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*Mary in the
Eastern Church*

STEPHEN C. GULOVICH

Number 45

ABOUT THE AUTHOR . . .

Very Rev. Stephen C. Gulovich is pastor of SS. Peter and Paul Church, Granville, New York, in the Greek Rite diocese of Pittsburgh. He is a former chancellor of that diocese and lecturer at Duquesne University. His doctorates in philosophy and sacred theology were awarded in Rome, where he was ordained in 1934. Father Gulovich's book, *Windows Westward* (McMullen, 1947), is a study of the Eastern Catholic Church in its liturgical and historical background.

The large majority of Christians in the East are not Catholic, but are members of the schismatic Orthodox Church. They are often referred to as Dissidents, i.e., those who do not acknowledge the Pope as the Supreme Pontiff. Eastern Catholics are those who are united with Rome and have their own proper liturgies, laws, and customs.

In this reprint, Father Gulovich discusses Mary's place in both the Orthodox and Catholic Eastern Churches, and her role as "the bridge" in eventually uniting the Orthodox Church with Rome.

In *Theology of the Apostolate*, Bishop Suenens writes: "Mary offers herself to us as the connecting link between Eastern and Western Christianity. She is a common blessing, a priceless treasure. . . . Mary will lead her children with a sure and gentle hand to the one fold where the whole truth is to be found, the fullness of life, Jesus Christ, Our Lord."

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MARY IN THE EASTERN CHURCH

STEPHEN C. GULOVICH

Most people have come upon oral or written statements that the Eastern Church is particularly noted for its devotion to the Blessed Mother. In fact there are some who go so far as to assert that this devotion to Mary in the East surpasses the devotion of the West.

Supporting the first assertion we have the authoritative statements of the several Popes who, when occasion presented itself, did not hesitate to proclaim the fact that the Eastern Church does have a great, a deep, and a vivid devotion to the Mother of God. This undeniable fact led them also to state emphatically that this lively Marian devotion not only gives us hope for the consummation of ultimate reunion between East and West, but that it offers us a certainty that this reunion will come about in due time. For surely such a loving Mother as Mary will eventually find ways and means of bringing about the reconciliation of the two quarreling daughters who faithfully kneel at her feet!

A confirmation of this fact comes to us from several quarters. The **Denver Register** carried two news items which unfortunately, did not receive the publicity they deserved. According to these dispatches the heads of the Hungarian and Czechoslovakian governments took official notice of the great response made by their subjugated people to the Holy See's invitation to celebrate the Marian Year. In fact the response was so great that the governments became gravely alarmed and frantically took measures to counterattack the Marian Year celebrations. They charged the responsible government agencies with the duty to take effective countermeasures, especially among the youth, asserting that **Marian devotion is one of the greatest enemies of the People's democracies.**

The second assertion, that the East has shown a greater devotion to Mary than the West, I will discuss at greater length.

SPEAKING IN VERY BROAD TERMS, we can safely say that up to the time of Charlemagne in both East and West, Mary was venerated almost exclusively as "Mother of God." But the founding of new religious orders and communities, the publicizing of the private

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revelations made to the saints, and the rise of the great Marian shrines brought about a further development in the West's Marian devotion. When St. Dominic popularized the rosary he automatically directed attention to certain phases of Mary's own life. Private revelations, such as those made at Lourdes and Fatima, to mention only two, prompted the West to take a closer look at the more intimate aspects of Mary's personality. The combined results of these many influences gave the Marian devotion in the West a richer aspect: to the fundamental devotion to Mary Mother of God, it added more specialized and subsidiary reasons, so to speak, to praise her greatness.

We might compare this change to the reaction of people listening to a great symphony. The bulk of the people, the amateurs let us say, delight in the harmony and artistry of the whole. But should we point out to them the different musical phrases and enable them to visualize the scene the music was intended to convey, they not only find special delight in the musical phrases as such, but they also come to appreciate the whole even more.

This development in Western devotion is duly recorded in the development of Christian art where Mary no longer appears exclusively under the representation as the **Mater Dei**, but more frequently as the **Annunciata**, the **Assumpta**, etc.¹

WHAT ABOUT THE EAST? In order to evaluate properly the Marian devotion in the East it is essential we be mindful of three important events in the history of the Eastern Church, namely, the Council of Ephesus, the schism of Cerularius, and lastly the first successful efforts at reunion initiated at the Council of Florence.

Let us begin with the post-Florentine period which marks the re-emergence of the Catholic groups in the Eastern Church.

We know for a fact that notwithstanding the sincerity of both sides there continued to be for many years to come much misunderstanding and mutual distrust on the **local level**. Limiting my observations to the history of what is known as the Ruthenian Church, I can say that it is a well-established fact that the Ruthenian ecclesiastical leaders in their efforts to make reunion permanent

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were confronted with tremendous difficulties. On the one hand, in the face of overpowering Dissident propaganda, they had to convince their own people that reunion did not mean Latinization and that the right to keep and perpetually preserve customs which did not conflict with the teachings of the Church was not a concession granted to trap the unwary but was a traditional right no one would take away from them. They had to convince their people that the concessions granted at Florence were not "concessions" in the strict sense of the word, but a solemn reaffirmation of the universality of the Church.

On the other hand, these same leaders, on the local level, were constantly face to face with the suspicions of their Latin neighbors who, mistaking unity for uniformity, too often looked upon the variety in observance as an unmistakable sign of heterodoxy.

IT SEEMS THAT AT TIMES, OF THE TWO, the suspicion of the Latins was the harder to bear. Consequently, in an effort to prove their Catholicity and the more effectively to separate themselves from the Dissidents, a number of bishops and priests on their own initiative did not hesitate gradually to introduce certain Latin customs, especially those which enjoyed great popularity. Thus in due time the recitation of the rosary became widespread, and new forms of devotion, among them some Marian devotions, were either relegated to a secondary place or were allowed to fall into disuse.²

Let me offer two examples. The Angelical Salutation in the Byzantine tradition reads as follows: "Hail, Virgin Theotokos, full of grace, the Lord is with Thee, blessed art Thou among women and blessed is the fruit of Thy womb, for Thou hast borne Christ, the Saviour and Redeemer of our souls."

WHEN THE RECITATION OF THE ROSARY was introduced the Latin form of the Angelical Salutation was translated and is now used whenever the rosary is recited, creating some confusion in the minds of the simple faithful as to which of these two forms is the "real" one. In like manner, here in America with few exceptions our children are taught the Latin form of the Angelical Salutation. This is primarily due to the fact that our children use catechisms and prayerbooks edited by Latin authors for their own people. Then

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there is the case of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. According to the Byzantine calendar the Feast of the Immaculate Conception is not a holyday of obligation (except for the Ukrainians by virtue of a synodal decree) and it is celebrated not on the eighth but on the ninth day of December. Again mistaking unity for uniformity and in the desire to underscore their Catholicity, some priests I know, on their own initiative, announce from the pulpit that the Feast in question is a holyday of obligation and in some instances even advance it from the ninth to the eighth day of the month.

Whether this artificial transplantation of Western traditions into the East is justified, whether it is useful or harmful, especially from the viewpoint of reunion, are questions I will not discuss, for I believe we must leave judgment in this matter to wiser and holier men. It does seem to me, however, that the so-called ultra-conservative ritualists are, to some extent at least, justified in looking upon the present day devotions (including some Marian devotions) used by the bulk of the Catholic Byzantine Church as a sort of hybrid devotion. To us, who belong to this rite, this whole question is a rather delicate subject. Therefore, having simply stated the situation, I will not pursue the matter any further.³

IN EVALUATING THE BYZANTINE MARIAN DEVOTION in its traditional form, or as some would say, its pure form, which the Catholics share with the Dissidents, we must keep in mind the other two important events mentioned above. One of these is the Council of Ephesus (431) whose dogmatic definitions helped crystallize the ultimate form the Marian devotion was to take in the East. The other is the Cerularian schism (1054) which immobilized the Marian devotion in the East.

By immobilization I mean this. It is a well-established fact that prior to the schism the entire Christian world would exchange customs and practices which they felt would promote religion. To mention but one fact, as soon as the celebration of Christmas, as a special feast day, was introduced in Germany, its observance spread rapidly throughout the Christian world.⁴ However, when the break between East and West was consummated the East took great care to immunize itself against the influence of the West. We no longer

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witness the friendly exchange of devotional practices among the great divisions of Christianity. On the contrary, every effort is made to condition the minds of the Eastern people so that they might look upon anything coming from the West as unorthodox or at least suspicious.

Thus the Cerularian schism prevented the East from feeling or recording the later development of Marian devotion in the West. The most obvious example of this can be found in the sacred art of the Byzantine Church where till this day the **official**, we might say, representation of Mary continues to be the traditional form of the **Theotokos**.⁵ The same is true of Marian devotion. Even though all the Marian privileges enumerated in the West are not only accepted in the East but are solemnly remembered by celebrating special feast days which are also holydays of obligation, nevertheless, the East focuses its attention on the **Mater Dei** aspect. Thus the Byzantine Church celebrates the Immaculate Conception, the Nativity, the Presentation, the Annunciation and the Assumption, but it focuses its attention on one thing only, viz., the divine maternity of Mary and her relation to our salvation.

Typical of this Theotokian aspect of the Byzantine devotion is the fact that under the influence of the Council of Ephesus the word **Theotokos** is no longer a title, but the proper name of Mary.⁶ I believe this Marian vocabulary is very important, though many seem to have overlooked it, for if properly evaluated the critics of Byzantine devotion might find a solution to their self-made difficulties.

AMONG OTHER THINGS THESE CRITICS CLAIM that the Byzantine tradition abounds in over-exaggerated praise for Mary, with the ultimate result that much of this material has little dogmatic and devotional value. Still objecting to this supposed exaggerated exuberance, some critics consider it in "bad taste," but typical Byzantine liturgy calls upon the faithful to burst forth with an exultant hymn honoring the Blessed Mother while the priest continues secretly to recite the remainder of the great Anaphora.

A closer look at the word **Theotokos** will give us, I believe, a

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good explanation for and a better understanding of the supposed exaggerations and the exuberance of the Byzantine Marian devotion.

In the Byzantine tradition both terms, **Theotokos** (literally birth-giver of God), and "Mother of God," are used extensively. But even a superficial reader will observe several differences, namely, that the term **Theotokos** is given first preference and is used more extensively and that the term **Theotokos** is used as a substantive whereas the term "Mother of God" is used in the form of an adjective. This obvious phenomenon cannot be written off as a simple matter of semantics. Through reading, and numerous discussions with men who excel in the Greek patrology I have come to conclusions which I think are valid, but which I humbly submit to the considered judgment of academically qualified scholars.

It is my impression (and I use this term advisedly as distinguished from something definitely established by sound scholarship and research) that once the Fathers decided upon the term **Theotokos**, they and the Eastern Church clung to its use tenaciously almost to the exclusion of the term "Mother of God." To my mind this was not an accident. It represents a case of definite design which undoubtedly resulted from the bitter debates with the Nestorians, all the details of which are not known to us.⁷

MATERNITY PRESUPPOSES CERTAIN SOCIAL AND physiological processes. God designed woman with potentiality to become a mother, but actual maternity is not necessary for a woman's existence as a woman. In this sense a woman is a woman first, and a mother secondarily. I believe it was this thought, namely, that Mary was a mother secondarily, that the Eastern Church wanted to avoid when it gave preference to the term **Theotokos** and in fact made it a proper name interchangeable with the name Mary.

Mary's whole existence was wrapped up in one single thought, namely, she was to be the Mother of God. By the eternal decree of God there is but one reason that justifies the existence of Mary. That reason was that she was free to choose to become the Mother of God. She was created a woman, she was preserved free from the stain of original sin, she was led by the Holy Ghost to vow virginity, she was presented at the Temple and introduced to divine

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wisdom, she was given to Joseph as a bride—these and all other things occurred because God had chosen her to be the Mother of His Son. Thus, the whole substance of Mary, her essence, so to speak, is to be the Mother of God. And since names are supposed to designate the substance and since the Greek language does lend itself to a compound form of expression the Fathers most properly did call Mary **Theotokos**. Once this thought as to Mary's special dignity was established by the dogmatic definition of Ephesus the Fathers were quick to draw another conclusion which eventually became the basis for the East's Marian devotion, namely, **what Christ is by nature Mary is by grace**. And once this was clearly understood there was no limit to the praise that could be duly given the Mother of God.⁸

It is here that we find the two main features that distinguish the East's devotion from the West. For unlike the Western, the Eastern Marian devotion is primarily exuberantly laudatory and only secondarily, one might say indirectly, supplicatory.

We must never forget that according to the Eastern tradition Mary is by grace everything Christ is by nature, hence there are no bounds to her praise. Because of this I do not think it is correct and just to say that the Marian praises some consider overexuberant are to be taken as oratorical and poetical liberties for which allowances are to be made. It appears to me that those who take this position miss the real spirit of the Byzantine tradition primarily, perhaps, because they fail to realize what Ephesus really meant to the East. We must judge the East by contemporary Eastern standards. These include not only the native temperament, an easy-going exuberance not much concerned for the practical, a flair for flowery language, etc., but also the fact that there was a council at Ephesus, that by some truly Christian instinct the common people understood the real meaning of the conciliar decisions, gave these decisions a most enthusiastic approval and showed this approval by demonstrations the like of which had not been witnessed before or since.⁹

In the truest sense of the word Ephesus was a total victory. Once and for all the enemies of Mary were crushed to the point of annihilation. As a result the East never felt the need of restraint in

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within the boundaries of the basic definition of the great Council.

In contrast to the East, there emerged in the West a Marian devotion which shows much more restraint, much more reserve and above all a great amount of scholastic precision.

In addition to this difference which we may classify as exuberance versus restraint there is another more substantial difference between the East and West. In fact I am inclined to believe that it is *the* distinguishing feature between East and West and one which we now living in the Western world should study very closely. Actually it can be epitomized as another aspect of the perennial dispute as to which is the better life, the contemplative or the active.

The West is said to have a special genius for the "practical" by virtue of which it is able to translate everything into personal benefit or profit. As a typical example in the realm of the spiritual I am thinking of the formal Ignatian meditation. We are given certain premises and are urged to draw the logical conclusion and arouse appropriate affections, but above all we are urged to make a practical resolution applicable to the day or immediate future. That this sort of practicality in prayer has its merits is beyond question and I raise the issue not to dispute the need of it but merely to bring into focus the contrast.

TURNING OUR ATTENTION TO MARIAN DEVOTION in particular we find that in the West it too came under the influence of this genius for the practical. Unless I am mistaken, the Marian devotion in the West, taken as a whole, is predominantly supplicatory and practical in the sense described above.

There can be no question that the Marian Year helped immensely to acquaint the world with the true personality and dignity of the great Mother of God. In like manner there can be no doubt that as a result of the year-long and world-wide celebrations Marian devotion reached a new high. But it is also my belief that a closer study of the Eastern Marian devotion and tradition, especially by the English-speaking world, will be of immense benefit.

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the praise of the **Theotokos** provided, of course, they remained

In contrast to the sober and ecclesiastically approved practicality of the West, the Eastern Marian devotion is particularly noted for its generous exuberance with little thought for the practical. I do not mean that the East does not petition Our Lady in our daily needs. On the contrary, there are many magnificent prayers that are entirely supplicatory. What I mean is that the over-all characteristic of the traditional Byzantine devotion is primarily laudatory and only secondarily supplicatory. I mean that the East is satisfied to abandon itself to the praise of the Blessed Mother and only secondarily, almost as if on second thought, is it concerned with supplication. A typical example of this difference between East and West can be found by comparing the Byzantine **Akathistos** with the Latin Litany in honor of Mary.¹⁰

IN VIEW OF THE DIFFICULTIES INHERENT to the general problem as to the respective merits of the contemplative and active life, in view of the fact that these delicate questions can be easily misinterpreted or complicated by drawing the wrong inferences, I find it extremely difficult to put my thoughts into exact words. But to the best of my ability I would characterize the East's devotion to Mary as an exuberant praise tempered by a quality known as "child-likeness." Father Maas, the great Jesuit scholar, states that the "greatness of a child consists in his perfect contentment with his littleness and his entire dependence."

So it is with the Marian devotion in the East. The East praises Mary, but it weaves its praises in such fashion that our own helplessness and our need for the loving care of our heavenly Mother are very obvious, even though no direct mention of our needs is made and there is no direct appeal for help. I might express this in another way. The Blessed Mother is familiar with the dictum "nobilitas obligat" and all that it implies. Therefore, the East reasons, if we ceaselessly and generously sing the glories of Mary as contrasted with our own misery, her own greatness—not to mention her boundless motherly love—will compel her to take into account our lowliness, our misery, our needs, without our directly pointing at any particular need.

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NOTES

1. In view of certain erroneous statements made by some modern Russian authors, let me add that despite this specialization the West did not lose sight of the fundamental fact that Mary was truly the Mother of God and that this fact and this fact alone was responsible for the special devotion shown her. Hence, statements which claim that according to the teaching of the Catholic Church it is "... in virtue of a privilege at the moment of her conception by her parents that we venerate the Mother of God more than any other creature" (L. Lossky, "Panagia," in *The Mother of God*, edited by E. L. Mascall, London: Dacre Press) are obviously false.
2. The Byzantine Church has two devotions dedicated to the honor of the Blessed Mother. One is known as the **Paraklis**, or Supplication to the Mother of God in case of any need; the other is the **Akathistos** in honor of the Annunciation. The **Paraklis** is composed of the following parts: the usual opening prayers, the recitation of Psalm 142 followed by the Alleluia, two hymns praising the Blessed Mother and the recitation of Psalm 50. This is followed by a supplicatory Canon which in turn is composed of eight odes, each ode having five or more verses. Between the sixth and seventh ode the Gospel of the Annunciation is chanted. After the Canon the congregation sings four **stikhiria** or hymns glorifying Mary. This is followed by a set of special petitions, a really magnificent prayer of superb dogmatic and devotional content to the Blessed Mother and the usual liturgical conclusion. The **Akathistos** (the "Standing Hymn" because it is always sung standing) consists of a brief introductory prayer, thirteen **kondakions** and twelve **ikoses** (these are different types of hymns) and concluding prayers to the Blessed Mother and to Our Lord. This **Akathistos** has been translated and published by the English Dominican Fathers and has become extremely popular with the Catholics as well as with the Anglicans who venerate Mary.
3. The most outspoken English-speaking critics of the "uniate innovations," as they are called, are two prominent English Catholics, Adrian Fortescue and Donald Attwater.
4. In the East the Nativity of Christ was commemorated in conjunction with the feast of the Epiphany. Shortly after its introduction in the West, Christmas as a separate feast was adopted in the East. While preaching at Antioch, St. John Chrysostom makes a direct mention of this feast.
5. It should be noted that in Russia, beginning approximately in the fourteenth century, the Western representation of the **Annunciata**, etc., was used on the **Ikonostasis** to represent the major feast days. This notwithstanding, even in Russia the official ikon of the Blessed Mother was the Mother of God.
6. A most common example of this can be found in the Byzantine version of the Angelical Salutation which reads: "Hail, Virgin **Theotokos** . . ."
7. Golubinsky, the reputable Russian church historian, reproduced a number of Slavonic versions of the Cerularian charges against the Church of Rome. According to one version, attributed to a Bishop George, one of the charges against the Latins, not contained in the original Greek, reads

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as follows: "The Latins do not venerate the Theotokos; they only venerate the Mother of God and this is the Nestorian heresy" (Cf. *Istoriya Russkoy Tzerkvi* (Moscow), t. 1, 2. str. 826).

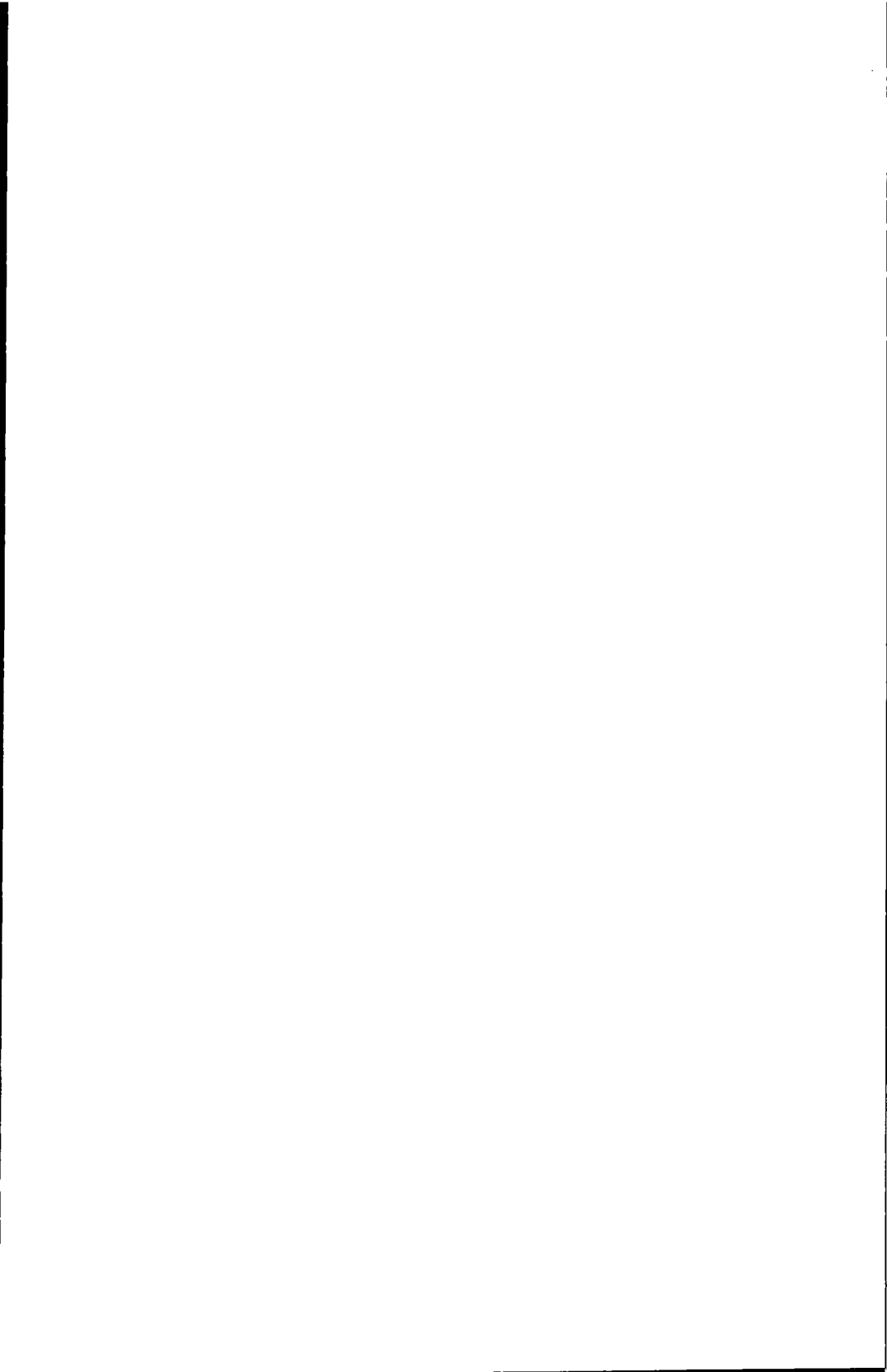
8. It should be noted, however, that Adrian Fortescue in *The Greek Fathers* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1908), p. 179, n. 2, mentions that in England there is a group which refuses to refer to Mary as the Mother of God but finds no objection in speaking of her as the *Theotokos*. The implication is that according to this group the term *Theotokos* does not signify true maternity. I think a more thorough study of the term especially from the patristic point of view is called for.
9. Contemporary descriptions of the spontaneous demonstrations which took place at Ephesus and elsewhere following the announcement of the conciliar decision of the divine maternity of Mary are a tribute not only to the devotion of the East but also to the popular realization of the tremendous victory of the orthodox party.
10. In the Litany every praise directed to the Blessed Mother is followed by the supplication "ora pro nobis." In the *Akathistos*, with the exception of the brief introductory and concluding prayers, not a single word of supplication is uttered.



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We call on those also who are separated from us by ancient schism, and whom none the less we love with paternal affection, to unite in pouring forth these joint prayers and supplications, knowing full well how greatly they venerate the Mother of Jesus Christ and celebrate her Immaculate Conception. May the same Blessed Virgin Mary look down on all those who are proud to call themselves Christians, and who, being united at least by the bond of charity, humbly raise to her their eyes, their minds, and their prayers, imploring that light which illumines the mind with heavenly rays, and begging for that unity by which at last there may be one fold and one shepherd.

PIUS XII, FULGENS CORONA



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