

KRZYSZTOF LEŚNIEWSKI

THE THEOTOKOS AND GOD IN ORTHODOX SPIRITUALITY

Orthodox Mariology is not a theological discipline of the kind found in Roman Catholic Theological Departments or Seminaries. Orthodox Christians have never developed a separate Mariological ‘theology’ They always treat it as an inseparable part of Christology, Pneumatology and ecclesiology¹ Indeed, “there is no Christian theology without permanent relation to the person and role of the Holy Virgin in the history of salvation”²

For centuries, devotion to the Theotokos³ has penetrated the spiritual life of the Eastern Church⁴ This devotion to the Mother of God corresponds

Dr. Krzysztof LEŚNIEWSKI – Assistant Professor at the Ecumenical Institute of the Catholic University of Lublin; address for correspondence: ul. Stefana Kisielewskiego 6/32, PL 20-865 Lublin; e-mail: lesni@kul.lublin.pl.

¹ Cf. V L o s s k y. *Panagia*. In: *In the Image and Likeness of God*. Ed. J.H. Erickson and T.E. Bird. Crestwood, NY 1985 p. 195.

² N. N i s s i o t i s. *Marie dans la théologie orthodoxe*. “Concilium. Revue Internationale de Théologie” 19:1983 cah. 188 p. 60.

³ The title *Theotokos* (“God-bearing”) has been used from the 3rd century. It appeared in a troparion and in a text of Hippolytus of Rome. One can find it in *Discourses against the Arians* of St. Athanasios of Alexandria. For St. Gregory of Nazianzos (PG 37, 177C – 180A) the title *Theotokos* is very important as one of the foundation of Christian faith: “If anyone does not confess that the Virgin Mary is Theotokos, he is found to be far from God! Whoever maintains that Christ passed through the Virgin as through a channel and was not fashioned in her in a manner at the same time divine and human – in a divine manner because [the conception occurred] without a man, in a human manner because Christ developed in her according to the principles of nature – is likewise godless. Whoever maintains that the human being was formed first, and later God descended upon him, is to be condemned” Cf. G. P o d s k a l s k y. *Theotokos*. In: *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*. Ed. in chief A.P. Kazhdan. Vol. 3. New York–Oxford 1991 p. 2070.

⁴ Father John M e y e n d o r f f, a man of broad patristic learning, wrote that “the boundless expressions of Marian piety and devotion [...] represent a legitimate and organic way

with the mentality of the East and forms an essential characteristic of the Eastern tradition of piety⁵ Orthodox spirituality is first of all a liturgical spirituality and as such its basis consists in presenting an authentic image of the Theotokos in the consciousness of the faithful⁶ In the liturgical spirituality, like in the cradle, matured monastic spirituality, daily piety of the Orthodox faithful and the theological reflections of the Fathers of the Church⁷

The great importance of the Theotokos in Orthodox spirituality can be drawn from the fact four of the Twelve Great Feast are devoted specifically to Her:

- The Birth of our Most Holy Lady the Theotokos (8 September),
- The Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple (21 November),
- The Annunciation of the Most Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary (25 March),
- The Dormition of our Most Holy Lady the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary (15 August).

Apart from these there is a great number of festivals of local importance which are connected with devotion to the Mother of God and Her holy icons. Mariological feasts are only one aspect of the veneration of Mary, which permeates the whole worship of the Orthodox Church. One can find her commemoration at the end of each liturgical prayer. A special hymn to the Theotokos known as *Theotokíon* concludes many hymns or prayers. On Wednesdays and Fridays, the hymn to the Virgin is known as the *Stavrotheotokíon* and refers to Mary standing at the Cross⁸

The liturgical texts include many references to the person of the Mother of God and her role in salvation history⁹ They do not concentrate exclusive-

of placing the somewhat abstract concepts and fifth and sixth century Christology on the level of simple faithful” See his *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*. New York, NY p. 165.

⁵ Cf. T. Š p i d l i k. *The Spirituality of the Christian East. A Systematic Handbook*. Transl. by A.P. Gythiel. Kalamazoo, Michigan 1986 pp. 158-159.

⁶ Cf. E. B e h r S i g e l. *Mary, the Mother of God: Traditional Mariology and New Questions*. In: *The Ministry of Women in the Church*. Redondo Beach, California 1991 pp. 190-204.

⁷ B. B o b r i n s k o y. *The Mystery of the Trinity. Trinitarian Experience and Vision in the Biblical and Patristic Tradition*. Transl. by A.P. Gythiel. Crestwood, NY 1999 p. 20.

⁸ Cf. A. S c h m e m a n n. *On Mariology in Orthodoxy*. In: *The Virgin Mary. The Celebration of Faith. Sermons*. Vol. 3. Crestwood, NY 1995 pp. 61-62.

⁹ Cf. J. L e d i t. *Marie dans la liturgie byzantine*. Paris 1976 passim.

ly on the Theotokos but describe Her in relation to the Person of Christ, to the Holy Spirit and to the Holy Trinity. If one takes into account the Divine Liturgy or Orthodox theology as a whole, one can notice that it is very common to speak of the relationship between Mary and Her Son. However, it should not be forgotten that, ultimately, it is the relationship between Mary and the Holy Trinity. It is worth remembering that Orthodox liturgical texts always speak of Mary in a very figurative and suggestive way. It is for this reason that they are defined as liturgical poetry.

In liturgical texts concerning Mary we find not only dogmatic statements¹⁰ expressed poetically¹¹ but also words of love, tenderness, trust and confidence. In other words, the same expressions found in relations between human beings. Finally, one can mention that a very important aspect of Orthodox Mariology is found in iconography. The icons of the Mother of God are very important in the Orthodox Church. Their very place in the Church building – on the iconostasis and in the apse – has definite theological meaning. Over the centuries there has developed veneration for the miraculous icons of the Theotokos, and most of them have their day of liturgical celebration¹²

I. THE THEOTOKOS IN THE HISTORY OF SALVATION

The Orthodox speak about the relationship of the Theotokos and the Holy Trinity in the context of the history of salvation. According to St. John of Damascus “The name of the Mother of God contains all the history of the divine economy in this world”¹³ The work of salvation and renewal of the

¹⁰ Father Michel P o m a z a n s k y has distinguished two dogmas concerning the Most Holy Mother of God: Her Ever-Virginity and Her name ‘Theotokos’, both of which proceed from the dogma of the unity of the Person of the Lord from the moment of His Incarnation. Cf. his *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology. A Concise Exposition*. Transl. and ed. by Hieromonk Seraphim Rose. Platina, California 1983 pp. 187-191.

¹¹ “The Orthodox Church has never felt it necessary to formulate other dogmas with the purpose of setting out the content of the Ephesian proclamation in reference to Mary. Everything the Church believes about Mary is based on dogma of Ephesus and set forth in the poetic and symbolic language of its liturgical hymns of praise and glorification” (B e h r S i g e l. *Mary, the Mother of God: Traditional Mariology and New Questions* p. 190).

¹² Cf. A. S c h m e m a n n. *Mary in Eastern Liturgy*. In: *The Virgin Mary. The Celebration of Faith. Sermons*. Vol. 3. Crestwood, NY 1995 p. 87

¹³ J o h n of D a m a s c u s. *On the Orthodox Faith* III 12.

world is made by God the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. The Theotokos is at the centre of the history of salvation, as St. Gregory Palamas teaches:

She is the cause of what came before Her, the champion of what came after Her and the agent of things eternal. She is the substance of the prophets, the principles of the apostles, the firm foundation of the martyrs and the premise of the teachers of the Church. She is the glory of those upon earth, the joy of celestial beings, the adornment of all creation. She is the beginning and the source and the root of unutterable good things; she is the summit and the consummation of everything holy¹⁴

This special role of the Theotokos flows from the fact that she alone is found between God and humanity¹⁵ She was placed in a unique and exceptional relationship to the Holy Trinity, even before Incarnation, as the prospective Mother of the Incarnate Lord to carry out the final consummation of God's eternal plan¹⁶ In Orthodox devotion to the Theotokos, the perspective of salvation is uppermost. A good example of this is the Theotokion that concludes *Canticle Seven* of *The Great Canon* by St. Andrew of Crete:

We praise thee, we bless thee, we venerate thee, O Mother of God:
for thou hast given birth to One of the undivided Trinity, thy Son and God,
and thou hast opened the heavenly places to us on earth¹⁷

The Eastern liturgy stresses that Mary is *Theogennitria*, that is to say, Mary is the One who has borne God. Thanks to her the great marvel of the Son of God Who takes on human form was achieved. This is the miracle of humanity, because the Word receives from His own creature. At the decisive moment of the Annunciation, God asked from Mary "the first-fruits of His humanity, His own human nature"¹⁸

¹⁴ G r e g o r y P a l a m a s. *A Homily on the Dormition of Our Supremely Pure Lady Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary (Homily 37)*. PG 151, 472 (translation copyright by Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston, Mass.).

¹⁵ P. S h e r w o o d. *Byzantine Mariology*. "The Eastern Churches Quarterly" Vol. XIV, Winter 1962 No. 8 p. 396.

¹⁶ G. F l o r o v s k y. *The Ever-Virgin of God*. In: *Creation and Redemption* as vol. 3 of the *Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, Belmont, Mass. 1976 p. 176.

¹⁷ A n d r e w o f C r e t e. *The Great Canon*. In: *The Lenten Triodion*. Transl. from the original Greek by Mother Mary and Archimandrite Kallistos Ware. London-Boston 1978 p. 405.

¹⁸ V L o s s k y. *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*. Transl. by Ian and Irita

The Incarnation of the Word was accomplished in Her and by Her, therefore the Person of Christ is inseparable from His Mother. St. Gregory Palamas, following the tradition of the Fathers of the Church, and above all, the Divine Liturgy, does not think about the person of Mary exclusively, but about "She, who bore God" For Palamas, as for the whole Tradition of the Eastern Church, Mariology is just one, particular and necessary aspect or dimension of the Orthodox Christology, which acknowledges both the full Divinity and full humanity of Christ. Without Mary that unity could not be realized in Person of Jesus.

The Orthodox mystics constantly underline a particular vocation for Mary. St. Gregory Palamas pointed out Her special intercessory role and the relation of mutual love between the Holy Mother and Her Son:

[The Virgin Mother] only is the frontier between created and uncreated nature, and there is no man that shall come to God except he be truly illuminated through her, the Lamp truly radiant with divinity, even as the Prophet says, 'God is in the midst of her, she shall not be shaken' (Ps 46: 5). If recompense is bestowed according to the measure of love for God, and if the man who loves the Son is loved of Him and of His Father and becomes the dwelling place of Both, and They mystically abide and walk in him, as it is recorded in the Master's Gospel, who, then, will love Him more than His Mother? For, he was her only-begotten Son, and moreover she alone among women gave birth knowing no spouse, so that the love of Him that had partaken of her flesh might be shared with her twofold. And who will the only-begotten Son love more than His Mother, He that came forth from Her ineffably without a father in this last age even as He came forth from the Father without a mother before ages?¹⁹

Mary plays a very important role in the salvation of the world. This does not consist in co-redemption with Christ, rather, the point is that Mary enables Christ to fulfil His mission. By means of Her body and through Her *fiat* was the Saviour born. Sometimes in the Eastern Tradition the body of the Holy Mother has been called the medicine which cures and saves humankind.

Kesarcodi-Watson. Crestwood, NY 1989 p. 93.

¹⁹ Gregory Palamas. *A Homily on the Dormition (Homily 37)*. PG 151, 471.

II. THE THEOTOKOS AND CHRIST

The relationship between the Theotokos and Christ has an important place in the liturgical texts and in all Orthodox spirituality and theology²⁰ “The Christological doctrine,” says Georges Florovsky, “can never be accurately and adequately stated unless a very definitive teaching about the Mother of Christ has been included”²¹

The Incarnation of God the Word is a reality related to the other Divine Persons. The Orthodox Church treats the Incarnation of God as a common activity of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, though neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit is made incarnate together with the Word. Aside from the distinctiveness of the Persons of the Godhead and the fact that only the Person of the Word assumed a human body, it must be stressed that the will and activity of the Persons of the Holy Trinity remain common for each, even in relation to the Incarnation. Of course, the plenitude of God’s activity reaches its peak in Christ, in His Divine and human Persons: “For in Him the whole fullness of the deity dwells bodily” (Col 2:9)²²

God become man, at the same time, becomes his Saviour. Thanks to the Ever-Virgin Mary the ‘humanising of God’ was made possible. The union of God with humanity is an event that transcends nature. The limits of nature were overcome in the person of the Blessed Virgin and Mother of God. The limitations of created beings were negated by the Uncreated Being. The Uncreated, by His Incarnation by the Virgin, begins to exist in a mode of createdness²³ The consent of the Ever-Virgin Mary to the Incarnation of God’s Son was not only the submission of human will to God’s will but also an exceptional existential event: the Virgin was acknowledged as worthy of participating in the very life of God. Her life, all of her body’s biological functions, were identified with the life of the Incarnate Person of God the

²⁰ Of interest is Vladimir Lossky’s explanation of the importance of the Theotokos in the awareness of the Church: “It is said that all those who rise up against the appellation Theotokos – all who refuse to admit that Mary has this quality which piety ascribes to her – are not truly Christians, for they oppose the true doctrine of the Incarnation of the Word. This should demonstrate the close connection between dogma and devotion, which are inseparable in the consciousness of the Church” (*Panagia* p. 196).

²¹ Florovsky. *The Ever-Virgin of God* p. 172.

²² Ch. Yannaras. *Elements of Faith. An Introduction to Orthodox Theology*. Edinburgh 1991 p. 97.

²³ Cf. *ibid.* p. 98.

Word. The Theotokos did not 'lend' her biological functions to God the Word – a mother can not 'lend' her body to her child – but she shaped His existence from her body and her blood, in the same way, as a mother shapes the 'soul' of her child by her care, speech, caresses, and tenderness²⁴ Therefore the Word of God – the Eternal Logos – took "flesh animated by a reasonable and spiritual soul"²⁵, as is in the case of every human conception.

The Fathers of the Church, when elaborating the mystery of the Incarnation and the role of Mary in it, often use comparisons known to their listeners from situations in their earthly life. St. Symeon the New Theologian, speaking about the Incarnation of the Word, uses expressions from Chalcedonian Christology. He underlines the significance of the two natures in Christ in order to express better the plenitude of His Divinity and the plenitude of His humanity. Simultaneously, he explains the Incarnation of the Word in terms of the mystical wedding of God to the Most Holy Theotokos. He calls the Ever-Virgin Mary the Bride of the Son of God. She is all-undefiled and all-pure when compared with humanity, although she remains a human being in relation to God²⁶ The idea of the mystical wedding between God and His people is connected on the one hand with sacramental marriage, and on the other hand with the wedding of a monk with God:

God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, sent down one of His servants, I mean Gabriel the archangel, from the heights of His holy place, to declare to Mary the salutation. The angel descended from above to present the mystery to the virgin, and said to her: 'Hail, O favoured one, the Lord is with you!' [Lk 1:28]. And, together with the word of greeting, the personal, co-essential, and co-eternal Word of God the Father entered wholly into the womb of the maid, and, by the descent and co-operation of His co-essential Spirit, took on flesh endowed with intelligence and soul from her all-pure blood, and became man. Here, then, is the inexpressible union, and this the mystical marriage (*ho gamos mystikos*) of God, and thus occurred the exchange of God with men. He was united without confusion with our corruptible and wretched nature and essence Who is Himself beyond nature and super-essential. For the Virgin conceived and gave birth paradoxically from two natures – I mean the divinity and the humanity – to one Son, perfect God and perfect man, our Lord Jesus

²⁴ Cf. *ibid.* pp. 99-100.

²⁵ John of Damascus. *On the Orthodox Faith* III 46.

²⁶ Cf. Symeon the New Theologian. *First Ethical Discourse IX*. In: *On the Mystical Life: The Ethical Discourses*. Vol. 1: *The Church and the Last Things*. Transl. from the Greek and introduced by A. Golitzin. Crestwood, NY 1995 pp. 53-54.

Christ, Who neither abolished her virginity nor was ever separated from the bosom of the Father.²⁷

The Mother of God received the Holy Spirit in the Incarnation: "God the Word took flesh from the pure Theotokos and gave in its place not flesh, but the Spirit Who is by essence Holy"²⁸ God the Word was born from the Most Holy Theotokos and we, for that reason, can say that He is born also from the saints who conceived Him spiritually. Hence, there are two kinds of procreation: the fleshly and the spiritual. Their interrelations constitute the basis upon which to explain the exceptional position of the Theotokos in the work of our salvation: "Just as God, the Word of the Father, entered into the Virgin's womb – even so do we receive the Word in us, as a kind of seed, while we are being taught the faith"²⁹ Of course, we human beings can not to come to know God in the flesh (to conceive Him bodily), as it was possible for the Theotokos. Our knowledge of God is a kind of spiritual knowledge, but it is a real knowledge of God. We have in our hearts the God-Man who was conceived by the Most Holy Theotokos. His presence does not consume people with pure hearts, just as the fire of the Divinity, the Holy Spirit Himself, did not burn up the Theotokos, but it became dew from heaven and the spring of eternal life³⁰

St. Symeon the New Theologian, in his *Ethical Discourses*, speaks about the work of God in the history of mankind, while simultaneously emphasising that it was effected by the participation of the Theotokos. He explains the role of the Most Holy Ever-Virgin Mary in the mystery of salvation by referring to a typological interpretation of the Old Testament. Basically, he touches on themes developed earlier by St. Irenaeus of Lyons, namely: the old Adam and the New Adam, the old Eve and the New Eve – Mary³¹ Through the Ever-Virgin Mary, the Theotokos, the Son of God became fully man, and in that way He became similar in all respects to the first Adam. The second Adam was born in the same way, without human seed, and He redeemed the

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 54.

²⁸ S y m e o n T h e N e w T h e o l o g i a n. *Second Ethical Discourse* VII (p. 112).

²⁹ I d e m. *First Ethical Discourse* X (p. 55).

³⁰ Cf. *ibid.* pp. 55-56.

³¹ Cf. J. D a n i é l o u. *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture. A History of Early Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea*. Vol. 2. Transl. by J.A. Baker. London-Philadelphia 1973 pp. 179-183.

sin of the first man. St. Symeon the New Theologian intentionally used picturesque comparisons in order to show a typical typology of births. The first birth, described in the book of Genesis, is compared with the birth that begins the New Covenant of God with humankind. He compares the two births: the destructible – of Adam and Eve – to the indestructible – of the only-begotten Word:

For just as when Eve was received Adam's seed in sexual union and gave birth, and subsequently from and through her all men have been born, so the Theotokos, on receiving the Word of God the Father rather than human seed, conceived and gave birth uniquely to Him Who is the only-begotten of the Father from eternity and, in these last days, is made flesh as the only-begotten of her. While she then ceased from conception and bearing children, her Son both engendered and continues to the present to engender those who believe in Him and keep His holy commandments. [...] The seed of a mortal and corruptible, begets and gives birth through a woman to sons who are mortal and corruptible; the immortal and incorruptible Word of the immortal and incorruptible God, however, begets and gives birth to immortal and incorruptible children, after having first been born of the virgin by the Spirit.³²

Mary, being nearest to God, is the only one worthy of receiving all of the grace of the Holy Spirit. St. Gregory Palamas considered not only the significant role of Mary during her earthly life, but also after her Dormition. Dwelling close to God, the Theotokos intercedes for those, who remain on earth:

[...] for thou art a vessel containing every grace, the fulness of all things good and beautiful, the tablet and living icon of every good and all uprightness, since thou alone hast been deemed worthy to receive the fulness of every gift of the Spirit. Thou alone didst bear in thy womb Him in Whom are found the treasures of all these gifts and didst become a wondrous tabernacle for Him; hence thou didst depart by way of death to immortality and art translated from earth to Heaven, as is proper, so that thou mightest be with Him eternally in a super-celestial abode. From thence thou ever carest diligently for thy inheritance and by thine unsleeping intercessions with Him, thou showest mercy to all. To the degree that she is closer to God than all those who have drawn nigh unto Him, by so much has the Theotokos been deemed worthy of greater audience. I do not speak of men alone, but also of the angelic hierarchies themselves.³³

³² S y m e o n T h e N e w T h e o l o g i a n . *First Ethical Discourse X* (pp. 59-60).

³³ G r e g o r y P a l a m a s . *A Homily on the Dormition of Our Supremely Pure Lady Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary (Homily 37)*.

St. Gregory Palamas also pointed out the importance of the Theotokos after her departure from this world. She stands at the right hand of God the Father together with Christ. Mary's participation in the history of salvation did not end with the mystery of the Incarnation, but continues to the final fulfilment of God's plan³⁴

III. THE THEOTOKOS AND GOD THE FATHER

Mary's relationship to God the Father is enveloped in mystery. In general terms, one might say that the Person of God the Father is surrounded by apophatic silence. Even the canons of iconography forbid depicting the Person of God the Father. The Son of God and the Holy Spirit have revealed His hidden face. God the Father reveals in His Son substance, which is effected by the Holy Spirit. The Ever-Virgin Mary received the breath of the Holy Spirit and she became the Mother of the Incarnate Word. But Her role did not end there, because the Theotokos, as Paul Evdokimov said, is also "the mysterious icon of God the Father"³⁵

One can find in Orthodox liturgical texts important references about the Theotokos to God, God in Trinity, the Son of God or the Holy Spirit. The first sticheron in the second tone of Small Vespers for the feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos is a good example of Orthodox awareness of the special nearness of the Ever-Virgin to God:

With what lips shall we, poor and worthless, call the Theotokos blessed?
 She is more honoured than the creation, and more holy than the cherubim and all the angels.
 She is the unshaken Throne of the King, the Abode in which the Most High has dwelt.
 She is the salvation of the world, the Holy Place of God,
 who richly grants unto the faithful great mercy on this her holy feast.³⁶

³⁴ "[The Theotokos] is not merely a companion but she also stands at God's right hand, for where Christ sat in the heavens, that is, at the 'right hand of majesty' (Heb 1:3), there too she also takes her stand, having ascended now from earth into the heavens. Not merely does she love and is loved in return more than every other, according to the very laws of nature, but she is truly His Throne, and wherever the King sits, there His Throne is set also" (*ibid.*).

³⁵ P. E v d o k i m o v. *Le Saint Esprit et la Mère de Dieu*. In: *La nouveauté de l'Esprit*. Begrolles 1977 p. 278.

³⁶ *The Festal Menaion*. Transl. from the original Greek by Mother Mary and Archiman-

The Ever-Virgin Mary unites creation with God the Creator in Her own life. For this reason alone, all of God's creation finds in her person the gateway to "true life" and the entrance to the fullness of existential possibilities³⁷

In Thee all creation rejoices,
The hosts of angels and generations of people.

The joy of all creations, both visible and invisible, as used in liturgical poetry, has its roots in the conviction of the Church that, thanks to The Theotokos, the renewal of the created world has taken place. The Theotokos is the New Eve, who recapitulates nature, not in the autonomy that contradicted nature and in death, but in the participation in Divinity, which goes beyond the limits of nature and bestows life eternal.

IV THE THEOTOKOS AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Son of God is inseparable from the Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation. St. Athanasios the Great wrote: "When the Logos inhabited the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit together with the Logos descended into her: the Logos fashioned a body for himself, doing that according to himself, and with his will of bringing the whole creation before the Father"³⁸ At the time of the Incarnation, the Holy Spirit became the *Spirit of the Incarnation*. He prepared a human body for the Word of God³⁹ The basic difference between the activity of the Word of God and the activity of the Holy Spirit consists in the fact that precisely the Logos alone, and not the Holy Spirit, became man. God the Logos became visible as the concrete Person of Jesus Christ, whereas God the Holy Spirit remains unknowable. The Holy Spirit

drite Kallistos Ware. London 1969 p. 504.

³⁷ Y a n n a r a s. *Elements of Faith* p. 100.

³⁸ A t h a n a s i o s t h e G r e a t. *Letter to Serapion* 1, 31. PG 26, 605A.

³⁹ "The very Incarnation of the Word, constitutes the masterpiece of the life-giving and deifying spirit. It shows to the utmost His intimate, fertile, and creative activity vis-à-vis the revelation of the Word of life to human being and of humanity's encounter with the latter – this free, ideal, and exemplary encounter that is actualized, after Mary's 'Fiat', in the hypostatic Union." (E. P a t a q S i m a n. *L'Expérience de l'Esprit d'après la tradition syrienne d'Antioche*. Paris 1971 p. 87).

reveals the Theotokos and She is the One, who in a unique way is the revelation of the Holy Spirit in the Church⁴⁰ For centuries the Christian East has called the Mother of God – *Pneumatóphora*. Father Sergius Bulgakov explains that when the Holy Spirit descended upon Mary, the Annunciation became the Virgin's Pentecost and the Holy Spirit completely sanctified and abided with her⁴¹

In the life of the Mother of God one can distinguish two descents of the Holy Spirit. The first, when she, by the power of the Holy Spirit, received the Son of God into her womb in the Incarnation, and the second during the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The former had the objective function of Mary's divine maternity, the latter was personal: a realisation in her person of the degree of holiness that corresponded to her unique function. In Orthodox spirituality and piety the person of the Theotokos has been exalted incomparably more than her function, which is a thing of the past. The faithful concentrate their praise mostly on the consummation of her holiness, because she received the plenitude of grace and gained unlimited glory by making real in her person all the holiness that could be sustained by the Church.

These two descents of the Holy Spirit upon the Holy Virgin can be compared with the two communications of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, namely, that which took place at evening on the day of the Resurrection and the other on the day of Pentecost. With the first descent the Apostles received the power to bind and to loose, which was a decree of God, independent of their personal qualities. The second communication of the Spirit had a subjective character, because it gave to all of the Apostles the possibility to realise their personal holiness.⁴²

In Orthodox Trinitarian theology, the Holy Spirit is inseparable from the Son of God, in that the Spirit both precedes and fulfils, or "seals" His activities. One cannot understand the veneration of the Mother of God in Eastern Christianity without the role Christ and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit personifies the holiness of God and the Ever-Virgin Mary personifies

⁴⁰ Cf. A. S c h m e m a n n. *Mary and the Holy Spirit*. In: *The Virgin Mary. The Celebration of Faith. Sermons*. Vol. 3. Crestwood, NY 1995 p. 72.

⁴¹ Cf. S. B u l g a k o v. *The Orthodox Church*. Transl. by L. Kesich. Crestwood, NY 1988 p. 117.

⁴² Cf. L o s s k y. *Panagia* pp. 206-207.

the sanctity of man⁴³ According to Father Alexander Schmemmann, the relation between the Holy Spirit and the Ever-Virgin Mary is *unique* and *archetypal*:

It is unique in the sense that it reveals to us Mary as a unique human being, unique in herself as a person, unique in her relationship to Christ and to God, unique by her place in the Church, i.e. in her relationship to all of us and to each one of us. It is archetypal in the sense that it reveals the very nature of the Holy Spirit in His relationship with the creature, the true nature of what we call sanctification.⁴⁴

The personal Pentecost of Mary begins with her story in the Gospel: “The Holy Spirit will come upon thee” (Luke 1:35). Mary became the first and the most perfect icon of the Holy Spirit. Being completely transparent to His presence, she was fully filled by Him. In her personal Pentecost we have two revelations, a double mystery. On the one hand, the divine motherhood of the Theotokos is the Holy Spirit’s unique revelation of her and of Jesus Christ. The faithful received this revelation as an object of eternal contemplation and joy, helping them to rejoice eternally in the Kingdom of God. On the other hand, it is a revelation of the new creation: a gift of completeness coming from the Giver of Life.⁴⁵ The important thing to remember is that the Holy Spirit is essentially the Sanctifier, while the Mother of God is the sanctified. The perfect expression of this relationship one can find in the eastern form of the Nicene Creed: “[...] born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary”⁴⁶

The Theotokos is the very ‘epiphany’ of spirituality in the Orthodox Church because she herself is the highest and the perfect fruit of the Holy Spirit throughout all creation. She is the one who reveals to the faithful the true nature and effects of Pentecost, which is the source of life in the Church. Therefore Mariology can serve as a kind of ‘criterion’ for Pneumatology⁴⁷

⁴³ J. K l i n g e r. *Zarys prawosławnej mariologii* [An Outline of Orthodox Mariology]. In: *O istocie prawosławia*. Warszawa 1983 p. 237.

⁴⁴ S c h m e m a n n. *Mary and the Holy Spirit* p. 75.

⁴⁵ Cf. *ibid.* pp. 76-78.

⁴⁶ S. B r o c k. *Introduction*. In: *On the Mother of God. Jacob of Serug*. Crestwood, NY 1998 p. 14.

⁴⁷ S c h m e m a n n. *Mary and the Holy Spirit* p. 75.

V THE THEOTOKOS IN MONASTIC SPIRITUALITY

Mary plays an exceptional role in monastic spirituality. She remains the teacher of spiritual life and supporter for all who undertake spiritual warfare. It is she who leads us to God and intercedes with His Son for the remission of sins. The exceptional respect for the Mother of God is indicated by the fact that the Holy Mountain of Athos is known as "The Garden of the Theotokos" In the ninth century, St. Peter the Athonite had a revelation of the Ever-Virgin, who said:

In Europe there is a mountain, very high and very beautiful, which extends towards the south and very deeply into the sea. This is the mountain that I have chosen out all the earth, and I have decided to make of it the country of the monastic order. I have consecrated it to be henceforth my dwelling: this is why people will call it the 'Holy Mountain' All who shall come to live there after having decided to fight the battle against the common enemy of the human race will find me at their side throughout their lives. I will be their invincible aid, I will teach them what they must do and what they must avoid. I myself will be their tutor, their physician, their nurse. I shall take care to give them both food and the care that their bodies require, and that which is necessary for their souls, to inspire and invigorate them, so they depart not from virtue. And all who finish their lives on this mountain in a spirit of love for God and repentance, I promise to recommend to my Son and God that He accord them complete remission of their sins.⁴⁸

The Mother of God is presented as a real queen of the desert in Orthodox monastic spirituality. A monk would not be able to find Jesus were it not for the Theotokos. She is the tabernacle of the Trinitarian God. The Holy Spirit lives in the Ever-Virgin Mary as in His property, since She is the Mother of the Incarnate Word. Mary has always remained in the presence of God. She directed her virgin soul toward the warming light of God's love in order to be permeated by its rays. For the Orthodox monk, the Mother of God is the supreme ideal and realisation of man fully deified. Every monk should become like Her – a pure space opened for God. All monastic wisdom concerning God is contained in the words spoken by the Virgin Mary: *Ecce ancilla Domini, fiat, magnificat*. Progress in spiritual life whether in the hermitage

⁴⁸ Gregory Palamas. *Life of St Peter the Athonite* 11. PG 150, 1005. In: *The Living Witness of the Holy Mountain*. Transl. by Hieromonk Alexander (Golitzin). South Canaan, Penn. 1996 pp. 104-105.

or in monastery depends on a monk's measure of resemblance to the Theotokos⁴⁹

The presence of the Theotokos, as experienced by the saints both at the level of the Church's liturgical life and in their own lives, points without any doubt to her exceptional role in the history of salvation⁵⁰ The Orthodox faithful invoke her presence and beseech for her intercession before God, believing that Mary constantly retains a great intimacy with the Persons of the Holy Trinity⁵¹

One can see faith in the tremendous help from Mary's approach towards God in the descriptions of spiritual struggles undertaken by the monks in order to attain deification. The experience of the Divine Light was of great support on the difficult path towards deification. It was considered to be a "measure" or "standard" of progress in all spiritual efforts. The search for such an experience and the wish to endure accompanies the spiritual struggles of monks. The Mother of God intercedes before God to make possible the experience of the Divine Light in the life of a monk. St. Symeon the New Theologian wrote that at the very beginning of his spiritual way towards God, he prayed to the Theotokos with attention, sobs and tears⁵² His fervent prayers gained the favour of the Mother of Christ and thanks to her interces-

⁴⁹ Cf. A. M o n k. *The Hermitage within. Spirituality of the Desert*. London 1977 pp. 117-123.

⁵⁰ According to St. Symeon the New Theologian the saints are triply kin of the Mother of God. First, they are related to her because of the same clay and breath of life; second they have communion with her in the flesh which was taken from her; third, that each one of them conceives in like manner to her within the God of all, as she gave Him birth in herself. Cf. S y m e o n T h e N e w T h e o l o g i a n. *First Ethical Discourse X* (p. 60).

⁵¹ Staretz Silouan (1866-1938) left behind a very interesting testimony how he had been convinced by the Holy Spirit about sinlessness of the Theotokos: "One day when I was a young novice I was praying before the icon of the Mother of God, and the Jesus Prayer entered into my heart and began to repeat itself there of its own accord. And another time I was listening in church to the reading from the prophet Isaiah, and at the words, 'Wash you, make you clean', I thought: 'Maybe at some time the Mother of God sinned, if only in thought. And marvellous to relate, in unison with my prayer a voice sounded clear in my heart, saying: 'The Mother of God never sinned, even in thought.' Thus did the Holy Spirit bear witness in my heart to her purity.'" (Archimandrite S o p h r o n y. *Wisdom from Mount Athos. The Writings of Staretz Silouan 1866-1938*. Transl. R. Edmonds. Crestwood, NY 1975 p. 59).

⁵² S y m é o n l e N o u v e a u T h é o l o g i e n. *Catéchèse 22* 77-79. In: *Catéchèses 6-22*. T. 2. Introduction, texte critique et notes par Mgr Basile Krivochéine. Traduction par Joseph Paramelle. SCh 104. Paris 1964 p. 370 (French translation p. 371).

sion he received the grace of the Holy Spirit. It was the Theotokos who caused St. Symeon to see the Divine Light⁵³

The experience of the Divine Light is not something that is experienced temporarily in this world. To experience this Light is eternal. The time of darkness is a time of great suffering. There exists an autobiographical description of Symeon's spiritual pain in not being able any more to see Christ. Distressed by desire to see Christ, Symeon approaches the icon of the Theotokos and prays before it:

One day I stepped up to an icon of the One, who gave birth to Thee. I kissed it and remained very close to it. Thou alone, at the time I arose, became visible inside my miserable heart and made it like light. At that time I became convinced that Thy presence in me is knowable.⁵⁴

Shortly after the mystical vision of the Divine Light, St. Symeon the New Theologian expressed his conviction that through the Theotokos' intercession God appeared and bestowed on him the grace of the Holy Spirit. Thereby he received the strength to rise to heaven and to behold the light that every Christian longs for but only some attain⁵⁵

The experience of the Divine Light, which was the desire of the hesychasts, draws our attention to the particular relation of the Theotokos to God. A monk beseeches Mary for intercession before God to bestow on him the experience of His Light. Mary is not treated as a 'mechanical agent' of that experience. A praying hesychast knows that the deification of man (which is his hope) has its roots in the Incarnation of God (which is the work of all the Persons of the Holy Trinity). The Ever-Virgin Mary "allowed" the Holy Trinity to fulfil the mystery of the Incarnation. She became the first One saved and the first One deified. The Mother of God fully preserved the vision of God after the birth of the Incarnate Logos. The monk hesychast, beseeching her intercession before God, does not lose from his sight the economy of the Trinitarian God.

⁵³ Cf. *ibid.* 151-156 (p. 376; French translation p. 377).

⁵⁴ *I d e m.* *Action de Grâces* 2.265-269. In: *Catéchèses 23-24. Action de Grâces*. T 3. Introduction, texte critique et notes par Mgr Basile Krivochéine. Traduction par Joseph Paramelle. SCh 113. Paris 1965 p. 350 and 352 (French translation p. 351, 353).

⁵⁵ *I d e m.* *On Faith*. In: *The Philokalia. The Complete Text*. Compiled by St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St Makarios of Corinth. Vol. 4. Transl. from the Greek and ed. by G.E.H. Palmer, P. Sherrard, K. Ware. London 1995 p. 19.

St. Gregory Palamas in Homily 53 describes the sojourn of Mary in the temple in terms that make her the model of hesychast life⁵⁶ In *The Eight Stages of Contemplation*, written by St. Peter of Damascus and which forms a part of the *Philokalia* (the main manual of hesychast life), one can discover that the fourth stage of contemplation consists in the Lord's Incarnation. St. Peter quotes two irmoi by St. John of Damascus which testify to how important the Theotokos is for the life not only of monks but of all believers:

Heaven was amazed, and the earth's ends were astounded,
that God should appear in bodily form to men
and that thy womb, O Mother of God, became capable of containing the heavens;
because of this the orders of angels and of men magnify thee.

All who heard shuddered at the ineffable condescension of God:
how the Most High of His own will descended even to the body,
born man from a virgin womb.
Because of this we the faithful magnify the pure Mother of God⁵⁷

The following introduction into contemplation by St. Peter gives insight into the life led by Jesus Christ in this world and makes references to the Theotokos. In the form of a prayer St. Peter explains why the faithful should ask the Mother of God to intercede before God:

Blessed Queen of the universe, thou knowest that we sinners have no intimacy with the God whom thou hast borne. But, putting our trust in thee, through thy mediation, we thy servants prostrate ourselves before the Lord: for thou canst freely approach Him since He is thy and our God. [...] Simply thy giving birth to the Son of God shows that thou excellest above all other beings. For He who, as creator of all, knows all things before they come into existence, found thy womb worthy of His indwelling. No one can question thee about thy mysteries, for they transcend nature, thought and intellect. Rightly do we, who have been saved through thee, pure Virgin, confess that thou art the Mother of God, extolling thee with the angelic choirs⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Cf. J. M e y e n d o r f f. *A Study of Gregory Palamas*. Aylesbury-Bucks 1974 p. 235.

⁵⁷ P e t e r of D a m a s c o s. *Book I. A Treasury of Divine Knowledge*. In: *The Philokalia. The Complete Text*. Compiled by St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St Makarios of Corinth. Vol. 3. Transl. from the Greek and ed. by G.E.H. Palmer, P Sherrard, K. Ware. London 1984 p. 122.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 129-130.

VI. THE THEOTOKOS IN THE DAILY LIFE OF ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS

The Christological decision of the Council of Ephesus affirmed the personal identity of Christ as the pre-existing and eternal Son of God Who had assumed human nature. This decision had a great impact on Christian spirituality because it caused "a renewed veneration of Mary – the woman through whom the incarnation occurred; the one human person who, by free concurrence with the greatest act of God's love, made the union of divinity and humanity possible"⁵⁹ Since the attribution of the title of the Theotokos to the Mother of Jesus countless number of hymnographers, poets, preachers, iconographers, and artists began to glorify her using a theological language that involved all kind of biblical symbols and analogies. The main reason for the emotionalism and variety in Marian piety was a spiritual discovery of the human side of the mystery of the Incarnation. Christians of the early Church in their piety and theology never tended to separate the veneration Mary, that simple woman who conceived the new life in her womb, from its Christological context⁶⁰

The Orthodox Christian finds for himself in Mary's personal decision and constant commitment the pattern of the most proper response to give God in His proposition of salvation. The Mother of God is the beloved comforter of the faithful during periods of fasting, their champion of prayer, their guide leading to the Saviour, their intercessor before God. The faithful converse with the Theotokos as they do with Christ⁶¹ This relation to Mary is not the result of theological speculation, but from directing one's life to the reality of redemption⁶²

Prayers addressed to the Mother of God occupy a significant place in all Orthodox services. One immediately notices that her name is constantly spoken of together with the name of Jesus Christ during Orthodox offices and private prayers. The Orthodox faithful venerate the Virgin Mary as "more

⁵⁹ J. M e y e n d o r f f. *Christ as Savior in the East*. In: *Christian Spirituality. Origins to the Twelfth Century*. Vol. 16 of *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest*. Ed. by B. McGinn and J. Meyendorff. New York, NY 1988 p. 239.

⁶⁰ Cf. *ibid.* pp. 239-240.

⁶¹ Cf. P. N e l l a s. *Deification in Christ. The Nature of Human Person*. Crestwood, NY 1987 p. 166.

⁶² G. F l o r o v s k y. *The Lamb of God*. "Scottish Journal of Theology" 4:1951 No. 1 p. 16.

honourable than the cherubim and beyond compare more glorious than the seraphim” One can say that love and veneration for the Theotokos is the soul of Orthodox piety. In the following words, Father Sergius Bulgakov summarises the exceptional position and role of the Mother of God for all people:

Living in heaven in a state of glory the Virgin remains the mother of the human race for which she prays and intercedes. This is why the Church addresses to her its supplications, invoking her aid. She covers the world with her veil praying, weeping for the sins of the world; at the Last Judgement she will intercede before her Son and ask pardon from Him. She sanctifies the whole natural world; in her and by her the world attains transfiguration. In a word, the veneration of the Virgin marks its imprint all Christian anthropology and cosmology and all the life of prayer and piety.⁶³

Orthodox saints and elders – the teachers of the faith – refused to speculate about Mary. For example, St. Tikhon of Zadonsk did not contemplate about the nature of the Virgin Birth but rather preferred to advise people to accept it as one of the mysteries of the faith. He taught with great reverence of Christ’s coming into “the world of tears” and His birth from the Ever-Virgin, who was the ever blessed among women. St. Tikhon considered the Theotokos’ icon as a reminder of Divine love. He would say: “Blessed be the womb that bore my Lord and my God!”

The numerous festivals devoted to Mary in the sequence of the liturgical year provide good occasions to demonstrate the role of the Blessed Virgin in the entire history of salvation and to explain Her relation to God. At the festival of the Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple, he preached: “Today the Mother of the Son of God is in the temple of God. She enters the holiest of the holies that she may become the holy temple and dwelling-place of the hypostatic Word of God Who is to become incarnate.” During the Divine Liturgy for the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, St. Tikhon explained: “On this day the living temple of God, the Mother of eternal life, migrated from things earthly to things heavenly. On this day, the Queen appeared at the right hand of the King of heaven, adorned in garments of gold!”⁶⁴

⁶³ Bulgakov. *The Orthodox Church* p. 118.

⁶⁴ N. Gorodetzky. *Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk. Inspirer of Dostoevsky*. Crestwood, NY 1976 pp. 169-170.

Events from the lives of the saints testify to their very close intimacy with the Mother of God. The Theotokos always accompanies a quest for sanctity. St. Seraphim of Sarov taught his spiritual children to seek the intercessions of the Theotokos. He also introduced the person of the Mother of God into the Jesus Prayer. To the usual form of the prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me a sinner", St. Seraphim proposed a slightly changed version, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, by prayers of the Theotokos, have mercy upon me a sinner" His own particular cry to the Mother of God was, "O most holy Mother save us!" St. Seraphim did not believe that the Theotokos could save someone, but this is made possible at her intercession to God. Thanks to these prayers and to keeping one's mind in quietude, without disturbance, one can be united with God. The Elder of Sarov instructed that the true goal of the Christian life is "the acquisition of the Holy Spirit"⁶⁵ This sensitivity to the Holy Spirit is entirely connected with the love shown to the Theotokos in the spirituality of the Christian East.

There is no doubt that the Theotokos/Holy Trinity relationship is of great importance in the piety of the Orthodox Church. It springs from the exceptional role of the Ever-Virgin Mary in the history of salvation and her close intimacy with God. The Theotokos does not veil Christ and the Holy Spirit in the consciousness of the faithful. She is the One, who introduces the experience of the philanthropic God.

In conclusion, I would like to quote the following words of confidence from a prayer of St. Gregory Palamas to the Theotokos:

Yea, O most-good Lady the Theotokos,
 hear my sorrowful prayer
 and disgrace me not from my expectation,
 thou who, after God
 are the hope of all the ends of the earth.
 [...]
 Cleanse my mouth
 that I may call with boldness upon the Father,
 the fearful and all-holy God.
 [...]
 O my Lady the Theotokos,
 the light of my darkened eyes,
 the consolation of my soul,

⁶⁵ V Z a n d e r. *St Seraphim of Sarov*. Crestwood, NY 1975 p. 85.

my hope and protection after God,

[...]

Make me worthy to partake,
without any condemnation in the present age,
of the all-holy precious Body and Blood
of thy Son and God.

[...]

Through thee, O most praised and good Lady,
is saved every human nature,
who praises and blesses the Father,
the Son and the Holy Spirit,
the all-holy and consubstantial Trinity,
always, now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.⁶⁶

I think that the last verse of this devotional poem in particular summarises the attitude of the Orthodox faithful towards the Mother of God.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Archimandrite S o p h r o n y. *Wisdom from Mount Athos. The Writings of Staretz Silouan 1866-1938.* Transl. by R. Edmonds. Crestwood, NY 1975.
- B e h r S i g e l E.: *Mary, the Mother of God: Traditional Mariology and New Questions.* In: *The Ministry of Women in the Church.* Redondo Beach, California 1991 pp. 190-204.
- B o b r i n s k o y B.: *The Mystery of the Trinity. Trinitarian Experience and Vision in the Biblical and Patristic Tradition.* Transl. by A.P. Gythiel. Crestwood, NY 1999.
- B r o c k S.: *Introduction.* In: *On the Mother of God. Jacob of Serug.* Crestwood, NY 1998 pp. 1-14.
- B u l g a k o v S.: *The Orthodox Church.* Transl. by L. Kesich. Crestwood, NY 1988.
- D a n i é l o u J.: *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture. A History of Early Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea. Vol. 2.* Transl. by J.A. Baker. London-Philadelphia 1973 pp. 179-183.
- E v d o k i m o v P.: *Le Saint Esprit et la Mère de Dieu.* In: *La nouveauté de l'Esprit.* Begrolles 1977 pp. 253-278.
- F l o r o v s k y G.: *The Ever-Virgin of God.* In: *Creation and Redemption as vol. 3 of the Collected Works of Georges Florovsky,* Belmond, Mass. 1976 pp. 171-188.

⁶⁶ G r e g o r y P a l a m a s. *A Prayer to the Most-Holy Theotokos.* In: *Voices in the Wilderness. An Anthology of Patristic Prayers.* Ed. and transl. from the Greek by N.S. Hatzinikolau. Brookline, Mass. 1988 pp. 189-191.

- Florovsky G.: The Lamb of God. "Scottish Journal of Theology" 4:1951 No. 1 pp. 13-28.
- Gorodetzky N.: Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk. Inspirer of Dostoevsky. Crestwood, NY 1976.
- Klinger J.: Zarys prawosławnej mariologii [An Outline of Orthodox Mariology]. In: O istocie prawosławia. Warszawa 1983 pp. 209-247.
- Ledit J.: Marie dans la liturgique byzantine. Paris 1976.
- Lossky V. Orthodox Theology: An Introduction. Transl. by Ian and Ihita Kesarcodi-Watson. Crestwood, NY 1989.
- Lossky V. Panagia. In: In the Image and Likeness of God. Ed. J.H. Erickson and T.E. Bird. Crestwood, NY 1985.
- Meyendorff J.: A Study of Gregory Palamas. Aylesbury-Bucks 1974.
- Meyendorff J.: Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes. New York, NY 1974.
- Meyendorff J.: Christ as Savior in the East. In: Christian Spirituality. Origins to the Twelfth Century. Vol. 16 of World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest. Ed. by B. McGinn and J. Meyendorff. New York, NY 1988 pp. 231-251.
- Monk A.: The Hermitage within. Spirituality of the Desert. London 1977.
- Nellas P. Deification in Christ. The Nature of Human Person. Crestwood, NY 1987.
- Nissiotis N.: Marie dans la théologie orthodoxe. "Concilium. Revue Internationale de Théologie" 19:1983 cah. 188 pp. 60-78.
- Pataq Siman E.: L'Expérience de l'Esprit d'après la tradition syrienne d'Antioche. Paris 1971.
- Podskalsky G.: Theotokos. In: The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium. Ed. in chief A.P. Kazhdan. Vol. 3. New York-Oxford 1991 p. 2070.
- Pomazansky M.: Orthodox Dogmatic Theology. A Concise Exposition. Transl. and ed. by Hieromonk Seraphim Rose. Platina, California 1983.
- Schmemmann A.: Mary and the Holy Spirit. In: The Virgin Mary. The Celebration of Faith. Sermons. Vol. 3. Crestwood, NY 1995 pp. 69-81.
- Schmemmann A.: Mary in Eastern Liturgy. In: The Virgin Mary. The Celebration of Faith. Sermons. Vol. 3. Crestwood, NY 1995 pp. 83-93.
- Schmemmann A.: On Mariology in Orthodoxy. In: The Virgin Mary. The Celebration of Faith. Sermons. Vol. 3. Crestwood, NY 1995 pp. 57-68.
- Sherwood P.: Byzantine Mariology. "The Eastern Churches Quarterly" Vol. XIV, Winter 1962 No. 8 pp. 384-409.
- Špidlik T.: The Spirituality of the Christian East. A Systematic Handbook. Transl. by A.P. Gythiel. Kalamazoo, Michigan 1986.
- The Festal Menaion. Transl. from the original Greek by Mother Mary and Archimandrite Kallistos Ware. London 1969
- Voices in the Wilderness. An Anthology of Patristic Prayers. Ed. and transl. from the Greek by N.S. Hatzinikolau. Brookline, Mass. 1988.
- Yannaras Ch.: Elements of Faith. An Introduction to Orthodox Theology. Edinburgh 1991.
- Zander V. St Seraphim of Sarov. Crestwood, NY 1975.

THEOTOKOS A BÓG W DUCHOWOŚCI PRAWOSŁAWNEJ

S t r e s z c z e n i e

W teologii prawosławnej mariologia stanowi integralną część chrystologii, nierozzerwalnie związaną z pneumatologią i eklezjologią. W takim ujęciu wyróżnia się historiozbawcza perspektywa w relacji do Matki Bożej. Jej kult kształtuje duchowość liturgiczna, która jest od wieków miejscem właściwym dojrzwania tak duchowości monastycznej, jak i codziennej pobożności prawosławnych chrześcijan. Teksty liturgiczne zawierają ogromne bogactwo treści dotyczących nie tylko samej Theotokos, ale również, a może nawet przede wszystkim Jej roli w historii zbawienia oraz odniesień do Osób Trójcy Świętej.

Perspektywa historiozbawcza wyznacza podstawy kultu Bogarodzicy. Ona jako *Theogenitria* – czyli „Ta, która zrodziła Boga” – ma szczególną moc wstawienniczą oraz pełni ważną rolę w zbawieniu świata. Jej rola nie polega na współodkupieniu z Chrystusem, ale na umożliwieniu Chrystusowi Jego posłannictwa. Oddawanie czci Matce Bożej oraz Jej wystawianie i błogosławienie wynika z tego, że zrodziła Jedną Osobę Trójcy Przenajświętszej i otworzyła niebiosa dla nas na ziemi (św. Andrzej z Krety). Maryja jest określana jako „granica pomiędzy światem stworzonym i niestworzonym”; Ona „oświeca prawdziwą Bożą światłością pragnących przyjść do Boga” (św. Grzegorz Palamas).

Relacje Theotokos do Chrystusa dominują w tekstach liturgicznych i w całej duchowości prawosławnej. Szczególnie podkreślane jest znaczenie misterium Wcielenia, w którym dzięki zgodzie Dziewicy Maryi doszło do „uczłowieczenia Boga”. Poprzez to wyjątkowe wydarzenie egzystencjalne została Ona uznana za godną udziału w życiu Boga. Odtąd Matka Boża jest nierozłącznie związana z Osobą i dziełem Jej Syna. Wcielenie bywa określane jako mistyczne zaślubiny (gr. *ho gámos mystikós*) Boga i Przenajświętszej Dziewicy. Udział Maryi w historii zbawienia nie kończy się na tajemnicy Wcielenia, lecz sięga ostatecznego spełnienia planu Boga.

Prawosławni niewiele mówią o odniesieniach Bogarodzicy do Boga Ojca. Osobę Boga Ojca okrywa apofatyczne milczenie. Jego ukryte oblicze objawiają Duch Święty, którego tchnienie przyjęła Dziewica Maryja, oraz Syn Boży – Słowo Wcielone, którego Matką się stała. Theotokos jest również określana jako „tajemnicza ikona Ojca” (Paul Evdokimov). Theotokos jednoczy w swym własnym życiu stworzenie z Bogiem Stwórcą.

W patrystycznej teologii trynitarniej Duch Święty jest nieodłączny od Syna Bożego. Bóg Słowo stał się widzialny jako konkretna osoba Jezusa Chrystusa, a Bóg Duch Święty ciągle pozostaje niepoznawalny. Chrześcijański Wschód od stuleci nazywa Theotokos – *Pneumatófora*, czyli „Niosąca Ducha Świętego”, Duch Święty bowiem znajduje w Niej odpowiednie naczynie do przelania wszystkich Swoich łask. W świadomości prawosławnej Maryja jest pierwszą i najdoskonalszą ikoną Ducha Świętego, gdyż została całkowicie przez Niego wypełniona. Tak jak Duch Święty uosabia świętość Boga, tak Dziewica Maryja uosabia świętość człowieka.

Theotokos pełni szczególną rolę w duchowości monastycznej chrześcijańskiego Wschodu. Dla prawosławnego mnicha Matka Boża jest świątynią Trójcy Świętej oraz najdoskonalszym wzorem i urzeczywistnieniem człowieka w pełni przeobstwowionego. Każdy mnich stara się w jak największym stopniu do Niej upodobnić, by osiągnąć przeobstwienie, które ma swój początek we Wcieleniu. Na drodze ascezy i zmagania duchowego nieustannie przyzywa on wspierającej obecności Theotokos i Jej wstawiennictwa u Boga. Ona objawia się jako niezwykła pomoc,

nauczyciel, lekarz, pielęgniarka oraz Ta, która sama zatroszczy się o potrzeby ciała i duszy mnichów. Święci mnisi hezychasty ze łzami i modlitwą zwracają się do Matki Bożej, by za sprawą Jej wstawiennictwa (gr. *présbeia*) stać się godnymi widzenia niestworzonego światła, którego tak wielu pragnie, ale tylko nieliczni je osiągają.

Nie jest do pomyślenia codzienna pobożność prawosławnych chrześcijan bez głębokich i pełnych miłości odniesień do Matki Bożej. W postawie Maryi, cechującej się osobistym zaangażowaniem w realizację planu Boga zbawienia wszystkich i całego stworzonego świata, znajdują oni wzór najwłaściwszej odpowiedzi na Jego wezwanie. Theotokos jest umiłowaną pocieszycielką we wszelakich strapieniach, mistrzynią modlitwy, przewodniczką prowadzącą do Chrystusa, żarliwą wstawienniczką o odpuszczenie grzechów, uzdrowienie duszy i ciała. Towarzyszy ona w dążeniu do osiągnięcia świętości. W świadomości wiernych Theotokos nie przesłania Chrystusa i Ducha Świętego, lecz wprowadza w doświadczenie Boga Miłującego człowieka (*Filánthropos*).

Streścił Krzysztof Leśniewski

Słowa kluczowe: Bóg, Trójca Święta, *Theotokos* – Matka Boża, historia zbawienia, duchowość prawosławna, monastycyzm.

Key words: God, the Holy Trinity, the *Theotokos* – the Mother of God, the history of salvation, Orthodox spirituality, monasticism.