
THEOTOKOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF HEALING INFERTILE HUMAN NATURE IN THE WORK OF SAINT PHOTIUS THE GREAT

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(Received 20 May 2012, revised 1 July 2012)

Abstract

One can find important and valuable contributions to Anthropology and theotokology in the homilies of the Holy Fathers and the Byzantine theologians of the post-patristic period. Very often they contain important data concerning the genealogical tree of our Saviour Jesus Christ and His earthly ancestors. In this larger context, the Holy Fathers and other ecclesiastical writers disclosed their theological system and basic theological ideas. Among these, patriarch Photius the Great of Constantinople covers theotokology from two perspectives: christological and anthropological. He highlights an essential aspect: the creation of the first people, Adam and Eve, is an act that is essentially different from the ulterior propagation of the species in a natural way. This act of creation is not characteristic of nature, yet neither is it contrary to nature. Patriarch Photius calls this act a 'work of the divine power' and refers to it as an event marked by the divine grace, as is the case of the extraordinary birth from a barren mother or from a virgin. In each case, something extraordinary has occurred, a miracle, which discloses the mystery of God's creation.

Keywords: Photius, Virgin Mary, Jesus Christ, the restoration and healing of human nature

1. Introduction

Saint Paul the Apostle calls the Saviour Jesus Christ "the firstborn among (many) brethren" (Romans 8. 29; see also: Colossians 1.15 și I Corinthians 15. 20). The answer to the question – in what way does Jesus Christ belong to the great human family and how can all men become His brothers – is the following: through the Ever-Virgin Mary. Through her, all people are 'related' to the Saviour Jesus Christ, to the Son of God. The natural ancestry from Adam, starting with the first people and up to the last ones to be born in history, does not denote – on the basis of causality – any interruption. The books of the Old and New Testament recount the fact that the transmission of the sacred gift of life was achieved, on the one hand, through people like Abraham and Sarah, Joachim and Anna, and this,

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despite old age and barrenness, and on the other hand, through the Virgin Mary, who kept her virginity intact.

The following analysis aims at revealing the way in which patriarch Photius the Great of Constantinople appreciated in the Virgin Mary the link between the whole of mankind and the earthly ancestors of the Lord. This undertaking illustrates the Photian Christological-anthropological understanding of the restoration and healing of suffering human nature; a restoration understood in terms of the whole contemplation of universal history, of the convergence between the entirety of creation and man, of the convergence existing from the moment of creation's beginning and up to the appearance of Jesus Christ, God-man, on history's stage. In other words, the study reveals to the reader aspects of Photian theotokological thinking as it concerns the renewal and remolding of the suffering human nature. Such a renewal is understood as an ontological restoration of man in Jesus Christ. This healing act has its premises in the Ever-Virgin Mary, Birth-giver-of-God, Theotokos, the one through whom and in whom human nature is ennobled.

2. Man's recreation and renewal in the Ever-Virgin Mary

The Son of God came into the world as Saviour. After man's fall into sin there followed eventually, "the fullness of time" (Galatians 4.4), his amendment, rise and restoration through Jesus Christ. The old creation is renewed and the Virgin Mary takes part and contributes directly to this process. Through her, God's plan to save the world, *oikonomia*, takes a step forward and marks a new a stage, bearing witness to the wonderful providential intervention of God in the Virgin Mary. Just as one can say about the first man that he was a synthesis, a concentration or a mirror of creation as a whole, being made in the image of God the Creator (Genesis 1.26-27), the same can be said about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Who is also the Son of the Virgin Mary. He 'fills' them; He makes everything plenary and masters everything (Ephesians 1.23); in Him all of human nature is completed and the human unites with the divine [1].

As concerns the bodily existence of the Virgin Mary, that is, her genealogical line, patriarch Photius shows that she descends from a tribe of priests and kings [2]; her parents were called Joachim and Anna [3]. However, this Anna, as patriarch Photius says, was not the daughter of Phanuel [2, q. 157, p. 202-205]. In his affirmation, the patriarch relies closely on the tradition already recorded by the Apocrypha [3, p. 175]. He documents that Mary had been taken to the temple of Jerusalem in the first years of her life, to be raised and educated there [2, q. 22, p. 77-81]. Her pure and innocent life is everywhere and always glorified, together with the great gift she was given, with her spiritual courage and with her constancy in virtue [4]. Patriarch Photius, mentioning an ancient tradition, writes that having been suspected of conceiving as a consequence of an act of immorality, the Virgin Mary was subjected to a test, similar to the one described in Numbers 5.11-31. She was forced to drink bitter water, which, in case of guilt, would have brought curse upon her, making her belly swell and her thigh rot. But the test proved that the

Virgin Mary was innocent and what was said about her was dismissed to the shame of the accusers. Patriarch Photius is sceptical of this tradition, for, as he says, if it were true the water should have been given to the Virgin Mary before the birth of Jesus, rather than after, as the account mentions. However, patriarch Photius says that this is an ancient tradition, transmitted along the centuries [2, q. 157, pp. 202-205]. Patriarch Photius also mentions that, together with her son, the Virgin Mary announced the Gospel [2, q. 158, pp. 206-207] and, through her feelings, she made the sufferings of Jesus her own sufferings in a mysterious way [2, q. 157, pp. 202-205]. Thus, a sword pierced her heart, fulfilling the prophecy of the wise and righteous Symeon on the occasion of the test with the water bringing a curse, to which she was subjected and also when she lost her twelve-year old son in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, patriarch Photius does not consider these moments to be examples of weakness or despair, as some might believe [4], who see in these moments, and especially near the cross, the Virgin Mary as have doubts regarding the divinity of her son [2, q. 157, p. 202-205].

Doubt and signs of weakness were foreign to the Virgin Mary, continues patriarch Photius. As a mother, her heart felt compassion for her crucified son and it was filled with a pain greater than if it had been being pierced by a sword [2, q. 176, p. 227]. Even if she had sufficient arguments to believe in the divinity of her son, the natural course and the logic of the ontology of human nature has had its say. She showed compassion and mercy towards her son. She had to see the whole drama with her own eyes, so that her soul was torn by a pain as great as the piercing of a sword. Patriarch Photius also mentions the dormition of the Virgin Mary, which occurred after Mary Magdalene moved to Ephesus, where Saint John the Apostle was living [2, q. 158, pp. 206-207]. His description of the dormition of the Virgin Mary is presented as full of victory and heavenly glory [4, p. 552].

In the homily on the feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos, patriarch Photius mentions that honouring the Mother of God is closely connected to worshipping the Saviour Jesus Christ [1]. Therefore, this feast is the root, source and foundation of the other feasts [3, p. 165]. Her nativity laid the foundations for the world's salvation and the nativity of Jesus implies first the nativity of the Theotokos. It is she to whom we all owe our adoption by God in Jesus Christ. As a descendant of Adam's successors, she announced Jesus Christ to the world, the One Who will bring salvation and liberation from the slavery of sin, a slavery to which the whole of mankind had fallen prey. On this day of the Nativity, the first people, Adam and Eve, leave all their sadness and celebrate with the entire Church, inviting all of their descendants to take part in this great feast. The homily is a description of the relationship between the Virgin Mary, her Son, the Saviour of all, and mankind who are saved in Him. Patriarch Photius discusses the fact that the Virgin Mary was born from a mother who had been barren [1]. That is why patriarch Photius characterises this birth as a wonder as great as that of the vestal unblemished birth of the Saviour Jesus Christ from Mary, nevertheless without paralleling those two events [4, p. 550]: "For today the Virgin Mary is born of a barren mother, and the palace of the Lord's advent is being decked out. Today the bonds of barrenness are loosed, and the locks of virginity are sealed" [3, p. 165].

Further on in the text, patriarch Photius wonders rhetorically how it was possible for the Virgin Mary to be born by Anna who was barren. He shows that those who believe in this wonder are worthy of it. Does not the precedent exist, he asks, of the birth of Isaac from Sarah who was barren? If the maternity of Anna, who was once barren, brings about so many complications in the eyes of those who find this miracle incredible, why do they believe in Sarah's maternity, who lived a long time before? If someone disputes this example, he would be cutting the root that nurtures the branch, says patriarch Photius, in a typically Byzantine rhetorical manner. The birth from a barren and aged woman, considers patriarch Photius, is impossible to explain in a natural and logical way. That is why he addresses his listeners, saying: "Why dost thou force grace to be subservient to nature, of which she has always been the mistress?" [3, p. 167]. He says: "Dost thou accept Adam to have been moulded out of clay and produced without natural birth, dost thou accept Eve to be the offspring not of intercourse but of a rib?" [3, p. 167]. The biological conception and the birth of man belong to the natural order, but the creation of Adam and Eve is not the result of a natural action. This act of creation, however, is not contrary to nature, because through creation, nature has its beginning, origin and principle. The natural way becomes thus the manner through which humanity is perpetuated, thereby proving that this process is nothing else than the result of the consultation of divinity with Itself. If God creates these wonderful things, is He incapable of defeating the barren womb? None of the Jews will doubt this miracle. Only those who are pagan in their soul and who have a pagan vision, opposed to God, can deny such a miracle [3, p. 167-168].

In order to prove that giving birth from a barren womb is not impossible for God, patriarch Photius addresses other questions to his listeners. He rhetorically wonders whether suffering, old age, and even early youth, are not in certain ways stronger than man's nature? Early youth prevents someone from being a father, he says. Nevertheless, if suffering is stronger than nature, is the cause of this in the respective suffering or in a remnant of nature? If grace created nature, is it not still the one that makes it better? Old age makes man sterile from a bodily point of view, drying the sources of procreative power. If this is the situation, should God as Creator of man remain indifferent and not create something fertile out of something barren and infertile? Cannot He easily restore the things proper to human nature, tracing new confinements [3, p. 169-170]? Certainly, God can do this and He did it in the case of Anna, as she became a fertile woman, rather than a barren one, bearing the Virgin Mary, no doubt through bodily union, according to the laws of nature. The feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos is not only the commemoration of an event that occurred a long time ago, as patriarch Photius shows, but it is also an occasion to rejoice, a day of grace and of the restoration of man. The whole mankind is renewed and death is defeated. What was barren becomes fruitful; a heavenly ladder leading to paradise; the curse is abolished and human nature is restored, regaining its lost dignity. Through these words, patriarch Photius' rhetoric reaches a climax, being also marked by an extraordinary spontaneity, as one can notice in the following fragment:

“Let us send up songs of thanksgiving because Adam is re-created and Eve is renovated with him, because the curse is abolished, and our nature, putting off the dead leathern mask of sin, is remoulded after the pristine dignity of the Lord’s likeness. Let us send up songs of thanksgiving and organise public choirs, because, coming forth from a sterile womb, the Virgin sanctifies the sterile womb of nature and grafts into its fruitlessness the fruitfulness of virtue. For in lending to the Lord and Husbandman of the world the streams of her stainless blood to moisten the whole desiccated lump, she fittingly receives on that account the blessing of fruitfulness. The ladder leading up to heaven is being built, and earthly nature, leaping over her proper boundaries, comes to dwell in the heavenly tabernacles. The Lord’s throne is being prepared on earth, earthly things are sanctified, and the heavenly hosts are mingled with us.” [3, p. 172]

On this day, patriarch Photius asserts, the evil that lured people is defeated and its power is permanently destroyed. The patriarch then reminds us, once again, of man’s wonderful creation by God, Whose power no one can describe or explain, for, above all, there are no words adequate for this task. Human reason is helpless, being exceeded by the greatness of this act [1]. The words of patriarch Photius are the following: “God formed man in the beginning, moved by an ineffable wealth of love, the work of His own hand, graciously giving him to bear the Creator’s image – the handiwork indicating the nobility of the flesh, the image that of the spirit” [3, p. 172].

God offers the newly created man the abode of paradise, a wonderful place, in which He has planted flowers and various amazing trees with equally amazing fruit:

“In this spot the Creator settled the work of His Lordly hand, appointing him master of everything, and showering him abundantly with every good thing. Thereafter He brought forth into being a companion from the rib of the ineffably born, that she might know the lender, wherefrom she had been taken, to be the head, and look up to him with her obligation in mind, and that through their natural bond the bond of concord should abide in them.” [3, p. 172-173].

Hence, God did not leave the man He had created adrift, for He had embedded in him a dignity as His own:

“Wherefore, the oneness of the Trinity having, if it is permitted to say so, consulted with Itself (and it is permissible to say this of the re-creation, since it is said of the creation, ‘Let us make man in our image and likeness’, with reference to the single purpose of the mind), made disposition for the re-creation of the creature that had been crushed” [3, p. 173-174].

After man’s fall, patriarch Photius continues, God sought a man who could fulfill the divine law completely, so that fallen humanity would follow His example. Because such a man could not be found, it was necessary for One of the Trinity to become human, in order to restore the work of God’s hands, making a new creation out of it [3, p. 174]. Therefore, it was necessary for Him to come down on earth, Son as He was in the eternity up in heaven. For this purpose, He had to assume our human nature, our bodily corporeality through His conception

and His becoming a body in a mysterious way in the womb of His Mother. That is why it was necessary to choose and prepare His Mother [1, p. 177].

3. The divine maternity of the Ever-Virgin Mary as a consequence of Jesus Christ's humanity

The mother of God's Son had to be a virgin. Just as the first man was made of virgin earth, in the same way, the restoration and reconstruction of man in Jesus Christ had to be done in a virgin womb. The Creator's birth occurred without the concupiscence specific to the human body, without lust, even though the act of giving birth is a natural one, specific to every woman. Those who are liberated by the Lord through His birth were those captive to carnal desires [1]. Going further in his reasoning, patriarch Photius says: "But who was worthy to serve as the minister of the mystery? Who was worthy to become the mother of God, and lend flesh to Him who is rich in everything? Who then was worthy?" [3, p. 174-175]

All these conditions, Photius argues, were fulfilled only by the Virgin Mary. She is the one miraculously born from the parents Joachim and Anna; she is the one who springs from Anna's barren root. Christianity celebrates this wonderful day, this day of visible wonders, but this is only a prelude to the great wonder of the birth of the Logos in a human body. Conceiving and bearing Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary had to be pure in body, soul and mind. As the mother of the Creator, she was forever chosen for this purpose. This is the very reason why her birth was a miraculous one, out of barren parents. Thus, through her, her parents could be rid of their shame and the sins of her ancestors were erased [3, p. 175].

Patriarch Photius appeals to the Marian apocrypha to recount the presentation of the Virgin Mary as an infant to the temple in Jerusalem in order to prepare there to become herself an animated temple for the divine Logos. She bore Him, without bodily union, offering Him a body as ours, made of flesh. Her vestal blood that nourished the Almighty King served Him as an imperial purple robe. This is the great wonder that the whole of creation cannot comprehend, that is, how Mary's virgin womb could bear and even preserve her virginity after delivery. Whom that the Cherubim do not dare behold, the Virgin carries in her arms of clay [1]. Referring to this, patriarch Photius says the following: "From the barren and fruitless womb comes forth the holy mountain, from which has been cut without hands a precious cornerstone, Christ our God, who has crushed the temples of the demons and the palaces of Hell together with their domination" [3, p. 175].

4. Conclusions

The way in which patriarch Photius regards the development of the human race from Adam and Eve up to the Virgin Mary and the Saviour Jesus Christ must be always understood in character with the biblical account about the creation of the first people, of the protofathers Adam and Eve, which is taken by Patriarch Photius ad litteram: "Let us make man according to our image and likeness" (Genesis 1.26). Adam becomes, through the direct intervention of God, the living

creature modeled from the dust of the ground, out of virgin ground, out of lifeless material [3, p. 173-174]; he was then created without man's seed and without the basic organic cells. God breathed an immortal soul into this lifeless material. The first woman, Eve, was then created without the need of a maternal womb, directly from Adam.

In his reasoning, patriarch Photius uses Saint Paul the Apostle and his Areopagus address in Athens (Acts 17.26) to show that all people, indiscriminately, descend from the primordial couple. The line of the human race and the manner of its reproduction denotes that this process of perpetuation of the human species was continuous, without interruption. Analyzing this in direct relation to the ancestry of the Jesus Christ, one can note that, several times, the process of perpetuation of a certain bloodline could have been interrupted if God had not intervened in a miraculous way, re-establishing the order and the necessary natural line [1].

Patriarch Photius refers to three cases in particular as confirmed either by a biblical or an extra biblical source.

- a) Through Sarah, who was a nonagenarian, God offers Abraham the gift of the promised son, Isaac (Genesis 15.1-6, 17.15-22, 17.17, 18.9-15, 21.1-8). Here, the line of Jesus Christ's ancestry would have been naturally interrupted if God had not intervened in a miraculous way. Because of old age, being advanced in days, both Sarah and Abraham could not procreate (Genesis 16.17, 18.11-12, 21.2-7). In the case of Abram, who becomes Abraham, that is, father of many tribes (Genesis 13.14-18, 15.1-6, 17.1-8), numerous like the dust of the earth (Genesis 13.16) or as the stars in the sky (Genesis 15.5), God wants to show that the accomplishment of the promise implies a special intervention. Human capacities are insufficient in this case: "Shall anything be impossible with the Lord?" (Genesis 18.14), He asks Abraham [1].
- b) As for the Virgin Mary, she is born of barren parents. A womb unfruitful and deadened for purposes of childbirth brought forth unexpectedly a fair fruit [3, p. 165-166]. It is not clear if the expression 'from a sterile womb', used by patriarch Photius, refers to both to Joachim and Anna, or only to Anna, about whom it is said that she was 'sterile because of old age'. The fact that her 'old age' is mentioned leads to the assumption that her husband, Joachim, was also advanced in days. The question is whether he was sterile, too. Eventually, it is said that "Joachim is called the father of a child" and that "youth did not produce a flower, yet old age puts forth a shoot" [3]. The reference of patriarch Photius to Abraham and Sarah lets it be deduced from the context that in the case of Joachim and Anna the situation was the same; that is, they were both barren and sterile. The words 'if old age is to chill and dry up the fountains of generation' and their context indicate that they refer both to Joachim and Anna. The same meaning is indicated by the words about the Virgin Mary, who "strangely issued from Joachim and Anna, the barren root" [3, p. 169] and "she who had been born in a wondrous manner from a sterile womb (...)" [3, p. 175]. Patriarch Photius describes this wonderful birth without indicating the inspiration source for his homily. What is certain is that he took information from apocryphal traditions, but Orthodox in content,

which he elaborated, hinting that, in actuality, these are divinely revealed truths, which oblige one to believe them. His reasoning follows the plan of the *Protoevangelium of James*, an apocryphal work used widely by some Fathers of the Church [1].

- c) The Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was born out of a virgin mother, with a pure body and soul and who could not have conceived or given birth in a natural, normal way, according to human reason and logic. From the point of view of the perpetuation of the human species, following the rule of parental conception, the perfect virginity and purity of Mary represents for patriarch Photius a reason for the interruption of the ancestry of Jesus Christ, which started with Adam and passed through Abraham and Sarah. He expresses this through the words “the locks of virginity are sealed” [3, p. 165-166]. Due to the fact that this natural impediment was eliminated through God’s miraculous and mysterious intervention, it is described in the Gospels (Matthew 1.18-25, Luke 1.26-38).

From a theological point of view, it is important to mention that patriarch Photius sees a direct relation of his idea of the very danger of the breach of the natural perpetuation of the human species. This relation refers, on the one hand, to the barrenness and insufficiency of human nature and, on the other hand, to overcoming this failure through the grace and the fruit of its work. This relation was noted in the case of the creation of Adam and Eve, in the case of Joachim and Anna, and completely differently in the case of the Virgin Mary [1]. The ‘virgin earth’ out of which the first man was made is not capable by itself of bringing a man into existence [3, p. 174]. In the same way, the creation of Eve out of Adam cannot be integrated into the category of any natural law [3, p. 167]. The creation of the first man, just as that of his wife was not a natural act, but neither is it contrary to nature [3, p. 167-168]. However, the first people represent the beginning of a natural process for the perpetuation of the species [1]. Actually, everything is the result of the eternal divine consultation with Himself. Through His love, God blessed them in order for them to be bearers of the Creator’s image. Thus, God reveals to us the noble origin of body and soul, both being created by Him [3, p. 172]. In fact, patriarch Photius highlights that God’s direct intervention in creating man denotes nothing else than the fact that matter in itself, the virgin earth, is not enough for such a great act [3, p. 174]. Out of this original earth, out of this amorphous and lifeless dust, God creates the first man through His direct intervention (Genesis 2.7), giving him a double ennoblement: on the one hand, in the body, he is the work of God’s hands and, on the other hand, in the soul, he is “image of the Image” (Genesis 1.26-27, 2.8-25).

At any rate, one can conclude unequivocally that man is completely the great work of God [1]. The more lifeless is the earth man was made of, the more incapable of bringing by itself something into life, the more God’s direct intervention is needed. That is why the result is more noble, more remarkable, more precious and important: the great work of God is made of body and soul, of matter and spirit, as “image of the Image” (Genesis 1.26-27, 2.8-25). Man as a whole, body and soul, is eventually nothing more than the reflection or image of

his Creator, for he bears in himself His image, thus revealing his noble character. Being the Creator's image, that is, carrying in himself God's image means that man was endowed by God with greatness, beauty and glory, with divine grace. God Himself is the One that blesses man, so that he becomes His image and likeness [3, p. 172]. Nevertheless, there remains a question: Is this a grace of nature or something much deeper? Patriarch Photius shows, as we have seen, that this miraculous work of the creation of man is not the work of nature, yet neither is it contrary to nature. He distinguishes two moments in this action: the creation of the first man, as "principle of arrangement, ordering and molding of the whole humanity" and "the successive multiplication and birth of men, keeping as it does a different order of procession" [3, p. 167-168].

Although the first moment represents the beginning of a natural order, it exceeds the limits of nature; whereas the second moment corresponds to nature, without being, in its turn, purely natural and automatic, lacking the support of grace. If one takes into consideration these highlighted aspects – leaving aside the tragic case of the fall into sin – then the second moment, of 'natural' multiplication and of the perpetuation of the 'blessing' of God's image implies, in its turn, a mark on the whole humanity. This leads to the conclusion that this moment had to be a natural one, in that concrete reference is made to the perpetuation of the species, an act in which God, through His grace and through the natural modality of procreation that he offered humanity, imprints His image (Genesis 4.1, 25; 5.1; 5.3) [1].

Referring to the example of Joachim and Anna, patriarch Photius makes a short reference relating it to the biblical episode of Isaac's birth, underlining that it is a similar situation, marked by God's intervention [3, p. 167].

The main topic of the homily is the nativity of the Virgin Mary from parents advanced in age, and from a barren mother. That is why this topic is particularly covered by patriarch Photius, all the other marginal interventions having only the purpose of facilitating understanding of this event. It is interesting that he links this event in a very concrete way to the birth of Jesus Christ and the birth of the faithful in the Church. Through the nativity of Mary from Joachim and Anna, 'the bonds of barrenness are loosed, and the locks of virginity are sealed'. Her mother, Anna, was prevented by the limits of nature, from being unable to conceive and give birth. Overcoming this obstacle through divine intervention, makes Anna become a mother. Her daughter, however, through the same intervention, preserves her virginity.

Hence, an antithesis is presented: a barren woman becomes a mother due to divine grace and another woman, due to the same grace, is guarded from losing the seals of virginity, thus placing a major obstacle against procreation and natural birth. However, this obstacle is only an apparent one, because through God's intervention it is overcome, without the seals of virginity being broken or blemished (Luke 1.37; compare to Genesis 18.14). The birth without natural concatenation and the preservation of the locks of virginity is announced or anticipated through the act of the birth from a barren mother, who, in turn, overcomes the boundaries or limits of human nature through divine intervention.

What is revealed with the birth of Mary from Anna is only a prelude of what is revealed through Jesus Christ, the Son of Mary and the Bridegroom of the Church of God, out of Whom are born and grow the sons of this Church [3, p. 165-166].

Patriarch Photius also underlines another important aspect: the birth of the Virgin Mary out of a barren mother is a great miracle. For this, nevertheless, one needs faith. The act itself did not occur as a natural continuity of events, but was evidence of divine intervention. Grace cannot be forced to be subservient to nature, but it is its mistress [3, p. 166-167]. Patriarch Photius asks rhetorically: “shall grace, which formed nature, not be able to repair her?” [3, p. 169]

The way in which this occurs, that is, the way in which a human inability is eliminated through a divine act, the way in which barrenness becomes fertility in the case of the birth of Mary, and the way in which the locks of virginity are sealed, is accomplished through grace at the birth of Jesus, are topics that patriarch Photius covers further in his homily. Everything occurs in the great plan of salvation in Jesus Christ, for patriarch Photius says, “universal salvation requires thanks that transcend our world” [3, p. 172].

The Virgin Mary is the precious shoot that ennobles Anna’s barren womb. Thus, human nature transcends its own limits. Just as the later Palamite theologians, patriarch Photius remarks on the close organic relation between nature and grace. He strongly insists that any intervention of God transcends the natural order and highlights, as an example, the creation of the first man, an act that in itself is not an act of nature, but as mentioned before, it is not contrary to it [3, p. 193]. That is why, the extraordinary birth from a barren mother and the birth from a virgin, are things that transcend the laws of nature, standing out as miracles of God and pointing to something from the mystery of His creation [3, p. 194], especially that of human nature, which, in the Virgin Mary, through her birth from barren parents, becomes ennobled and ready to be restored and healed in Jesus Christ.

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