

Bishop Jovan (Purić) (Belgrade)

THE MYSTERY OF THEOTOKOS IN BYZANTINE HYMNOGRAPHY: THEOTOKOLOGY IN HYMNOGRAPHY OF ST. JOHN OF DAMASCUS

The name of the *Virgin Mary* is encountered not only in the Holy Scripture¹ and the Holy Tradition, but is mentioned in the entire life of the Orthodox Church: in divine worship, hymnography, iconography and music. Of special importance is the fact that the divine services of the Orthodox Church repeat the entire Theandric Economy of Salvation.²

The patristic position is that the Most Holy Mary is the *Ever-Virgin*,³ which is a witnessing and an affirmation of the supernatural character of the mystery of the Incarnation as the precondition for the spiritual renewal of man, the world and all creation.⁴ What is, however, especially important to note is the fact that, in Orthodox theology, the Theotokos is never mentioned autonomously, but is always mentioned and brought into direct connection with Her Son – God-Man Jesus Christ, with Whom She is, if we express ourselves freely, organically tied.⁵ This truth is evidenced by every Orthodox

¹ On this topic, see: L.S. Thornton, "The Mother of God in Holy Scripture," *The Mother of God*, Oxford 1949, 9-23. I. Καλογήρου, «Μαρία», ή μήτηρ του Χριστού, Αγία Γραφή – Αγιολογία – Δογματική», ΘΗΕ 8, 1966, 649.

² Cf. Јован Пурић, *Тајна спасења. Антологија молитвеног предања као подлога и иконографског програма храма и параклиса манастира Пустинје и Храма Св. Муч. Станка*, (Jovan Purić ed., *The Mystery of Salvation – Anthology of Prayerful Tradition as a Base for the Iconographic Program of the Church and Paraclesis of the Pustinja Monastery and the Church of the Holy Martyr Stanko*), Хришћанска мисао, Србинје-Belgrade-Valjevo 2004, p. 5.

³ For more on this, see: Προκλός Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, *Ἐγκώμιον εἰς τὴν Παναγίαν Θεοτόκον Μαρίαν*, A', PG 65, 684A. Γρηγορίου Νεοκαισαρίας, *Εἰς τὸν Εὐαγγελισμόν τῆς Παναγίας Θεοτόκου Παρθένου τῆς Μαρίας*, 3, PG 10, 1173A. Ἐπιφανίου Κύπρου, *Ἐγκώμιον εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν Θεοτόκον*, PG 43, 496C-497D. Μέγα Ἀθανασίου, *Κατὰ Ἀρειανῶν*, 2, 70, PG 26, 296B.

⁴ For more details, see: Εὐαγγέλου Κ. Πριγκιπάκη, *Ἡ Θεοτόκος καὶ τὸ μυστήριον τῆς θείας Οἰκονομίας κατὰ τὸν ἅγιον Ἀνδρέα Κρήτης*, pp. 314-315.

⁵ Cf. W. Beinert, *Die mariologischen Dogmen und ihre Entfaltung*, HdM I (1996), 314. K. E. Barresen, "Maria in der katholischen Theologie," *Concilium* 19 (1982), 632.

icon on which the Virgin Mary is represented: She is never shown alone, but always with the Divine Infant Jesus Christ. The Virgin Mary is absolutely rightly characterized as the “living synopsis of all Christology,”⁶ because the virgin birth of the Logos is visible proof of the Divinity of the Son of God.⁷ Each Orthodox *icon* of the Virgin carries the inscription “*Theotokos*” or “*Mother of God*.” In that way, the inscription (on *icons*) expresses the truth of the Incarnation of the Son of God and manifests the Mystery of the Economy of Salvation.⁸ In a word, the Virgin’s glory is intrinsically tied to the glory of the Incarnate Son of God, the Savior and the Redeemer,⁹ and Her glory is greater than the glory of the Cherubim or any man in the world.¹⁰ This truth is also heartily expressed by hymnographers and the Holy Fathers. And it would certainly not be superfluous to point out the fact that the basic characteristic of Church hymnography is its dogmatic content expressed in a poetic way. Let us simply recall the hymn, “*It is truly right to bless thee....*” It is important to underline that Orthodox hymnography is Triadological and Christological.¹¹ Triadological and Christological dogma “make up the two basic axes around which all Orthodox divine worship revolves.”¹² All this is, however, closely tied with salvation and deification in God-Man Jesus Christ. It is especially important to emphasize the fact that the Virgin is not simply Mary but that She is, above all, the *Theotokos* and that, when the name *Theotokos* is invoked, the truth, reality and actuality of the Incarnation, that is, the Humanization of God the Logos – Jesus Christ – always stands before us.

When the fullness of time came, God chose the Virgin Mary, as a daughter of Adam, to become the beginning of human spiritual renewal and restoration (cf. Lk 1:27),¹³ and the Logos was born of Her, for the sake of the redemption, salvation and deification of humankind.¹⁴ In a word, the Incarnation of God the Logos marked the beginning, in Christ, of a “new creation,” a new man, a new time and a new world, the presence of the Kingdom of God.¹⁵

⁶ A. Kniazeff, «Ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία», *Ζωή* 53/2331 (1963), 54.

⁷ Cf. St. Athanasius the Great, *Against the Arians*, 2, 70, PG 26, 296B.

⁸ Cf. St. John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 3, 12, PG 94, 1029C.

⁹ Cf. K. B. Σκουτέρη, «Μαρία ἡ Θεοτόκος», *ΠΒΛ* 6 (1991), 34.

¹⁰ Cf. St. Andrew of Crete, *Εἰς τὴν Κοίμησιν*, I, IB', PG 97, 1056B.

¹¹ Cf. Γεωργίου Μεταλληνου, *Παράλληλα δογματικά Θεοτόκου καὶ Σταυροῦ ἐν τῇ Ὁρθοδόξῳ Ὑμνογραφίᾳ*, *Θεολογία ΜΖ'*, Τεύχος 4, p. 779.

¹² Ἄνδρ. Θεοδώρου, *Ἡ περὶ Τριάδος καὶ Χριστοῦ διδασκαλία τῆς Παρακλητικῆς*, ... Ἀθήναις 1962, 4-5.

¹³ Cf. St. Andrew of Crete, *Εἰς τὴν Κοίμησιν*, I, IB', PG 97, 1068C.

¹⁴ Cf. St. Andrew of Crete, *Εἰς τὸ Γενέθλιον ἡμέραν*, A', PG 97, 813D-814A.

¹⁵ Cf. St. Andrew of Crete, *Εἰς τὴν Κοίμησιν*, I, IB', PG 97, 1056B.

The Orthodox view is that, “incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,” God the Logos (cf. Jn 1:14), that is, Jesus Christ, is at the same time the greatest and the full Revelation of the Living God in history, while the meaning and aim of man’s life was revealed by the Humanization of the Logos.¹⁶ The goal of humankind is for man to truly experience the joy of the birth of Jesus Christ – the Messiah. If we devote our attention to the hymns of Saint Andrew of Crete, we will see that this joy fills the Christ-centric worship of the Orthodox Church.¹⁷

Bearing in mind that the Mystery of the Economy of Salvation was carried out in the Virgin’s womb in a fleshly way (corporeally),¹⁸ it is no wonder that the person of the Most Holy Theotokos stands at the center of Orthodox piety and that it occupies a special place in the theological teaching of our Holy Church, as She sums up the entire Mystery of the Economy of Salvation within Her person.¹⁹

Of special importance is the truth, as told to us by the Holy Scripture and the Sacred Tradition, that, when the “fullness of time” had come, that is, during the Incarnation of God the Logos – the Son of God, there occurred the closest possible, freely-loving cooperation between the Triune God and man – the Virgin Mary. The Virgin was intrinsically tied with the Old Testament prophecies on the Incarnation of the Logos,²⁰ and She became the Mother of the Logos in the flesh.²¹ We are, thus, talking about the mystery of *cooperation* and living *communion* between God and man,²² and, precisely owing to this *cooperation*, “the Truth came” into the world and human history, thus endowing fallen (sinful and mortal) man with the grace and the possibility of gaining salvation and living supratemporal life in communion with the Triune God. In that Mystery, a special role is played by, on the one hand, the Son of God (= Jesus Christ) and, on the other, the blessed Virgin Mary, who voluntarily, with profound faith, agreed to give birth to God the Logos in His human nature. Thus, in incarnating Himself of the

¹⁶ Compare: Παναγιώτη Νέλλα, *Ἡ Μητέρα τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ὁ Θεοκεντρικὸς ἄνθρωπος*, p. 314.

¹⁷ Cf. L. Scheffczyk, *Maria in der Verehrung der Kirche*, Wien 1992, p. 10; M. Hauke, “Marienlehre und Marienfrömmigkeit bei den Heiligen der Väterzeit,” *MJ* 6 (2002), 50-51; M. Cunningham, “St. Andrew of Crete. A Highstyle Preacher of the Eighth Century,” *Preacher*, p. 274.

¹⁸ St. Andrew of Crete, *Εἰς τὴν ἀγίαν Γέννησιν*, Δ', PG 97, 864C.

¹⁹ Cf. St. Andrew of Crete, *Εἰς τὴ Κίμησιν*, III, IB, PG 97, 1100A.

²⁰ Cf. St. Andrew of Crete, *Εἰς τὴν Γενέθλιαν ἡμέραν*, Γ', PG 97, 860A.

²¹ Cf. St. Andrew of Crete, *Εἰς τὴ Κίμησιν*, I, IB', PG 97, 1084B.

²² It is precisely because of this *cooperation*, i.e., the true birth of the Logos of the Virgin Mary, that God the Logos Incarnate came to be known by people. See: F. Courth, “Maria/Marienfrömmigkeit. VI. Orthodoxie,” *TRE* 22 (1992), 149.

Virgin Mary, God the Logos achieved the so-called “second creation.”²³ In addition, it is seen that the Virgin was a member and a part of the human race, that is, not a supernatural being – a “Goddess” – but the “queen of all of human nature,”²⁴ who received salvation (deification) as a gift from the Incarnate Son of God, because She is also a true human like all other people, the difference being that the power of the Spirit cleansed Her so that She would be sanctified by the Holy Spirit and give birth to God the Logos in His human nature. In other words, the Theotokos is saved and deified by the Incarnation of the Logos of Her.

The Virgin became the spiritual mirror of the Father’s image²⁵ while, according to Biblical testimony; the Son is the image of the Father’s glory and being (Heb 1:3). The Virgin is the created temple of the incarnate and humanized Creator of the world,²⁶ freely and obediently serving exclusively within the Mystery of the Economy of Salvation, and not in the flawed and erroneous way thought by the Roman Catholics and the Protestants.²⁷ Certain theologians have rightly noted that the Orthodox teaching on the Theotokos contains two equal principles: Christology and anthropology.²⁸ This means that, on the one hand, we do not ascribe divine characteristics to the Virgin Mary that do not belong to Her while, on the other, we in no way diminish Her role in the Economy of Salvation,²⁹ for we well know that She is exalted above all other creatures and that, due to the birth of God the Logos, She was accorded the “honor” of revealing to the world the Mystery of the Economy of Salvation that had been hidden from ages and from generations (cf. Col 1:26).³⁰ Simply put, we are mindful of the Divine message that, without God, man cannot do a single good deed.³¹ This teaching is Biblical and Holy-Traditional, while all other teachings represent human, non-Biblical and unfounded philosophizing.

²³ See: St. Andrew of Crete, *Εἰς τὴν Γενέθλιαν ἡμέραν*, A', PG 97, 812C.

²⁴ Cf. St. Andrew of Crete, *Εἰς τὴ Κίμησιν*, III, IB, PG 97, 1100A.

²⁵ Cf. St. Andrew of Crete, *Εἰς τὴ Κίμησιν*, I, IB', PG 97, 1068D.

²⁶ Cf. St. Andrew of Crete, *Εἰς τὸ Γενέθλιον ἡμέραν*, A', IB', PG 97, 1053A. See: B. Spuler, “Das neue Mariendogma in orthodoxer Sicht,” *IKZ* 41(1951), pp. 138-145.

²⁷ For more details on this topic, see: A. Σπουρλάκου-Εὐτυχιάδου, *Ἡ Παναγία Θεοτόκος*, pp. 23-30.

²⁸ See: A. Σπουρλάκου – Εὐτυχιάδου, *Ἡ Παναγία Θεοτόκος τύπος χριστιανικῆς ἀγιότητος. Συμβολὴ εἰς τὴν Ὁρθόδοξον τοποθέτησιν ἔναντι τῆς ρωμαιοκαθολικῆς Ἀσπίλου Συλλήψεως καὶ τῶν συναφῶν ταύτητοδογμάτων*, Ἀθῆναι 1990, 33. Εὐαγγέλου Κ. Πριγκιπάκη, *Ἡ Θεοτόκος καὶ τὸ μυστήριον τῆς θείας Οἰκονομίας κατὰ τὸν ἅγιον Ἀνδρέα Κρήτης*, p. 84.

²⁹ See: Βασίλειος Σελευκείας, *Εἰς τὸν Εὐαγγελισμόν τῆς Παναγίας Θεοτόκου*, 39, 2, PG 85, 428CD. Ἰωάννου πρεσβ. Εὐβοίας, *Λόγος εἰς τὴν Σύλληψιν τῆς ἀγίας Θεοτόκου*, 1, PG 96, 1459C. St. Andrew of Crete, *Εἰς τὴ Κίμησιν*, II, IG, PG 97, 1088CD.

³⁰ Cf. St. Andrew of Crete, *Εἰς τὸν Εὐαγγελισμόν*, E', PG 97, 884B.

³¹ Cf. St. Andrew of Crete, *Περὶ Τελώνου-Φαρισσαίου*, K', PG 97, 1261A.

In our work, we will try to encompass all the *events* from the life of the Virgin Mary, to theologially analyze them, and then Christologically, that is, Triadologically, and ecclesiastically interpret them, as She was the *chosen vessel*, the human organ that served the accomplishment of the Mystery of the Incarnation of God the Logos and the salvation of the human race.³² For this reason our view is that our work is inseparable from the liturgical life of our Church and that it will contribute to a better understanding of the Christological character of the Virgin's service and role in the Economy of Salvation. There is one truth that we should always bear in mind: the teaching about the Most Holy Virgin Mary – the Theotokos, is interpreted, and is only thus understandable, as a part of Christology, and the Virgin is experienced in the divine worship of the Orthodox Church as the one that truly gave birth to God the Logos – the Son of God in the flesh.³³ Thus, by His human nature, the incarnate Son of God – Jesus Christ is *ἀπάτωρ* – without a father, while by His Divine nature He is *ἀμήτωρ* – without a mother.³⁴

We should additionally emphasize here that the Virgin Mary is a historical personality as all other people, and that She experienced physical death (= separation of the soul from the body), like all those (the descendants of patriarch Adam) that are born and come into this world. However, Her Son raised Her into heaven to the *Heavenly Tabernacle*, that is, to the very place of His dwelling.

Orthodox Christians celebrate the Theotokos in a divinely beautiful way. Thus, Orthodoxy teaches us: “If you are contemplating the Mother of God – think prayerfully; if you are speaking of the Mother of God – speak prayerfully.” It is only through prayer and love that our heart is opened to understanding the contents of the Mystery of the Economy of Salvation and the person of the Most Holy Theotokos. “For our spirit-bearing Fathers, prayer is the method of life and the method of thinking. Thus, they think about the Holy Theotokos and speak of Her with divine wisdom, in forbearing prayer, bounding each word with prayer, girdling each thought with the flaming girdle of prayer, which unclean spirits are unable to breach. That is why all their speech concerning Her is – a prayer to Her, each of their words about Her – a song of praise to Her...”

That is why they are the only ones that Orthodoxy considers as competent to speak worthily of the Most Holy Ever-Virgin. Orthodoxy instructs

³² Cf. M.M. Garijo-Guembe, “Maria in der östlichen Tradition,” *Lebzeug* 43 (1999), 271.

³³ For more on this important topic, see: I. Όρ. Καλογήρου, Ἡριστολογικὴ θεμελίωσις τῆς ὀρθοδόξου περὶ τῆς Θεοτόκου Μαρίας διδακαλίας, *Κληρονομία* 17 (1985), 35. Ibid, «Μαρία. Ἄγία Γραφή, Ἄγιολογία, Δογματικὴ», *ΘΗΕ* 8 (1966) 672. G. Söll, “Madre di Gesu,” *DPAC* II (1984), 2104.

³⁴ Cf. St. Andrew of Crete, *Εἰς τὸ Γενέθλιον*, A', PG 97, 820C.

each of its members to contemplate the Holy Virgin through the Holy Fathers, to use them as guides through the ineffable mysteries of Her person. She requires that each firstly arm his own heart, mind, and tongue with prayer before speaking of the Holy Theotokos.

Only a thinking apparatus armed with prayer enables man to speak worthily about the most worthy among all the created beings. The more prayerful an Orthodox man is – the more he loves the Mother of God, the more he contemplates Her, the more he prays to Her – a son of Orthodoxy once said.³⁵

That is why, in speaking of the Most Holy Theotokos and the Ever-Virgin Mary, I shall speak of Her in the way in which the Holy Orthodox Church thinks and speaks of Her, through the mouths of the divinely inspired Holy Fathers at the Ecumenical Councils, through their deeds and words, and through the hymns of the divinely inspired church poets for, according to the Orthodox teaching, no writer may, in studying Divine words and truths, consider his thoughts as competent without checking them against the thoughts of the Holy Fathers.

Biblical-patristic theology has reached its zenith in the divine contemplation of divine worship and liturgy. In our exposition concerning the mystery of the person of the Most Holy Theotokos, to whom the hymnographer refers as the “unwedded Maiden”³⁶ and “gladdened by God,”³⁷ we have underlined that the Virgin was chosen from among all the peoples and foretold by all the prophets.³⁸ She, “having been chosen by God as a beautiful and spacious Village.”³⁹ “The true Sion, Christ the Logos vouchsafed to choose You, O Theotokos, for Himself as the elected for the Divine Dwelling.”⁴⁰ God found Mary “as a fragrant Lily in the valley of life,”⁴¹ and only within Her, of all people, did the Divine mysteries take place.⁴² Or, in the words of the hymnographer: *That which was foretold by the prophecies about You has now been fulfilled in You, O most pure one without compare.*⁴³ “You have shown yourself as the newly-grown Paradise of immortality and as

³⁵ Archpresbyter Dr. Janković, at a Catholic congress in Ljubljana, Slovenia, “Преглед епархије жичке” (“Žiça Bishopric Review”), Čačak 1926, no. 2.

³⁶ Theotokion on verses of Tone 8, Saturday Vespers.

³⁷ St. 2 on verses of the Forefeast of the Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos, September 6.

³⁸ Theotokion, Tone 4, Matins, December 10, Menaion.

³⁹ Theotokion, ode 7, St. Juliana, December 21.

⁴⁰ St. 2, Ode 4, Kont., Tone 8, Saturday Compline.

⁴¹ Theotokion, Ode 8, Canon poem. Gerasimus, March 4.

⁴² See: Ode 1, Canon of the Synaxis of St. Peter and St. Paul, Akathist to the Theotokos, Eikos 9.

⁴³ Theotokion, Ode 6 of the Canon, St. Arsenije of Srem, October 28.

truly splendid, O Maiden, for the Tree of Life that begins in God, which you carried in your womb and bore, took root in you."⁴⁴ Truly, hymnography is wholly justified to say of Her: "you are the only one of Great Name, O Most Holy Virgin Mary."⁴⁵ The cry that erupts from us, "what tongue will hymn you, O Sovereign Lady," is the conclusion that inevitably comes to us. That is so because the Virgin is the "Depth invisible even to the eyes of Angels"⁴⁶ and, as such, "surpasses all bounds of praise."⁴⁷

At the very beginning of the conclusion of our research of the topic of the Most Holy Theotokos, we concur with Saint Symeon the New Theologian that "Christ takes the place of everything that I have,"⁴⁸ and that "the beginning of salvation was Gabriel's announcement to the Maiden, which She heard, to rejoice."⁴⁹ And, truly, the Theotokos is the "joy of the apostles and the martyrs,"⁵⁰ the "ineffable Rejoicing and festivity of souls."⁵¹ The inspired poet calls to the Virgin: "Rejoice, Healing of my flesh,"⁵² and "you came to the separated ones as the one that unites, for by you people have truly become fellow citizens of the Angels."⁵³ "O Theotokos... you are the Union to the dwellers of heaven and earth."⁵⁴ The joy of Christians is endless: "Rejoice, Bride of God, divine Entry of the saved",⁵⁵ "Rejoice, O Surety of those praying in silence";⁵⁶ "Rejoice, you who has woven maidenhood into motherhood";⁵⁷ "Rejoice, O Land yielding the immortal Fruit."⁵⁸

We should say that "the greatest act by which the Orthodox faithful honor the Theotokos is expressed in the Prothesis (Proskomydia), at which the Holy Sacraments – bread and wine – are offered in order to be blessed during the performance of the Divine Eucharist."⁵⁹ "That is why we place Her particle to the right of the holy Bread, showing that She is above all and the closest to God, while to the left are placed the particles for the Angels

⁴⁴ Theotokion, Tone 1, Saturday Small Vespers.

⁴⁵ Akathist to the Theotokos, 9.

⁴⁶ Akathist to the Theotokos, Eikos 11.

⁴⁷ Canon, Tone 1, Sunday Vespers.

⁴⁸ Symeon the New Theologian, Hymn XV, p. 289.

⁴⁹ St. 1, Ode 1, Canon of Tone 8, Saturday Compline.

⁵⁰ Theotokion, Tone 3, Wednesday Vespers.

⁵¹ Theotokion, Ode 4, Canon of Venerable Euthymius, January 20.

⁵² Akathist to the Theotokos, Eikos 12.

⁵³ Theotokion, Ode 9, Canon of the Pentecost.

⁵⁴ Theotokion on Siedalen, Ode 3, Canon of Venerable Gabriel of Lesnovo.

⁵⁵ St. 4, Ode 5, Canon to the Most Holy Theotokos, Saturday Matins, 5th week of Lent.

⁵⁶ Akathist to the Theotokos, Eikos 2.

⁵⁷ Akathist to the Theotokos, Eikos 8.

⁵⁸ Akathist to the Theotokos, Eikos 3.

⁵⁹ Dimitrios Tsamis, "Theomitorikon. Praises of the Mother of God," *op. cit.*, p. 15.

and all the Saints, for they occupy the second rank in relation to Her. Thus, everything is ordered so that She is above everyone, because it is through Her and by way of the Saints that we are also saved."⁶⁰ That is the reason why the hymnographer addresses the Theotokos thus: "Rejoice, Cause of our salvation";⁶¹ we have you "as Arms, Protection and Barrier,"⁶² "the Aid and Assistance of all Christians."⁶³

The question is: how should we relate to the Most Holy Theotokos? The answer can be found with the holy Fathers: "Just as the Theotokos was revealed as a worthy and holy refuge for God, when He deigned to enter the world, so are we, truly, now obliged, when we should praise Her, to find adequate words and, aided by grace, offer a presentation of Her life, bestowing upon Her the praise that She deserves, for, as exalted as that undertaking is, it is in the same measure almost impossible, so how are we, then, to harmonize praise and desire."⁶⁴

Saint Cyril of Alexandria connects the person of the Most Holy Theotokos with the concept of the Church. The Church cannot even be conceived, cannot exist without the All-Holy Mother of Christ the Savior. The Most Holy Theotokos is the Church, and the Church is the Most Holy Theotokos. To say "Theotokos" is to encompass the entire idea of the Church, because the entire divine mystery of the Person of Jesus Christ is expressed by the name Theotokos in the person of the Ever-Virgin Mary."⁶⁵ In other words, the Theotokos is the fulfillment of the Creator's Economy of Salvation.⁶⁶

Epiphanius of Cyprus: "Let Mary be in honor, but let worship be given to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; one does not, thus, worship Mary... even though She is the best, holy and respected, one does not worship Mary. Had Mary's body not been holy, God would not have been born through it. Yes, She was a virgin and remained a venerable virgin, but it does not befit us to bow to Her of Herself, but rather to the body that was born of Her, that is, to the One who came to us from the arms of the Father."⁶⁷

Events from the life of the Most Holy Theotokos are difficult to understand for people, and they have the character of the *queen of mystery*.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, in the Angel's words to the Virgin Mary: "rejoice," the mys-

⁶⁰ Symeon of Thessalonika, *On the Holy Liturgy*, PG 155, 284AB.

⁶¹ Theotokion on the Aposticha, Saturday of Cheesefare Week.

⁶² Theotokion on the procession stichera on St. Sava, the First Serbian Archbishop.

⁶³ O.M.B. concluding prayer.

⁶⁴ Canon of the Akathist Hymn, Ode 7, Troparion 2, Triodion.

⁶⁵ Metropolitan Dionysios of Kozani, in Atanasije Jevtić, *Η Θεοτόκος*, p. 270.

⁶⁶ Troparion, Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple, November 21.

⁶⁷ *Panarion* 79:4 and 7, PG 42, 752AB and 745C.

⁶⁸ Andrew of Crete, *Εἰς τὴν Κοίμησιν*, I, IB', PG 97, 1076B.

tery that was revealed was that Christianity is life, and that life is joy. While foremother Eve, due to her sin, introduced “sorrow” into the world (Gn 3:16), the Theotokos, without expressing doubt like Sarah did in the tent, or demanding a sign from the Angel like Zechariah (Lk 1:18), introduced *joy*. And truly, the Church testifies that the Virgin Mary is the Theotokos – Blessed (cf. Lk 1:48), and that the blessing She received never expires, but is eternal.⁶⁹ This is a unique joy, which is interpreted, understood and accepted Christologically, because Jesus Christ is the One Who provided the Virgin Mary with both Her first and “second existence”⁷⁰ – eternal and blessed life. Thus, the Virgin Mary is “Blessed by God,”⁷¹ that is, by God’s blessing, not of Herself. She is “the holy Land, from which Christ sprouted, the spike of life.”⁷² That is also what the hymnographer says: “You are the sole Root of maidenhood,”⁷³ “rejoice, O uncultivated Land that bears the most splendid Spike, the Provider of all creation.”⁷⁴

And not only to Her: “The Son and Logos of God, having pre-eternally assumed flesh, Son to the Maiden by the benevolence of the Father and the cooperation of the Divine Spirit, renewed my entire corruptible image, as the Almighty,”⁷⁵ says the hymnographer.

According to the Orthodox teaching, the mystery of the person of the Theotokos Virgin Mary is properly interpreted and understood exclusively in the mystery of the Theandric Person of Her Son – Jesus Christ, to Whom She gave birth not as a perfect man, but as God with a real human body (= God-Man) – the incarnate and humanized Logos.⁷⁶ We rightly call the holy Mary the Theotokos in strict truth, for this name contains the entire mystery of the Economy of Salvation.⁷⁷

Having become “the Lord God’s living chamber,”⁷⁸ “in which God deigned to live,”⁷⁹ the Virgin is the Mother of the new creation because She gave birth to the One Who is the creator of the new creation: “if any

⁶⁹ Cf. John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, IV, 16.

⁷⁰ Cf. John of Damascus, *Ἐγκώμιον τρίτον εἰς τὴν Κοίμησιν*, 4.

⁷¹ Theotokion, Ode 6, Canon of St. Theoctistus, January 4.

⁷² Theotokion, Ode 8, Canon of St. Theodore the Sykeote, April 22.

⁷³ Theotokion on Siedalen pol. of St. Metrophanes the Wonderworker, First Bishop of Voronezh, November 23.

⁷⁴ Theotokion, Ode 9, Canon of St. Karl, May 20.

⁷⁵ Theotokion, Ode 9, Canon of the service of Holy Hieromartyr Clement, Bishop of Ancyra, January 23.

⁷⁶ Cf. John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, III, 2.

⁷⁷ Cf. John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, III, 12.

⁷⁸ Canon on the Conception by St. Anna of the Most Holy Theotokos, Irmos, Ode 8.

⁷⁹ Theotokion, Ode 8, Canon of St. Vladimir, June 15.

man be in Christ, he is a new creature" (2 Cor 5:17). Expressed poetically: "Your womb has shown itself a God-bearing Palace, in which the king of all, Christ, rested."⁸⁰ We Orthodox Christians "honor the King's Divine Palace, into which He moved as was His wish."⁸¹

The divinely wise Gregory of Nyssa was truly right in seeing the end of the reign of death in the person of the Most Holy Theotokos,⁸² for the Only-Begotten Son of God – Christ is the one Who brought salvation and spiritual renewal – deification.⁸³ In presenting the pan-Orthodox teaching on the Most Holy Theotokos, Saint Gregory Palamas says: "No one comes to God except through the Most Holy Theotokos and of Her Mediator, and none of the gifts of God are given to the Angels or people except through Her... The Virgin Mother is incomparably greater than everyone and everything: communicants of God become thus through Her; those that celebrate God celebrate Her after God. She is the foundation of the Prophets, the head of the Apostles, the courage of the Martyrs, the foundation of the Teachers, the glory of the earthly, the joy of the heavenly, the adornment of all creation. She is the beginning and the source and the root of ineffable goods. She is the culmination and the perfection of all that is holy."⁸⁴ Moreover, through the Mother of God, "the saints receive all their holiness."⁸⁵

We shall also say in conclusion that the "mystery" of the Most Holy Theotokos in the Orthodox Church can be understood in the Christological sense and in the liturgical life of the Church – its atmosphere of divine worship, the sole place where the Holy Scripture is interpreted properly, as well as all the places related to the Virgin Mary – the Theotokos.⁸⁶ According to the patristic teaching, as the "Height beyond human logic,"⁸⁷ the Theotokos is the "Seal of the prophets"⁸⁸ and the key to the proper understanding of the Theandric Person of Jesus Christ and, thus, of Orthodox ecclesiology and soteriology.⁸⁹ Church hymnography explains this mystery:

⁸⁰ Theotokion, Ode 4, Canon of Holy Martyrs Cleonicus and Basiliscus, March 3.

⁸¹ Theotokion, Ode 1, Canon of the Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ, December 22.

⁸² St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Περί παρθενίας*, 14, PG 46, 377C.

⁸³ Cf. Justin the Philosopher, *Dialogue with Tryphon*, 100, 5.

⁸⁴ St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily 37*, PG 151, 472CD.

⁸⁵ St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily 37*, PG 151, 461A.

⁸⁶ Cf. Π. Νέλλα, *Νικολάου Καβάσιλα, Η Θεομήτωρ. Τρεῖς Θεομητορικές ὁμιλίες. Κείμενο – μετάφραση – εἰσαγωγή – σχόλια*, Ἀθήνα 1974, 19.

⁸⁷ Akathist to the Theotokos, Eikos 1.

⁸⁸ Verse. 1 on Aposticha at Small Vespers, Saturday of the Week of the Man Born Blind.

⁸⁹ Cf. Χρυσοστόμου Σταμούλη, *Η Θεοτόκος κατὰ τὸν ἅγιο Κυρίλλο Ἀλεξανδρείας*, p. 389.

“We know you as the seal of prophets, as the protector of the Old as well as the intercessor of the New.”⁹⁰

In a word, in the person of the Virgin Mary, “fair in resplendencies,”⁹¹ we see the Theotokos, for She indeed gave birth to the “Holy Lord of all,”⁹² while also being the paragon of the holy Maiden and of the Mother.⁹³ She is the “Flower of virginity,”⁹⁴ whom the Son of God adorned with His gifts, and He is the beauty of His Mother.⁹⁵ That is why we “venerate the Divinely Fair and incomparably Most Pure Maiden,”⁹⁶ and hymn Her praises “as the true Mirror of maidenhood, and pure Dwelling of the Godhead.”⁹⁷ In fact, rejection of the Most Holy Virgin Mary’s Motherhood of God is a consequence of the rejection of the truth of the Divinity of Her son – Jesus Christ.⁹⁸

According to the sober-mindedness of Saint Gregory Palamas, the Theotokos is a joint adornment of the earthly and the heavenly world,⁹⁹ because She, among all people, was worthy of being the “great Gift.”¹⁰⁰ She is “adorned with an immaterial spirit.”¹⁰¹ The Most Holy Virgin Mary, “originating from mankind” and, by the incarnation of the Son of God through Her, having gained incomparable and singular glory, represents the “adornment” of all humanity. The Most Holy Theotokos is also called the “Adornment of high priests.”¹⁰² The hymnographer addresses Her as follows: “The only one to have Adorned humanity, with your Offspring, O Bride of God.”¹⁰³

Regrettably, not all people believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, not all people know of or respect His Mother. Thus, not everyone can fathom and evaluate the honor, the glory gained by humanity in the person of the Most Holy Virgin Mary. Hence, the Most Holy Mary is an adornment primarily for the faithful. For the faithful, She is not merely an adornment but also an object of praise, for only they are able to comprehend the honor of having Her as their ornament, their glory.

⁹⁰ Sticheron on glory: on Beatitudes, Synaxis of St. John the Baptist, January 7.

⁹¹ Theotokion, Ode 9, Canon, 7th week after Pascha, at Matins.

⁹² Theotokion, Ode 5, Canon of St. Emilian the Confessor, January 8.

⁹³ Cf. Βάσ. Γιούλτση, *Πνευματικότητα καὶ κοινωνικότητα*, pp. 107-111.

⁹⁴ Verse 2 on Lord, I called, Assumption of the Most Holy Theotokos, August 15.

⁹⁵ See: Efrhäm der Syrer, *Jobgesang an der Wüste*, Lambertus – Verlag, Freiburg im Breisgan 1967, p. 15.

⁹⁶ Theotokion, Small Vespers, Sunday of the Blind Man.

⁹⁷ Verse 1, Ode 6, Canon to the Theotokos, Tone 8, Saturday Compline.

⁹⁸ Cf. John of Damascus, Epistle 16, PG 77, 104C.

⁹⁹ See: Gregory Palamas, *Εἰς τὴν πρὸς τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων εἰσοδόν: ἔκδοσις τοῦ Σοφοκλέους Κ. Οικονόμου, ὁμιλία 53, 6, Ἀθηνῆσι 1816, 139.*

¹⁰⁰ Theotokion, Ode 3, Canon, St. Stefan Štiljanović of Serbia, October 4.

¹⁰¹ Kontakion of the Forefeast of the Assumption of the Most Holy Theotokos.

¹⁰² Theotokion, Ode 8, Canon, Tone 2, Friday Matins.

¹⁰³ Theotokion, Siedalen on Ode 3, Canon of Holy Wonderworker Tikhon.

The Most Holy Mary is an “adornment of the faithful” not only because She became worthy of heaven and the most direct graceful contact with God – which for the truly faithful represents the most important thing and the aim of all their desires, as well as being the blessing of angels – but because She Herself has become “heaven and the temple of God.” The all-pure Virgin is referred to as a temple and a gate, a palace and a throne,¹⁰⁴ the “Beauty of the Church,”¹⁰⁵ “Giver of divine Graciousness”¹⁰⁶ and the one that has shown us “Christ, the man-befriending Lord.”¹⁰⁷ The inevitable question arises: in what sense and why is the Most Holy Mary called “heaven and divine temple”?

She became heaven. The word “heaven” has several meanings in the Holy Scripture. First, it denotes the sky that we see, or the “firmament” (Gn 1:8). Second, in the language of the Holy Scripture, “heaven” denotes the world of spirits, the world of angels (Gn 1:1). The Most Holy Mary became equal to that heaven through Her purity and holiness of life. “Rejoice, you whom reflects the life of the Angels.”¹⁰⁸

Lastly, *heaven* as a place of God’s special presence is referred to in the Holy Scripture as “God’s throne” (Mt. 5:34). It is primarily in this meaning that hymns refer to the Most Holy Mary not only as “heaven” but as the “new,”¹⁰⁹ “earthly,”¹¹⁰ “living,”¹¹¹ “noetic” i.e., spiritual heaven,¹¹² because there was a special Divine presence within Her as well – for, unfathomably for angels and people, into Her “moved the corporeal fulfillment of the Godhead,”¹¹³ “one of the Trinity,”¹¹⁴ and She “became God’s throne, on which Christ sat in the flesh.”¹¹⁵

And temple of the Godhead. Like in heaven, there is a special Divine presence in temples, the blessing of which is felt by the faithful. There was also a special presence of the “Godhead” in the womb of the Most Holy Virgin Mary. Hence, the title of “temple of the Godhead” is attached to St.

¹⁰⁴Theotokion, Tone 5, *Menaion*.

¹⁰⁵Theotokion, Ode 5, Canon of the Holy Martyrs Pajsije and Avakum of Serbia, November 17.

¹⁰⁶Verse 2 on Aposticha of the service of the Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos, March 8.

¹⁰⁷Akathist to the Theotokos, Eikos 5.

¹⁰⁸Akathist to the Theotokos, Eikos 7.

¹⁰⁹Irmos, Canon, Tone 6, Ode 9, Irmos 9.

¹¹⁰Canon 1, on the Assumption, Ode 4, Tr. 1.

¹¹¹Canon 2, on the Assumption, Ode 1, Tr. 2.

¹¹²Oct. Tone 2, Kr. Theotok. Trop. 1.

¹¹³Irmos, Canon, Tone 8, Ode 9, Irmos 15.

¹¹⁴Theotok. at sec. Matins, Tone 6.

¹¹⁵Oct. Tone 6, sec. Mat. Kr. 2, Ode 3 Theot.

Mary in the same way as that of “heaven,” in the highest sense of the word. “You appeared to the Trinity as an honorable temple, within which the Father with love, the Son in the flesh, the Holy Spirit with infusion created a dwelling for Himself.”¹¹⁶

That is why the Church calls to its spiritual children: *Let us hymn the Virgin, the glory of all the world, Who originated from mankind and gave birth to the Sovereign of all that exists, Who is the gate in the heavens, hymned by the incorporeal beings, and the adornment of the faithful. For She was shown as the heaven and the temple of the Godhead. Tearing down the barrier of enmity (between God and man), She introduced peace and opened the royal palace; revering Her as the anchor of faith, we have for our companion the Lord whom She bore. Do, thus, fortify yourselves, O people of God, for He shall, as the almighty, defeat the enemies.*

In the Theotokion of the first tone, celebrating the Mother of God with various titles appropriate to Her greatness and thanking Her for the blessings performed for mankind, Saint John of Damascus urges those who are under Her protection and who have an advocate in the person of Her divine Son to sustain their salvific boldness in their battle against enemies and firm conviction in victory over them.

“The glory of the Most Holy Virgin Mary is so great because, among other things, the person of the Theotokos in Orthodox tradition represents the most perfect prototype of spiritual growth toward God.”¹¹⁷ Her glory stimulated godly veneration for Herself and the admiration of not just people but of angels! She is, in the full sense of the word – ecumenical! Rejoice, O Most Extolled Lady, who gave birth to the Most Extolled God of all.”¹¹⁸

Even though the glory of the Most Holy Theotokos is great, because She is the “God-Bearing Mother”¹¹⁹ and “Divine Dwelling of the eternal being,”¹²⁰ we nevertheless must reiterate that the Theotokos does not save, as She Herself was saved by Her own Son: the savior is God in the flesh – Jesus Christ, through the mediation and prayer of the Theotokos. The patristic thinking is that only the Theotokos has deified people, because She gave birth to the incarnate Logos.¹²¹ Born of the Virgin, Lord Christ brings the “richness of deification”¹²² to people. It is specially emphasized in the prayerful knowledge of the Orthodox Church that, having impoverished Himself thoroughly for our sake, God the Logos deified man through His

¹¹⁶ Can. to the Most Holy Trinity, Ode 1, now Theotok.

¹¹⁷ G. Manzaridis, *Orthodox Spiritual Life*, Thessaloniki 1992, p. 47.

¹¹⁸ Theotokion, Ode 7, Eikos, Canon of St. Theodosius of the Caves, May 3.

¹¹⁹ Theotokion, Ode 5, Venerable Romanus of Djunis (Serbia), August 16.

¹²⁰ Theotokion on Aposticha, Forefeast of the Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos.

¹²¹ Thursday, Matins, Canon to the Holy Apostles, Ode 9, Theotokion, Tone 7, *Octoechos*.

¹²² December 25, Canon, Ode 7.

union and communion with him.¹²³ In a word, from the Virgin's womb "the Sun of the Godhead shone corporeally and illuminated the world corporeally,"¹²⁴ while the Virgin Mary, daughter of Adam and mother of God,¹²⁵ is the "Carriage of the entire Godhead,"¹²⁶ as well as the "Preface of Christ's miracles"¹²⁷ and the "divine bridge that constantly conveys from the earth toward Him,"¹²⁸ that is, toward the Living God; thus, She is our intercessor before Her Son, Who is "all, and in all" (Col 3:11).

The Theotokos confessed the Orthodox faith from the beginning¹²⁹ and understood Her mission – a handmaid in the Economy of Salvation, who became the Mother of the humanized God the Logos,¹³⁰ that is, of "the Foundation of the earth."¹³¹ She is, so to say, the "Leader of spiritual restoration,"¹³² and it is Her that "all the faithful see as the beginning of salvation."¹³³ Due to Her motherly relationship with the Son Whom She bore, the Most Holy Theotokos is the closest to Him among all beings and can, thus, address the strongest pleas to Him for our sake in Her prayers. "For the Mother's prayers to the merciful Sovereign can do much."¹³⁴ Therefore, those that seek the most important and the greatest treasure for themselves – *salvation of the soul* – should turn to Her and appeal to Her for Her motherly prayerful advocacy before Her Son.

To confess the Virgin Mary as the Theotokos in the Orthodox way means to recognize that She did not give birth to an ordinary man, as was taught by Nestorius, who thus called Her the Christotokos, but to true God (God-Man). And only those that recognize Her in that Orthodox sense can place hope in Her prayer. That is why we place All our hopes in Her, for, as the worship of the Orthodox Church says, She is the true Vine.¹³⁵ "Небеснују двер и кивот, свјесвјатују гору, свјетлиј облак воспојим, неопалимију купину, словесниј Рај, Еви возваније, вселенија всеја великое сокрвишче..."¹³⁶

¹²³ December 25, Matins, Canon 1, ode 5.

¹²⁴ Theotokion, Ode 6, Canon of Prophet Zachariah, February 8.

¹²⁵ John of Damascus, *Ευκώμιον τρίτον εις την Κοίμησιν*, 4.

¹²⁶ Verse 2, Ode 8, Canon of the service of the Wonderworking Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos of Kazan, July 8.

¹²⁷ Akathist to the Theotokos, Eikos 2.

¹²⁸ Dogmatikon, Tone 2, Sunday Vespers.

¹²⁹ Cf. John of Damascus, *Oration 15*, PG 77, 1093A.

¹³⁰ Cf. John of Damascus, *Oration 4*, PG 77, 992D.

¹³¹ Akathist to the Theotokos, Verse 1. Ode 4, Canon.

¹³² Akathist to the Theotokos, Eikos 10.

¹³³ Theotokion on Aposticha, Holy Martyr Canon, March 5.

¹³⁴ Theotok. at the Sixth Hour.

¹³⁵ Theotokion, Tone 6, December 4, Matins, *Menaion*.

¹³⁶ Theotokion, Matins, December 5, *Menaion*.

God is love, and where there is love, there is giving and freedom.¹³⁷ And everything that we have been talking about has happened and is happening in the Economy of Salvation so “that as sin has reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rm 5:21). “Death came through the maiden Eve. It was, thus, befitting that life should come through a maiden or, better said, of a Maiden, so that, as the snake deceived the former, Gabriel would bring glad tidings to the latter.”¹³⁸ And, truly, “God’s Immeasurable Wisdom, Christ, built for Himself a Dwelling from a Maiden, unfathomably to the mind.”¹³⁹ The Church Poet describes this truth in a singular way: “As an uncultivated Vine, O Maiden, you sprouted the most beautiful Cluster, out of which flows the wine of salvation.”¹⁴⁰ We, therefore, know the Virgin Mary “as the Mother of Life and Parent of God,”¹⁴¹ for She bore “the one Who is before the ages by nature,”¹⁴² and Who brought us from non-being into being.¹⁴³ As the Virgin, who “has motherly mercy for the Christian race,”¹⁴⁴ although shaken with a storm of sinful thoughts, but still possessing reason fortified in God, we Orthodox Christians “glorify you, O Theotokos, sudden Remover of the old condemnation and foremother’s Correction, who are the Cause of the adoption of the race, Bridge toward the Creator.”¹⁴⁵ Hence, we “look upon the Holy Virgin as a candle that sheds light for those in the darkness of sin and the valley of tears, for with the spiritual fire of Her prayers, lit for the sake of guidance and consolation, She brings to the unquenchable light all who honor Her.”¹⁴⁶ The Orthodox Church confesses and testifies that the Virgin “has shown Herself as a sweet-bearing land to those that have sought to harvest salvation.”¹⁴⁷ She can do that, for She received the “power to put to order and protect the Christian race” from God.¹⁴⁸ Truly is

¹³⁷ Dumitru Staniloe, *Spiritual Community in the Orthodox Liturgy* (Serbian translation: Димитрије Станилоје, *Духовна заједница у православној Литургији*, Belgrade 1992, p. 188).

¹³⁸ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses*, Twelfth Catechesis, 15.

¹³⁹ Aposticha stichera, Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ, December 23.

¹⁴⁰ Theotokion on 2nd Siedalen on St. Sava of Serbia, January 12.

¹⁴¹ Exclamation on Ode 8 of the Canon, except for feasts devoted to Christ.

¹⁴² Theotokion, Ode 7, Canon of St. Sylvester.

¹⁴³ Cf. John of Damascus, Troparion on the Nativity of the Theotokos.

¹⁴⁴ Akathist to the Most Holy Theotokos for Her wonderworking icon, Eikos 3.

¹⁴⁵ Verse 2, Ode 9, Canon of St. Joachim and Anna.

¹⁴⁶ Akathist to the Most Holy Theotokos for Her wonderworking icon, Eikos 11.

¹⁴⁷ Akathist to the Most Holy Theotokos for Her wonderworking icon, Kontakion 7.

¹⁴⁸ Akathist to the Most Holy Theotokos for Her wonderworking icon, Kontakion 3.

the Virgin Mary “refuge of the Orthodox,”¹⁴⁹ citadel and protection for all who turn to Her.¹⁵⁰

Although the tongue of every orator and theological researcher is inadequate to stress the significance of the person of the Most Holy Theotokos and the mystery of Her service to the human race,¹⁵¹ since Her wondrous person surpasses all reason with its divine mysteriousness,¹⁵² and whose glory overshadows all human praise, for, in the words of the inspired poet: “It is, thus, easier for us to offer You silence with trepidation and love, O Virgin, and harder for us to weave You songs,”¹⁵³ we shall nevertheless conclude this theological research with the following words addressed to the Most Holy Theotokos: “How shall we call You, O Blessed Lady: Heaven, for You radiated forth the Sun of justice; Paradise, for You germinated the Flower of incorruptibility; Maiden, for You remained pure (chaste); Pure Mother, for You held in your holy arms Your Son, the God of all.”¹⁵⁴ The divinely wise Ephraim of Syria sings: “Lord, no one knows how to call Your Mother! Call Her the Virgin? But there is Her child! Wedded? But no man knew Her! If Your Mother is a mystery, how great a mystery are You, then?”¹⁵⁵ “How shall I call You: I know not and am terrified. Thus, as I have been commanded, I call out to You: rejoice, Highly Favored One.”¹⁵⁶ “We receive You, O Temple, Bride of God, as a royal Crown,”¹⁵⁷ and exclaim to You: “Rejoice, Access of mortals to God,”¹⁵⁸ and “rejoice O Queen, Glory of mothers and maidens, for no nimble and well-spoken and articulate mouth can worthily extol You, not every mind can fathom Your Offspring, so we celebrate You in unison,”¹⁵⁹ for “You are the fortification of those that repent, O Virgin Theotokos, and of those who seek to attain chastity with all their hearts, and peaceful Harbor for those that suffer in this world and turn to You, for You are the Queen of the Angels and truly the Mother of God.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁴⁹ Akathist to the Most Holy Theotokos of the Three Joys, Eikos 5.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Akathist to the Theotokos of Vladimir, Eikos 10.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Akathist to the Theotokos “Addition of Mind,” Eikos 9.

¹⁵² Cf. Jovan Purić, *Mystery of Salvation. Anthology of Prayerful Tradition*, p. 17.

¹⁵³ December 25, Matins, Canon, Tone 1, Irmos of Ode 9.

¹⁵⁴ Theotokion on 1st Svetilen of the service of the Translation of the Relics of St. John Chrysostom, January 27.

¹⁵⁵ Efrhäm der Syrer, *Jobgesang an der Wüste*, Lambertus – Verlag, p. 37.

¹⁵⁶ Theotokion, Tone 3, Sunday Vespers and Monday on God is the Lord.

¹⁵⁷ Verse 4, Ode 6, Canon of the Postfeast of the Entrance of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple, November 24.

¹⁵⁸ Akathist to the Theotokos, Eikos 3.

¹⁵⁹ Irmos, Ode 9, Canon on the Pentecost.

¹⁶⁰ Akathist to the Theotokos “Deliverance from Desires of the Flesh,” Eikos 10.

At the end, we will say that we are in full agreement with the observation regarding the rightness of the Orthodox theologians who advocate the necessity of elaborating our "liturgical theology, i.e., the systemization of the theological ideas of our divine worship. It is there that the living self-consciousness of the Church is found,"¹⁶¹ for "divine worship is the flower of Church life and, also, its root and seed."¹⁶²

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¹⁶¹ Cf. Hieromonk Cyprian, *The Lilies of Prayer* (Serbian translation: Јеромонах Кипријан, *Молитвени кринови*, Kragujevac 2000, p. 21).

¹⁶² Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* (Serbian translation: Павле Флоренски, *Стуб и тврђава истине*, p. 298).

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Summary

Bishop Jovan (Purić) (Belgrade)

The Mystery of Theotokos in Byzantine Hymnography: Theotokology in Hymnography of St. John of Damascus

The paper aims to analyze the way in which the Theotokos – the Mother of God is portrayed in Byzantine hymnography, as particularly in the hymnographic writings of St John Damascene. As the purpose of the Church hymnography is to transfer a dogmatic message by means of poetry, the representation of Mary the Mother of God serves to underline Trinitarian and Christological dogma. By proclaiming Mary as Theotokos – the Mother of God, the hymnography stresses the reality of Incarnation of God. Moreover, due to Incarnation of the Logos of God in her, Theotokos is saved and deified. In Trinitarian terms, Theotokos is interpreted as the *chosen vessel* by the Holy Trinity to accomplish the Mystery of the Incarnation of God the Logos. The further focus of the paper is on identification of the Theotokos with the Church, the Heaven and the Temple of the Godhead.

Keywords: Theotokos, Byzantine hymnography, Trinitarian theology, Christology, John Damascene.