculum I. O., București, 2002, p. 69.

Virgin means not acknowledging that His subject was not the product of immanence. And this means the denial of Revelation²⁷. Therefore,

“the infant born in virgin purity had to remain pure from any state of lust; she had to remain the Virgin in her whole existence as the Mother of Jesus Christ, because the connection between mother and child is so intimate that even after birth there is a continuous spiritual transmission from her to him²⁸.”

Regarding the holiness of the Mother of God, which derives from her eternal virginity, the theologian Alexis Kniaseff shows the following:

“The character of this holiness is as easy to accept as it is mysterious. For the whole human history waited for the Virgin, so that the highest rank of holiness - represented by the Thrones, Cherubim, and Seraphim, also known in the Mosaic religion - may remain behind a representative of the human kind, and also a woman. But if the greatest virtue is love (including humility), the Virgin Mary has penetrated between and above the angelic wings, in her total attachment to God²⁹.”

For “once the Holy Spirit came upon her, it remained over, and in Mary. She remained the living temple of the Spirit³⁰. Therefore, the Mother of God “was sanctified by her full attachment to God and became more and more holy by the descent of the Spirit upon her and in her, and then more and more holy by dwelling in her the divinity of the Word³¹. Referring to the purity and everlasting virginity of the Mother of God, St. Gregory of Nyssa calls her “the spotless Mary (αμικαντος)”³².

Therefore, in theological terms the worship brought to the Mother of God in the Orthodox Church is also called *hyperdoulia* (υπερδουλια), that is *supra-veneration* or *most veneration*, unlike the veneration we bring

²⁷ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Iisus Hristos sau Restaurarea omului*, ediția a doua, Editura Omniscope, Craiova, 1993, p. 159.

²⁸ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Iisus Hristos sau Restaurarea omului*, p. 162.

²⁹ Anca MANOLACHE, *Pași spre mântuire*, p. 71.

³⁰ Alexis KNIASEFF, *Cours de Mariologie*, p. 54.

³¹ Anca MANOLACHE, *Pași spre mântuire*, p. 72.

³² Sf. GRIGORIE DE NYSSA, *Despre feciorie 2*, PG 46, 324.

to the other saints of the Church, whom we call simple *doulia* (δουλία), that is *veneration* or *honor*³³. Through this cult of hyperdoulia, the highest honor that the Church brings to the Mother of God is expressed, showing the supreme level the Eternal Virgin is found at. Emphasizing the connection between the worship of God (λατρεία) and the veneration of the saints (δουλία), or the super-veneration of the Theotokos (υπερδουλία), St. John of Damascus says that:

“He who honors the martyr honors God, for Whom the martyr suffered martyrdom. He who worships the apostle of Christ worships the One who sent the apostle. He who prostrates himself before the Mother of God is evidently bringing honor to her Son, for there is no other God but One, the One known and worshiped in the Trinity”³⁴.

The distinction that St. John of Damascus made in the eighth century between *adoration* (λατρεία) and *honor* or *veneration* (δουλεία) it is not relevant enough to express the honor due to the Mother of God, certainly less than it deserves to God, but far greater than it deserves to an ordinary human being and greater than to any other saint. Therefore, the Mother of God cannot be worshiped as *latreia*, which is brought absolutely only to God, but deserves more than worship of *doulia*. That is why the most appropriate term for the worship that belongs to the Mother of God is *hyperdoulia*³⁵.

For Orthodox Christians, *the Theotokos is the intercessor for our salvation to her Christ-Son*. This teaching is in consensus with the whole patristic teaching of the Church. Thus, emphasizing the role of mediator of the Mother of God, Saint Andrew of Crete addresses her in such words: “You intercede with the Lord for the common creature. Until you were on earth, a small part of the earth held you. After you moved from the

³³ Prof. Dr. Ene BRANIȘTE, *Liturgica Generală*, pp. 60-61.

³⁴ LEONTIE AL NEAPOLEI din insula Cipru, *Contra iudeilor, despre închinarea la Crucea lui Hristos, la icoanele sfinților, a unora către alții și despre moaștele sfinților*, quoted by Sfântul IOAN DAMASHINUL, *Cele trei tratate contra iconoclaștilor, Mărturie despre icoane ale sfinților și cinstiților părinți din vechime*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2016, p. 108.

³⁵ Jean Arthur CHOLLER, “Hyperdoulia”, in: *Dictionnaire de Theologie Catholique*, t. 3, col. 2404-2427.

earth, everyone has you as intercessor of forgiveness”³⁶. In her capacity as intercessor of our salvation to her Son, “we ask the Blessed Virgin Mary not only to pray for us, but also to help us, as the Mother of the Son of God, since it is connected with her special intercession for us”³⁷. The intercession and help we can receive from the Theotokos is possible for us believers, as she, sitting in heaven with the Savior Christ has “on the one hand maternal authority over Him when she prays for us, and on the other hand, motherly tenderness for our difficulties”³⁸.

The Orthodox Church recorded in its piety “the hymns of the faithful, the theological conclusions of the Church Fathers and the prayers of the saints, gathering them all together with the data of Scripture and thus achieving a coherent doctrine without exaggeration”³⁹ by which it honors the Mother of God. Thus, the hymnography and writings of the Holy Fathers of the Church “fill the lack of details that Scripture has silenced for various reasons. The Church of Tradition thus knows a wealth of references to the Mother of God”⁴⁰.

b) The Theotokos in the teaching of the Christian West

- The Roman-Catholic teaching

Eastern Mariology, which has its origins in the writings of the Greek Fathers and in Byzantine Christianity, will also have a decisive influence on the Western conception of the Virgin Mary during the patristic period and the early Middle Ages. At that time, the Church Fathers, like Ambrose of Milan, acted as transmitters of Greek mariology for the Western Churches⁴¹. Thus, the Great Catechism of 1648 shows the following on the Mother of God: “Christ the Son of God became man, assuming a true body and a rational soul, being conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, from her substance, born of her, and yet without sin”⁴².

³⁶ Sf. ANDREI CRITEANUL, *Homilie in Nativitatem*, PG 97, 896.

³⁷ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 3, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe, București, 1997, p. 318.

³⁸ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Iisus Hristos sau Restaurarea omului*, p. 167.

³⁹ Anca MANOLACHE, *Pași spre mântuire*, pp. 51-52.

⁴⁰ Anca MANOLACHE, *Pași spre mântuire*, p. 65.

⁴¹ Jaroslav PELIKAN, *Fecioara Maria de-a lungul secolelor. Locul ei în istoria culturii*, p. 108.

⁴² *Larger catechism*, point 37, in: *School of Faith*, p. 191, quoted by Jaroslav PELIKAN, *Fecioara Maria de-a lungul secolelor. Locul ei în istoria culturii*, p. 158.

Although the Christian West largely adopted the Mariological vision of the Orthodox East, it was also the author of new teachings and names of the Blessed Virgin, creating some new dogmas, unknown to early Christianity.

To begin with, we mention a favorite appointment given in the Christian West to the Mother of God, namely that of *Mater Dolorosa*. This name is expressed by the Western theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, as follows: “She suffers with her Son, and she experiences His death in her soul”⁴³.

The second name given to the Mother of God by the Christian West is that of *Mediatrix*, by this title being indicated her position of eternal mediator between Christ and mankind. “She is seen as the Mediatrix between man and Christ; ... She was chosen by God for this mission to plead the cause of mankind before her Son...”⁴⁴. According to this attribute “The Virgin Mary enjoys a unique holiness”⁴⁵.

Finally, the Mother of God is known in the Christian West as the *Mother of the Church*. According to the Roman Catholic catechism, “she is truly the Mother of the members of Christ, because through love she cooperated to the birth of the faithful in the Church, who are the members of this Head”⁴⁶. So, the Mother of God appears to Roman Catholics as “Mary - Mother of Christ, Mother of the Church”⁴⁷.

Roman-Catholicism has a specific teaching about the Mother of God - the dogma regarding *immaculate conception of Mary, imaculata conceptio* or her birth from St Anna free from the original sin. According to the Roman Catholic catechism: “Over the centuries the Church has understood that Mary, «the one full of grace» from God (Luke 1, 28), had been redeemed since her birth”⁴⁸. In conclusion, the Roman Catholic Catechism shows that “she is completely free from the stain of ancestral sin and has remained

⁴³ Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *The Threefold Garland: The World's Salvation in Mary Prayer*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1982, p. 102.

⁴⁴ Jaroslav PELIKAN, *Fecioara Maria de-a lungul secolelor. Locul ei în istoria culturii*, p. 133.

⁴⁵ Jaroslav PELIKAN, *Fecioara Maria de-a lungul secolelor. Locul ei în istoria culturii*, p. 135.

⁴⁶ *Lumen gentium*, 53, *Catehismul Bisericii Catolice*, Arhiepiscopia Romano-Catolică de București, 1993, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, p. 216.

⁴⁷ Papa Paul al VI-lea, *Cuvântare*, 21 noiembrie 1964, quoted in *Catehismul Bisericii Catolice*, p. 216.

⁴⁸ *Catehismul Bisericii Catolice*, p. 114.

untouched by any personal sin throughout her life”⁴⁹. In the Catholic world, this teaching about the Mother of God was initially challenged by Bernard de Clairvaux, Thomas Aquinas, and their followers, who showed that if the Virgin Mary had been born without original sin, then there would have been no need to be saved, which would fall from “the dignity of Christ as the universal Savior of all”⁵⁰. With all these voices opposing with this teaching, at the 36th session of the Basel Council on December 18, 1439, it was decided that the teaching of the Immaculate Conception is “a perfectly justified doctrine, according to the Catholic faith, the worship of the Church, right judgment and Holy Scripture”. It was recommended that this doctrine be “approved, supported, and shared by all Catholics”⁵¹ and it was forbidden to preach against her. Thus, by the end of the fifteenth century, the doctrine of the immaculate conception of Mary had become “generally accepted in Western Christianity, shared by believers, and preached by theologians”⁵². At the Council of Trent, which took place between 1545 and 1563 to respond, among other things, to Protestant attacks on Catholic doctrine, including the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception and other teachings that appeared after the conclusion of the biblical canon related to the Virgin Mary, the debates on the original sin stressed the need for taking into account the immaculate conception too⁵³. When, in one of the draft decrees for the seventh session of the Council of Trent, original sin was spoken of as being transmitted to “the whole human race according to universal law”⁵⁴, the implications of this statement for the doctrine of the Virgin Mary led to its removal. Finally, on the occasion of the 14th session, a new paragraph was inserted at the end of the decree stating that it was not the Council’s intention to include the Virgin Mary in this statement on the universality of original sin. The decisions regarding the Virgin promulgated by Pope Sixtus IV in 1477 and 1483 were cited in this

⁴⁹ *Catehismul Bisericii Catolice*, p. 117.

⁵⁰ Jaroslav PELIKAN, *Fecioara Maria de-a lungul secolelor. Locul ei în istoria culturii*, p. 194.

⁵¹ Jaroslav PELIKAN, *Fecioara Maria de-a lungul secolelor. Locul ei în istoria culturii*, p. 197.

⁵² Jaroslav PELIKAN, *Fecioara Maria de-a lungul secolelor. Locul ei în istoria culturii*, p. 198.

⁵³ *The Christian Tradition*, 4, p. 302-303.

⁵⁴ DENZINGER-SCHONMETZER, *Enchiridion Symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, 2803 – 4, quoted by Jaroslav PELIKAN, *Fecioara Maria de-a lungul secolelor. Locul ei în istoria culturii*, p. 198.

sense, but without defining the immaculate conception as a dogma, as an article of faith for the whole Church. This will not happen until December 8, 1854, through the bull *Ineffabilis Deus* of Pope Pius IX, which states:

“The doctrine that the Blessed Virgin Mary was spared the original sin from the first moment of her conception, by a unique grace and privilege granted by God, out of consideration for the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the nation human being, has been revealed by God and must therefore be shared by all believers”⁵⁵.

Therefore, this unique state of holiness, specific only to the Virgin Mary and no other mortal, “comes entirely from Christ; she was eminently redeemed for the merits of her Son”⁵⁶. Four years later, on March 25, 1858, in the town of Lourdes in the Pyrenees, a “charming lady” appeared to a young peasant, Bernadette Soubirous, telling her in her dialect: “I am the Immaculate Conception”⁵⁷. The promulgation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception by Pope Pius IX sparked lively controversy from both Eastern Orthodoxy and Western Protestantism⁵⁸.

Another Roman Catholic teaching, unknown to early Christianity, is that of the *Mother of God as co-redeemer*, or *Co-redemptrix*, which refers to the contribution of the Mother of God to the work of salvation together with her Son, so that she may be called by this term. The Roman Catholic catechism defines the role of the Theotokos as a co-redeemer in the following statement: “Mary collaborates in all the work that her Son must fulfill. She is Mother everywhere where He is the Savior and Head of the mystical body”⁵⁹. This teaching was promulgated in the West from the 15th century. According to this teaching, the Virgin Mary worked together not only on the incarnation of the Son of God, but also on his Sacrifice on the Cross, taking part in His sufferings and appropriating them. Christ gave His Mother the “merits” that belonged to Him, so that the Mother of

⁵⁵ DENZINGER-SCHONMETZER, *Enchiridion Symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, 2803 – 125, quoted in *Catehismul Bisericii Catolice*, p. 114.

⁵⁶ *Catehismul Bisericii Catolice*, p. 114.

⁵⁷ See Jaroslav PELIKAN, *Fecioara Maria de-a lungul secolelor. Locul ei în istoria culturii*, pp. 182, 199.

⁵⁸ Jaroslav PELIKAN, *Fecioara Maria de-a lungul secolelor. Locul ei în istoria culturii*, p. 199.

⁵⁹ *Catehismul Bisericii Catolice*, p. 218.

God could give to all the gifts that Christ acquired through His death and Blood. Therefore, the teaching about the Mother of God as co-savior is closely related to the theory of “merits” according to which God the Father gave grace to the Son for the work he did. And Christ gave these gifts to His Mother, because she “suffered” with Him at His Crucifixion⁶⁰.

Finally, the last Marian teaching that distinguishes Roman Catholicism from the Orthodox East is the teaching on the *Assumption of the Mother of God to heaven with her body*. About this, the Roman Catholic Catechism shows:

“Finally, the Blessed Virgin ... having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things, so that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords and conqueror of sin and death”⁶¹.

Therefore, “the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin is a singular participation in her Son’s Resurrection and an anticipation of the resurrection of other Christians”⁶². This dogma was promulgated in the middle of the twentieth century, being considered the last or most recent teaching adopted by Roman Catholics. Thus, on November 1, 1950, by the bull of Pope Pius XII, entitled *Munificentissimus Deus*⁶³ the solemn proclamation of the ascension of the Virgin Mary with the body to heaven took place. This teaching thus became official, after it had long been shared by both laymen and theologians. The following were stipulated in this papal bull: “the Immaculate Mother of God, *the ever-Virgin Mary*, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory”⁶⁴. Following his bull, Pope Pius XII states, using the word *αναστασις*, that

⁶⁰ See IEROTHEOS, Mitropolit al Nafpaktosului, *Praznicele Maicii Domnului – o perspectivă istorică și teologică*, pp. 500-501.

⁶¹ *Lumen gentium*, 59; See also The proclamation by Pope Pius XII, in 1950, of the dogma of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in DENZINGER-SCHONMETZER, *Enchiridion Symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, 3903 – 501, quoted in *Catehismul Bisericii Catolice*, p. 216.

⁶² *Catehismul Bisericii Catolice*, p. 216.

⁶³ See Karl RAHNER, “The Interpretation of the dogma of the Assumption”, in: *Theological Investigations*, Helicon Press, Baltimore, 1961, pp. 215-227.

⁶⁴ DENZINGER-SCHONMETZER, *Enchiridion Symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, 3903, quoted by Jaroslav PELIKAN, *Fecioara Maria de-a lungul secolelor. Locul ei în istoria culturii*, p. 200.

“Consequently, just as the glorious resurrection of Christ was an essential part and the final sign of this victory, so that struggle which was common to the Blessed Virgin and her divine Son should be brought to a close by the glorification of her virginal body”⁶⁵.

Thus, from 1950 it became mandatory for Roman Catholics to believe and preach what Sister Maria de Jesus de Agreda had already stated in 1670 in her writing *The Life of the Virgin Mother of God*, namely, that the Mother of God

“was raised up at the right hand of her Son and of the true God and seated on the same royal throne as the Most Holy Trinity, where neither men, nor angels, nor seraphim have ever arrived, nor will they ever arrive in the age to come. This is the greatest privilege granted to our Mistress and Queen: that of being seated on the same throne with the Divine Persons, as Empress, while the rest of the people are only servants of the Supreme King”⁶⁶.

The promulgation of this papal bull provoked rumors among Protestant theologians, both in terms of doctrinal content and dogmatic authority⁶⁷. The dogma *Munificentissimus Deus* was seen as an act that deepened the differences between Christians, especially as its promulgation came at a time when the ecumenical movement was trying to end the old conflicts between the Eastern Church and Roman Catholicism and even between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism⁶⁸. The essential argument against this dogma was the fact that the New Testament and the tradition of the early Church do not mention anything about the end of the earthly journey of the Mother of God, although many legends appeared on this subject throughout history⁶⁹.

⁶⁵ Walter J. BURGHARDT, “The Testimony of the Patristic Age Concerning Mary’s Death”, in: *Marian Studies*, vol. 8, 1957, pp. 58-59.

⁶⁶ Maria DE AGREDA, *Vida de la Virgen Maria segun la Venerable Sor Maria de Jesus de Agreda* (Madrid, 1670), Montanery Simon, Barcelona, 1899, p. 365.

⁶⁷ See Raymond WINCH and Victor BENNETT, *The Assumption of Our Lady and the Catholic Theology*, Macmillan, Londra, 1950.

⁶⁸ Jaroslav PELIKAN, *Fecioara Maria de-a lungul secolelor. Locul ei în istoria culturii*, p. 201.

⁶⁹ On the silence of the Scriptures concerning the ascension to heaven with the body of the

- *The teaching of the reformers*

In 1962, Walter Tappolet created a remarkable collection entitled *The Marian Praise of the Reformers*, a work that brings together texts from the great Reformed theologians Luther, Calvin and Zwingli⁷⁰, representing the most conclusive proof of the orthodoxy of Protestant Mariology, at least in its beginnings⁷¹. From its content we understand that at the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, the Mother of God had her role clearly defined in the economy of the salvation of the human race in the thinking of the three great representatives of the reform movement. Thus, Zwingli called Mary “the most important creature after her Son” and “Mother of God”, and Balthazar Hubmaier always affirmed her virginity⁷². Also, both in his private writings and in his public sermons, Martin Luther calls the Virgin Mary “Virgin, both before and after birth”⁷³. In one of his sermons from 1521, at the end of the *Interpretation on Magnificat*, Luther exclaimed: “May the Lord grant this to us, through the intercession and for the sake of His Mother Mary!”⁷⁴. Also, in his only confession of faith that was officially adopted by Lutherans and included in the official collection *The Book of Concord* from 1580, in *The Smalcald Articles* from 1537, in the Latin text Martin Luther shows that the conception of Christ the Son of God was made: “from Mary, pure, holy and everlasting Virgin” (*ex Maria pura, sancta, Semper Virgine*)⁷⁵.

From all the quoted texts it can be easily observed that at the beginning, the reformers kept the orthodox character of their language and teaching about the Virgin Mary, speaking with great warmth and enthusiasm about her⁷⁶.

Mother of God see O. FALLER, *De priorum saeculorum silentio circa Assumptionem Beatae Mariae Virginis*, Gregorian University, Roma, 1946.

⁷⁰ Walter TAPPOLET (ed.), *Das Marienlob der Reformatoren*, Katzmann Verlag, Tübingen, 1962.

⁷¹ *Catehismul Bisericii Catolice*, p. 216.

⁷² *The Christian Tradition*, vol. 4, p. 261.

⁷³ LUTHER, “Sermon on the Presentation of Christ in the Temple”, in: *Luther’s Works*, volume 52, *Sermons II*, Luther’s Works (Augsburg) Hardcover, June 1, 1974, pp. 688-699.

⁷⁴ Martin LUTHER, “Sermon on the Mount and the Magnificat”, in: *Luther’s Works*, vol.21, Concordia, Kindle Edition, p. 355.

⁷⁵ “Smalcald Articles”, I, 4, in: *Die Bekenntnis schrift ender evangelish-lutherischen Kirche*, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1952, p. 414.

⁷⁶ Jaroslav PELIKAN, *Fecioara Maria de-a lungul secolelor. Locul ei în istoria culturii*, p. 158.

III. Conclusions

1. In the Synaxarion of the Church, no saint is given a more chosen honor than that which is given to the Blessed Virgin. The Theotokos occupies a central place in the life of the Church, together with Christ, His Son.

2. The Mother of God has been honored since the beginning of Christianity, even if her veneration was manifested in the first three centuries in discreet forms, especially in the private worship of every Christian in the first Christian community in Jerusalem, or around his tomb in the Garden of Gethsemane. However, the piety of the first Christians towards the Mother of God manifested itself in the church service even before the 3rd century, there are documents that recall the prayers addressed to the Virgin from the 3rd-4th centuries.

3. The veneration of the Theotokos in the public cult of the Church and a proper development of this cult can be noticed after the freedom granted by the Holy Emperor Constantine the Great to Christendom. This explains the fact that in the 4th century there was already a worship of the Mother of God in the Church, a fact proved by the laudatory speeches and homilies of the great Fathers from this century.

4. The Theotokos worship, existing since the beginning of the Christian life in the Church, experienced an explosive development in the first half of the 5th century, due to the dioprosopist heresy of Nestorius. The Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in 431 condemned this heresy, formulating the Orthodox teaching on the Mother of God, emphasizing the two major qualities of the Mother of God: Mother of God and ever-virgin. After this synod, from the 5th century, the first feasts of the Mother of God appear.

5. In the neo-patristic period, the worship of the Mother of God experienced the same flowering as in the patristic ages. The most important Holy Fathers who theologized about the Mother of God in the neo-patristic period are: Theophanes of Nicaea, Gregory Palamas and Nicholas Cabasila.

6. The worship of the Mother of God transcends the boundaries of her veneration only by the believers in this world, as she is praised by angels, apostles, and martyrs alike. From this perspective, the liturgical hymns emphasize the universal honor bestowed on the Theotokos, both by the seen and the unseen world.

7. *Theotokia*, that is, the quality of the Mother of God to be the God-Bearer and *aeiparthenia*, that is her ever virginity is the basis of what is called in Orthodox theology *hyperdoulia*, her *most honoring or super-veneration*. Through this cult of *hyperdoulia*, the highest honor that the Church brings to the Mother of God is expressed, showing the supreme level the Eternal Virgin is found at. For Orthodox Christians, *the Mother of God is the intercessor to her Christ-Son, for our salvation*. This teaching is in consensus with the whole patristic teaching of the Church.

8. Eastern Mariology, which has its origins in the writings of the Greek Fathers and in Byzantine Christianity, will also have a decisive influence on the Western conception of the Virgin Mary during the patristic period and the early Middle Ages. Although the Christian West largely adopted the Mariological vision of the Orthodox East, he was also the author of new teachings and names of the Blessed Virgin, creating some new teachings, unknown to early Christianity, such as: Mother of God - *Mater Dolorosa*; *Mediatrix*, or her position of eternal mediator between Christ and mankind; *Mother of the Church*. Other Roman Catholic teachings were completely unknown to the Universal Church in the first millennium. Among these we mention: *the immaculate conception of Mary* or *imaculata conceptio*, that is, her birth from the Holy Fathers Joachim and Anna, without inheriting ancestral sin and *The Mother of God co-redeemer*, or *Co-redemtrix*, which refers to the contribution of the Mother of God to the work of salvation together with her Son. All these teachings were formulated in the Roman Catholic world between the 15th – 20th centuries, being absolutely unknown to the early Church.

9. We note in particular that in the Christian West dominated by the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, the role of the Mother of God in the economy of salvation of mankind was highlighted from the beginning of this movement. Thus, from the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, the Mother of God had her role clearly delimited in the economy of the salvation of the human race from the three great representatives of the reform movement: Luther, Calvin and Zvingli. It is well known that the Reformers preserved in the beginning the orthodox character of their language and teaching about the Virgin Mary, speaking with great warmth and enthusiasm about her. Subsequently, the Reformed teaching degenerated, the neo-reform movement completely denying the qualities and role of the Mother of God in the work of saving the world.