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## **THESIS SUMMARY**

*DOGOMATIC ASPECTS OF THE VENERATION OF THE  
MOTHER OF GOD IN ORTHODOXY, REFLECTED IN THE  
ROMAINIAN ORTHODOX THEOLOGY IN THE SECOND  
HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY*

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## PhD Thesis Summary

The PhD thesis entitled “Dogmatic Aspects of the Veneration of the Mother of God in Orthodoxy, Reflected in the Romanian Orthodox Theology of the Second Half of the Twentieth Century” proposes to be a concise approach to the doctrine of the Mother of God, as the foundation of her veneration.

Over the time, countless rows of great sensibility, artistic beauty, and spiritual profoundness have been written about the Mother of God. Many authors have felt great joy and honor in showing their great devotion to the Virgin Mary, paying tribute to that one who, through her long-awaited and liberated *fiat*, has reopened the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven to all humanity and gave to man the hope to return from the exile of sin, into the house of the Most High One. This theme is vast and can be treated from several perspectives, but the present research deals with the study of the essential dogmatic concepts of the Mother of God from the works of some Romanian Orthodox theologians of the second half of the 20th century.

The purpose of the present PhD thesis is to show in a clear and accessible way who is the Virgin Mary theologically, what is her position and role in the Christian-Orthodox spirituality and at the same time how each believer must relate, from an existential point of view, to the Mother of God.



This PhD thesis aims at carrying out a dogmatic analysis from the Orthodox perspective of the main assertions and opinions on the life and personality of the Virgin Mary, as they are rendered in the Sacred Scripture, in the Holy Tradition, and in newer editorial publications, especially in those that were written in the Romanian Orthodox theology of the second half of the 20th century.

In order to highlight the dogmatic aspects of the veneration of the Virgin Mary, reflected in the works of the Romanian theologians of the second half of the 20th century, there have been consulted the writings of some theologians of the Romanian Orthodoxy, that focused their attention on the research of some topics related to the dogmatic doctrine of the Mother of God. Such theologians were: Dumitru Stăniloae, Petru Rezuș, Olimp Căciula, Ilie Moldovan, Constantin Galeriu, Chesarie Gheorghescu, Pinteă Dumitru, Isidor Todoran, Nicolae Chițescu and Ion Bria.

The PhD thesis begins with an “Introduction” and continues with the study itself, that is structured in five parts.

In the **first part** of the thesis, in which the diachronic method of research was used, started with the presentation of the scriptural foundations of the veneration of the Virgin Mary, continued with exposing of the main views expressed by the Holy Fathers referring to the Virgin Mary and ended with the definition of the dogmatic doctrine regarding the Mother of God during the period of the Ecumenical Councils.

In the **second part** of the thesis, there has been targeted the detailed presentation of the most important conceptions about the Mother of God, launched in the Romanian theology of the second half of the 20th century, as well as of the historical and theological context in which these concepts appeared. The present doctoral thesis has proposed to carry out a thorough analysis and provide an adequate interpretation of the more important theotokological statements and ideas transmitted by the Romanian theologians that were used. In this second part of the PhD thesis, the predominant research method was the analytical method, supported by the synchronic method, by the diachronic method, but also by the synthetic method. It has been aimed the highlighting, in a thorough, well structured and systematized form, the main themes that have in their center the Mother of God, in her indissoluble union with the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Church. In the Romanian theological thinking, the doctrine of the Virgin Mary was thematically presented, while the dogmatic themes regarding the Mother of God as the God-bearer and the Virgin Mary were analyzed. It has been shown that the title of God-bearer refers to the fact that the Mother of God has begotten the Son of God Himself, with His human flesh and soul, i.e. the human nature, taken through the Incarnation, “at the fullness of time”, from the Virgin Mary, a human nature that He has united in His only Divine Hypostasis with the divine nature, received through the eternal birth from the Father. It has also been spoken of the perpetual-virginity of the Mother of God, a

teaching that highlights the fact that the Virgin Mary dedicated her whole life to God, promising to Him, even from the time that she spent in the temple, that she would remain forever virgin. Therefore, the Incarnation and the Birth of the Son of God in the womb of the Mother of God, having a supernatural virginal character, since they took place through the sacred and sanctified work of the Holy Spirit, did not spoil, but kept the seal of Mary's virginity untouched. In this respect, the Romanian theologians have stated that the Orthodox Church teaches about the Mother of God three-dimensional virginity: before birth, in birth and after birth. It was also emphasized, in the Romanian theology, the connection between the divine maternity and the perpetual virginity of the Mother of God, claiming that if the maternity did not ruin the virginity's seal, in turn, the virginity found out the power of birth and the right fulfillment in the maternity. These two teachings determined the Church to legitimize and to give a cult of veneration to the Mother of God, which manifested itself in prayers, hymnology, iconography, homily and liturgy. The Romanian theologians have also shown that God Himself is the One who, above all, brought honor to the Virgin Mary and consecrated the establishment of this cult of veneration, that all the believers have the duty to address, with love and with sincere devotion, the Mother of God. Thus, the faith of the Church in the divine maternity and in the virginity of the Mother of Christ is at the same time dogmatic and doxologically confessed, both by the dogmatic definitions and the liturgical forms.

In the **third part** of the thesis, the theme of the relationship between the Virgin Mary and the life of the Church was discussed, highlighting the role of the Mother of God as the spiritual Mother of the Christians and the Mediator of all graces. The present PhD thesis has aimed to show that the Virgin Mary is a true parable of experiencing the life in Christ, as it opens the way of the spiritual union of the believers with the Son of God, while being the ultimate fulfillment and the guarantee of this relationship. At the same time, it has been highlighted the Romanian theologians conception regarding the relationship between the Virgin Mary and the ancestral sin as well as the role of the Holy Spirit in the act of the Incarnation. Thus, it was stated that the Mother of God was born with the ancestral sin, like all men except Christ, and therefore, she remained in solidarity with the people. However, according to the explanations offered by the Romanian theologians, the Virgin Mary was cleansed of the ancestral sin by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, who, in His graceful descent upon her, prepared her so that she could receive within herself and give birth as a man to the Incarnated Son of God. Also, in this part, where the diachronic and analytical method were used, it was exposed the theme that regards the Mother of God as a Mediator in supporting the Faithfull's efforts to achieve the subjective salvation. It was noted that, in the Romanian theology, a distinction was made between the two directions of the intercession of the Mother of God: one which takes into consideration her quality of Prayer in

the favor of the faithful, and the second, which refers to her role as Distributor or Deliverer, in a direct and proper sense, of the divine graces to the ecclesial community as a result of the supreme unity existing between her humanity and the deified human nature of the incarnated Son of God. Also, there has been made reference to the Mother of God, as Guardian and Advisor of the faithful, as she was seen in the thinking of the Romanian theologians.

In the **fourth part** of this thesis, an apologetic-inter-confessional approach was made from the Orthodox point of view to the distinctive dogmatic aspects of the Mother of God veneration, present in the Roman Catholic and the Neo-protestant theology. In this sense, there has been dogmatically debated the teachings of the Immaculate Conception, the Corporal Assumption and the Mother of the Lord Corredemptrix – specific to the Roman Catholic Church – and the criticisms on the perpetual virginity of the Mother of Christ and on the need to bring a cult of veneration to the Mother of God – raised by neo-protestant theology.

The Romanian theologians have shown that the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception preserves the Virgin Mary from the ancestral sin, and therefore she no longer needs to be cleansed at the Annunciation. This dogma shows that the very need of the Virgin Mary to be saved through the sacrifice on the Cross of the Christ is unjustifiable, the Mother of God becoming herself an autonomous salvation center for the human kind, even before

Christ. Also, in the Romanian theology, it was shown that the dogma of the Corporal Assumption removes from the secret cover the event of the Ascension of the Most Holy Mother in heaven. Presented as a consequence of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, Bodily Assumption refers to the fact that the Mother of God, in the absence of the ancestral sin, no longer needed to experience the reality of death, an event that was overlooked in Catholicism, so that she was ascended through her own powers, with her body and soul, in heaven. The Romanian theologians have drawn attention to the fact that in Orthodoxy there has been made the reference to Mary's death as a Sleep, while affirming the faith in her moving to heaven, but not separated from Christ, by her own power, as a God, but only in Christ and by the divine power of Christ. Regarding the death of Mary, the Orthodox theologians have stated that it is not a sacrificial death assumed voluntarily for the salvation of men, like the death of Christ, but is a consequence of the ancestral sin. The Romanian theologians explained that the rise of Mary does not derive from her death, but, because of the full unity of her nature with the humanity of Christ, Mary's death is mild and fleeting, being overcome by the very power of Christ's death. About the Catholic doctrine, unformulated as a dogma, that regards the Mother of God as corredemptrix, in the Romanian Orthodoxy it has been stated that the Virgin Mary could not have a role in the realization of the objective salvation, since this work belongs exclusively to Christ. The Mother of God only fulfills the

role of transmitting the necessary graces to support the spiritual efforts of the believers in order to obtain the subjective salvation. In accomplishing the objective salvation, the Virgin Mary participates by her consent at the Annunciation to become the Mother of the Son of God as a human being. In her intercessory role, the Virgin Mary does not interfere between the believers and Christ, but becomes fully transparent to the divine irradiations that come down from God to men, through the human nature of the Mother of God. It has been pointed out, as a conclusion, that the Romanian Orthodox theologians found, in connection with these three special teachings about the Mother of God, the clear tendency of the Catholicism to parallel the Virgin Mary with Christ, to autonomy her of Him and to exclude her from the solidarity with people. Regarding the neo-protestant objections to the Orthodox doctrine concerning the teaching of the Mother of God, it was mentioned that the Romanian theologians put this attitude of rejection in the relation to the rational inability to recognize the virginity of the Mother of God during and after the birth of Jesus Christ, on the basis of their unilateral interpretation of the neo-testamentary expressions “until”, “the first-born” and “the brethren of the Lord”. In the Romanian theology, it has been demonstrated that these expressions cannot be invoked as arguments against the teaching of the Mother of God, because, in reality, the expression “until” shows the perpetuity of a state of fact, in the present case of virginity, the expression “First-born” is used to refer to the

double inheritance of the firstborn, in the case of the existence of several siblings, but this is not mandatory, and the phrase “the Lord’s brethren” refers to the secondary cousins of Jesus, more precisely, to the sons of Mary of Cleopa, the brother of Joseph. In the Romanian theology, there has been also a response to the objection of the neo-protestants that the bodily kinship would be disregarded by the Savior because He would have treated Her Mother with indifference sometimes, saying that the kinship is not bad in itself but does not have a role in salvation, because believers must acquire the true affinity by observing the divine commandments, following the example of the Virgin Mary. Neither the accusation of the neo-protestants that the veneration of the Mother of God was Mariolatry was not unanswered, the Romanian theologians pointing out that, in the Orthodox Church, the veneration of the Mother of God is relative to the worship of God so that the prayer to the Virgin Mary passes indirectly to God. Therefore, in the present work it was dismantled that the peculiarities of perception of the teaching of the Mother of God in Roman Catholic and Neo-protestant theology imply two diametrically opposed views: one of maximizing and another of minimizing the role of the Virgin Mary in the work of salvation. Only Orthodoxy keeps the middle path in all the teachings of the faith, including in the theotokology.

In the **fifth part**, it was intended to bring the researched theme up to date, with the aim of opening new perspectives in studying the doctrine concerning the veneration of the Mother of



God. In this sense, it was revealed how this dogmatic doctrine, reflected in the Romanian Orthodoxy of the second half of the 20th century, was received in the contemporary Romanian Orthodox theology. However, it has been highlighted the relevance of this reception of the theotokological teaching in the mission and pastoral work of the Orthodox Church today. So, in the present PhD thesis, it was made reference to the volume of the priest Professor Ștefan Buchiu, entitled “The Mother of God. An introduction to the Orthodox theotokology”, in which the theotokological doctrine was presented, in correlation with the other dogmatic doctrines of the Orthodox theology. In this sense, the author pointed out that an authentic Orthodox theotokology must be fully integrated into Christology as well as in soteriology, ecclesiology and eschatology, and to find a doxological correspondent in the cult and in the spirituality of the Church. Based on the statements of the priest Ștefan Buchiu, it was emphasized that the missionary and the pastoral work of the Church should focus, in the context of the current secularized world, on guiding the believers towards the intensification of the religious and the spiritual life, the inner transformation, by the cultivation of the virtues and by the fulfillment of the divine commandments, having as a perfect model and as a hopeful help the Holy Mother of God. The last but not the least, it was emphasized that the mission of the Church should direct the theological research towards specifying and clarifying some rather controversial themes of the teaching of the Mother of God,

such as the work of intercession of the graces and the divine gifts. Also from a missionary point of view, the Church must channel its efforts to clarify the Orthodox specifics of the teaching about the veneration of the Mother of God, in the face of the various mariological, deviant and exaggerated concepts promoted by other Christian confessions, thus preparing the Orthodox believers to face the proselytism that tends to jeopardize the authentic theotokological content of the ecclesial tradition of the early Christian ages, affirmed, preserved and updated in the Orthodox Church. Also, the present PhD thesis referred to the work of the deacon Professor Ioan Ică jr, entitled “The Mother of God in the theology of the 20th century and in the Hesychast spirituality of the 14th century”, in which the author analyzed how was approached the doctrine of the Mother of God in the Christian Europe of the twentieth century. The starting point of this great work was the polemic about the Byzantine mariology, which was played between the group of Chernivtsi theologians from Sibiu and the great theologian Dumitru Stăniloae. In the opinion of deacon Ioan Ică jr, this controversy would not have taken place, given that there was the translation into Romanian language of the “Mariology Treaty”, elaborated by Teofan of Nicea, whose original conception of the intercession of the Mother of God constituted the source of the irreconcilable controversy between the Romanian theologians. Knowing the text elaborated by this Byzantine author and putting it in correlation with other writers of the same period that had the

same conception of the intercession of the Virgin Mary could be the premise of understanding this theme in the spirit of the Holy Fathers. Thus, the expression “Mother of All Graces”, referring to the capacity of the Holy Mother to share the divine graces to all the believers, could be embraced with more openness in the environments of the Romanian theology, and could, at the same time, be accepted as a fully Orthodox expression, a fact that may put an end to the theotokological disputes between the Romanian theologians.

The PhD thesis ends with a part dedicated to the

#### **Conclusions:**

1. In the writings published in the second half of the last century, the Romanian orthodox theologians approached the theotokological teaching from a biblical and patristic perspective. The undivided church of the first millennium has affirmed, through an undeniable dogmatic formulation, the unswerving faith in the divine maternity, the ever-virginity, in the pre-honoring and the intercession of the Mother of God. In the Romanian theological thinking of the second half of the 20th century, it was pointed out that before the definitive fixing of the teachings about the Mother of God within the ecumenical synods around this doctrine, there were fierce doctrinal struggles in which the most important defensive walls of orthodoxy were the divine and ever-maternal maternity. If these fortifications were to be conquered, then the teachings of incarnation and salvation

would have been totally destroyed. Therefore, it was emphasized that, according to the Romanian theologians, the theotokology represents the mother of all the Christological dogmas of the Orthodox Church.

2. The Romanian Orthodox theologians did not consider that the Doctrine of the Mother of God is a distinct and independent theme of theology, but a subject that must be correlated with the main chapters of Orthodox dogmatics such as Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology and Eschatology. Through this, it was revealed that the Mother of God can not be conceived without her Son, just as the Lord Jesus Christ can not be conceived without His Mother. In this sense, the unitary character of Orthodox theology is preserved and emphasized, in which all dogmatic themes are in perfect interdependence. From the statements made in the Romanian orthodoxy of the second half of the 20th century, it follows that the doctrine of the pre-honoring of the Mother of God is not an insignificant and marginal theme of theology, being a lesson that can not be overlooked, since it is instituted and demanded by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It has been pointed out that the preaching of the Mother of God is an expression of Christian godliness and spirituality, but especially a teaching of faith absolutely necessary for salvation. In the face of the exceptional mystery of the Mother of God, every Christian is obliged to express all his love and reverence, for by placing her in the highest

neighborhood of the throne of glory of her Son, the Virgin Mary intercedes with full efficiency for the salvation and deification of all members of the Church.

3. With regard to the theme of the intercession of the Mother of God, there were differences of opinion between the Romanian theologians. On the one hand, it was claimed that the Virgin Mary only realizes intercession through prayer, intervening before God to convey Christian uncreated divine graces. This intercession of the Mother of God differs only in degree by the intercession of saints, since the Virgin Mary is more united with Christ than any creature, because of divine maternity. On the other hand, it was stated that the Mother of God is not only a Prayer for the reception of grace, but also a Giver or a Distributor, a true and real distributor of grace to the Church community. Despite differences of opinion, Romanian theologians have stated that the intercession of the Mother of God is only an intercession in the plan of subjective salvation, as opposed to the intercession of Christ, which lies in the plan of objective salvation.
4. Orthodox theotokology was approached in the Romanian theological thinking of the second half of the 20th century, especially in the context of inter-confessional discussions. According to the Romanian theologians, all Catholic innovations related to the dogmatic doctrine of the Mother of God represent an arbitrary, unilateral, and simplifying

opportunity to paralyze the Virgin Mary with the Savior Jesus Christ. Therefore, the Mother of God is associated with her Son in his work of achieving salvation. The Romanian theologians have shown that such an attitude not only removes the Virgin Mary from solidarity with men, but excludes it from its very dependence on Christ, conferring upon the Mother of God powers, attributes and divine prerogatives. In relation to the neo-protestant theology, it was shown that the problem raised by the expressions until the Firstborn and the Lord's brethren obviously envisaged the non-recognition of the Virgin Mary's virginity in the time and after the birth of Jesus Christ as a dogmatic premise for rejecting the doctrine of the Superstition of the Virgin Mary. Similarly to the mariological assertions of Roman Catholicism, the neo-protestant assertions about the Mother of God are characterized by the same tendency of simplifying rationality.

Unlike Catholicism, in orthodox theology, the Virgin Mary does not have an own and autonomous or parallel work in relation to the work of Christ. In orthodoxy, there is only one saving work, that of the Lord Jesus Christ, in which the Mother of God has the role of a direct participant, in particular, by her quality of Mother of God, appropriated at the incarnation, with his consent to God through the Angel Gavriil at Annunciation. Consequently, according to romanian theologians, the Mother of God enjoys a higher

honor in orthodoxy than in catholicism, since it is the subject of the fullness of the Holy Spirit, that is of uncreated divine grace, like Christ, but through Christ and in full unity with Christ. The glory of the Mother of God springs from Christ and is embraced in the glory of Christ. That is why in orthodoxy, through the mystery and glory of the Mother of God, the most categorical and deepest Christocentrism is asserted.

5. In general, the Romanian Orthodox theologians treated the theotocological doctrine only in the context of the discussion of the Christological theme of hypostatic unity. Thus, the teaching of the quality of the Virgin Mary of the Mother of God is represented as one of the consequences or implications of a perfect union between human and divine nature in the Hypostasis of the Word of God. Another context in which the Romanian theology referred to the teaching of the Mother of God is that related to the holiness of the saints, underlining the fundamental dogmatic motives that have led the Church to grant the preaching of the Virgin a pre-accession cult. Also, in the Romanian theological thought, the Doctrine of the Mother of God was discussed in connection with the theme of the communion of the righteous with the church of the Church of Fighting on the earth, underlining the importance of the intercession of the Most Holy Mother of God, more united with His Son than all righteous, can intervene more effectively in favor of

believers to provide them with the necessary support to obtain subjective salvation. This type of approach is specific to the structure that the textbooks of dogmatic theology are in general because it does not divide the doctrine of the Mother of God with the Christology and the other themes of dogmatic theology. Thus, in the Romanian Orthodox dogma, the unity between theology and Christology, soteriology, pneumatology, ecclesiology and eschatology is declared and preserved. Therefore, this theoto-cological approach is usually encountered by authors who have developed such scientific works for the use of theology schools. Within these textbooks, doctrinal references to the Mother of God are systematically and structurally restricted and systematically linked to the teaching of the Incarnation as one of the consequences of the hypostatic union and the theme of subjective salvation, which underlines the significance of the notion of holiness in Orthodox theology.

The main contribution of this doctoral dissertation is the deepening of the dogmatic doctrine of the Mother of God, reflected in the Romanian Orthodox theology of the second half of the 20th century. In this sense, the statements made by several Romanian theologians who were concerned with the study of some dogmatic and moral themes related to the person, life and activity of the Holy Virgin Mary were emphasized. The present PhD Thesis includes a structured synthesis of the mariological themes debated by the Romanian theologians, a synthesis that



emphasizes the importance of the Holy Virgin Mary's preacquisition in the doctrine and spirituality of the Orthodox Church, as well as the position of this teaching within the great themes of Orthodox dogmatics. In presenting the mariological ideas, emphasis was placed on the peculiarities of opinion of the statements made by the Romanian theologians.

The novelty and originality of this PhD thesis consists in the rather concise and comprehensive approach of the theme of the pre-instillation of the Holy Mother, an approach aimed at exposing in a holistic way the theotocological doctrine, in full dogmatic unity with all the other teachings Orthodox faith, especially with Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology and Eschatology. This approach also includes highlighting the link between the assertion of dogmatic truth and its doxological expression in the cult and spirituality of the Church. In addition, the present PhD thesis aimed to make clear that a complete and current theotocology must have a clear impact and mirror directly into the practical life of the believers. Therefore, this PhD thesis aims to promote a living, fully fundamental scriptural and patristic, well-formulated from a doctrinal point of view, clearly and concisely expressed, fully integrated into the dogmatic unity of Orthodox theology and harmoniously aligned with the real needs of believers.

The Mother of God enjoys the preacquisition that the Church brings to her. That is why the Most Holy Mother of God directs the ecclesial community to its prayers and intercessions

filled with maternal love, while the Church, as a sign of gratitude, confesses doxologically to faith in the divine maternity, purity-virginity, holiness and intercession of the Mother of God, with all love, a supernatural cult. The venerable Virgin Mary is a true model to follow for all believers, whom she leads to the encounter with God in the Kingdom of Heaven. In her special condition of deification and glorification, due to divine virginity and maternity, the Mother of God represents the fulfillment and proof of the ultimate goal for which God created man. Being close to her Son and the Supreme Judge of the world, the Virgin Mary guides them to the believers in their journey to eternity, helping them to turn to their right, under the glory and mystery of the world God, in which she herself rests. Only when they will truly attain this state of ultimate happiness, believers will be able to see the Mother of God in perfect unity with Christ, who will reveal to all the righteous the exceptional mystery of the Virgin - the pattern and realization of the spiritual union of men with the Son of God .

This theme is vast and can be treated from several perspectives. For now, this PhD thesis summarizes this narrow and general study, but it remains open for further in-depth research.

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