

**Remus RUS, Rev. Adrian CAZACU, ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟΣ.
Theological Encyclopedia, printed with the blessing of His
Eminence Calinic, Archbishop of Suceava and Rădăuți,
Crimca Publishing House, Suceava, 2023, 712 pp.**

The result of long and devoted work, undoubtedly intertwined with prayer and grounded in the sincere intention to offer readers a valuable work in terms of content and clarity of expression, the encyclopedia authored by Professor Remus Rus and Father Adrian Cazacu reveals an exhaustive approach, although the authors acknowledge that “the present work is not all-encompassing” (p. 20).

With exceptional graphic quality, published by Crimca Publishing House in collaboration with the design team WINCERO, the encyclopedia represents a jewel of Romanian ecclesiastical printing. The cover features a remarkable icon of the Most Pure Mother with the Child held in her palms, surrounded by a choir of seraphim arranged in a harmoniously painted circle, beneath which stands the concept ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟΣ, the most perfect expression of the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon, referring to the Mother of God.

The astute mind of the reader will notice the three stars specific to Byzantine Mariological iconography, a symbol of Mary’s perpetual virginity, doxologically expressed in a hymn from the Seventh Ode of the Second Paraklesis to the Mother of God: “Virgin you were before childbirth, and in childbirth, you were again a virgin, and after childbirth, you remained ever-virgin; therefore, we bless you forevermore”.

Based on an extensive bibliography, the authors provide researchers with a list of abbreviations used (pp. 5–12), followed by a detailed enumeration of all twelve feasts of the Mother of God as they are „mentioned in the liturgical books of the Orthodox Church” (p. 13).

The preface of the encyclopedia, written by His Grace Damaschin Dorneanul, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Suceava and Rădăuți, together with the Foreword—a true introductory study by the authors with profound theological insights—serves as a guide to navigating

this extensive work. It directs readers through their journey in search of teachings about the Mother of God, clearly expressed and alphabetically organized within the over 650 pages.

An intriguing observation in the Foreword is the novel analogy between the Virgin Mother and the patriarch Abraham: “Her faith, obedience, and submission, prefigured by the faith, obedience, and submission of Abraham, materialize in her supreme acceptance of the divine plan” (p. 30). “Abraham receives a reward from God, while (...) Mary receives her own blessing. (...) If Abraham was blessed as the father of many nations, Mary will become the mother of all those restored in Christ” (p. 31). “Just as Abraham received and hosted in his tent the three Men, a mystical revelation of the one God in three Persons, Mary shelters in her pure womb the Son and Word of God” (pp. 32–33).

The work stands out for the accuracy of its information and its comprehensive bibliographic references, included both throughout the text and at the end of each article, encompassing primary sources as well as updated specialized studies. Each article is meticulously crafted, providing readers with a profound and well-documented understanding of the subjects addressed.

Regarding patristic texts, the authors note: “Greek texts have been transliterated. For Romanian translations, we have used existing ones, both older (Fathers and Ecclesiastical Writers) and more recent (those published by Deisis Publishing House), always indicating the source used. However, for the most part, we have strived to produce our own translations” (p. 20).

The encyclopedia offers an interdisciplinary approach, blending biblical, dogmatic, and liturgical theology with history, iconographic art, and other related fields to provide a complete and complex portrayal of the Virgin Mary and the devotion dedicated to her. From scriptural testimonies to cultural and artistic impact, the work traces a fascinating journey of the role of the Mother of God in Christian spirituality.

From the very beginning, the authors reveal the purpose of this exceptional work:

“We conceived this work out of a desire to provide those interested with a necessary guide to understanding the Orthodox Church’s

teaching about the Most Holy Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, seeking to highlight how the Church has shaped, developed, and evaluated the unique status and role that the Most Holy Virgin Mary has had and continues to have in the work of salvation of humanity, accomplished by her only Son and the Son of God, our Savior Jesus Christ” (p. 19).

Readers, carefully going through the texts of the encyclopedia, will notice a thoughtfully structured analysis of the works of the Holy Fathers and Church writers, of post-patristic theologians, and of authors who maintained the doctrinal coherence specific to Eastern Christianity. At the same time, they will identify the ideas of “certain medieval reformers whose reluctance toward the veneration of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, within the broader rejection of the veneration of saints, was evident” (p. 19). Perspectives from authors in the Monophysite or Miaphysite tradition are also included, who “propose a teaching about the Most Holy Virgin Mary that is in harmony with that of the undivided Church” (p. 19).

The work also discusses the doctrinal additions specific to Western Christianity, which diverge from patristic teaching. By presenting these perspectives, the encyclopedia contributes to strengthening ecumenical dialogue, making it an exceptionally valuable tool.

Also noteworthy is the article entitled “The Holy Virgin Mary in Islam” (pp. 396–404), which places the book in the broader context of interreligious dialogue.

Researchers in the field of Mariology will find in this work not only a valuable starting point with exceptionally broad horizons but also new directions for exploration. The complexity of the articles, rooted in the simplicity of presenting the teachings specific to each Holy Father, ecclesiastical writer, or heterodox theologian, is truly enlightening.

Beyond its academic contribution, theologians will identify in this work a pronounced apologetic role, as it provides a solid foundation for defending the veneration of the Mother of God. Biblical and patristic arguments are presented in an accessible manner, making them easy to identify and utilize.

A distinctive focus within the succession of articles is the interpretation of the cult of the Mother of God. The encyclopedia discusses the major feasts dedicated to the Virgin Mary, the most well-known hymnographic compositions — the Akathist and the Paraklesis — and includes archaeological and epigraphic testimonies.

Of particular note are references to the role of the *Protoevangelium of James* (pp. 561–565), part of the body of writings known as apocrypha, in iconography and the Church’s veneration. The authors emphasize that “the Protoevangelium is not merely a simple history of the life and activity of the Most Holy Virgin. It contains a series of elements that help us discern an authentic doctrine about the Most Holy Virgin Mary, the Mother of God”. The use of this text by Church Writers and Fathers, especially by St. Maximus the Confessor in *The Life of the Mother of God*, underscores its importance in educating and strengthening the faith.

Regarding the stylistic features of the encyclopedia, one can observe its clarity, eloquence, conciseness, synthesis ability, pertinence of conclusions, and its invitation to deeper study by opening new perspectives.

Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia is more than a book — it is an invitation to profound reflection on the mystery of the Virgin Mary and her role in the history of salvation. Through its comprehensive synthesis, the encyclopedia becomes a benchmark for theologians, researchers, students, and all believers who wish to delve deeper into the Orthodox teaching about the Mother of God.

With its interdisciplinary approach, elegant style, and academic rigor, this work stands among the most significant contemporary theological contributions. It not only illuminates the Christian tradition dedicated to the Mother of God but also renews interest in Mariological spirituality in a constantly changing world. This essential book, as noted by His Grace Damaschin Dorneanul, enriches both the mind and the soul.

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