

The role of the function of the servant (δοῦλος) as the steward of the ἀπόφασις in the divine Liturgies of Byzantine origin

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1. Introduction: lifelong God visions; 2. The topicalness of the study; 3. The importance of the manager service (δοῦλος) function; 4. The advocating assignment and impact of the surrounding reality of apophasis; 5. Apophatism in the Liturgy; 6. Conclusions on apophasis existing in the Liturgy

The present lecture does not long for focusing on the historical considerations of the origin of the divine Liturgies (Byz-BAS, CHR, JAS)¹, but on a characteristic approach to the idealism of the sacred ceremonies already in our hands, namely on apophatism, in the correlation of the manager servant (δοῦλος).

An out-of-common and specific reason for this is that several Catholic and neo-Protestant studies seek to marginalize the significance of the function of apophatism today, or at least reduce its purpose both in theology and spirituality, especially in relation to human-scale statements brought into play in positive theology, with availing a particular emphasis on the former as though it regarded the relationship between God and man in a more ponderous disjunctive way.

In addition to this full many a time one-sided theological loquence, I would even like to highlight in this concise liturgical lecture the

1 Byz-BAS: Byzantine Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great; CHR: Byzantine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom; JAS: Greek Liturgy of Saint James.

imposing and irresistible unifying power of apophatic vision in the contact of the Creator and the liturgical minister as divine creation, while also going quest of possible answers to whether the divine Liturgy is a merely sublimating image or an ontological reality of the mystical union generated by the two senseful paths of apophatism.

Furthermore, I also attempt to dwell on, in spite of the human endeavour permanently wishes to split them, the ever-present and continual fraction of the visible and invisible, otherwise inseparably unified worlds. Unfortunately, one heaps of times applies this odd process instead of shifting the apophatic experience of total ignorance relived in the divine Liturgy into the place of contemplation, or rather transfiguring the Byzantine-rooted worships into awareness of the presence of the Unknown.

1. Introduction: lifelong God visions

Guilelmus de Tocco (c. 1250-1323), a reliable biographer of Thomas Aquinas, who left a massive philosophical throwback, attentively noted that the otherwise book- and study-rich medieval theologian, after celebrating the Mass in the morning of the feast day of December 6, 1273, dedicated to Saint Nicholas the Archbishop of Mura, showed all of a sudden an unprecedented behavior. When the monk Reginaldus, the most attached fellow companion, asked his friend about the harsh change in behavior and why he did not long for describing and articulating any further scientific theological remarks in favor of the Church since the ceremony, Thomas replied: “[...] I cannot continue, for all that I describe seems like an empty quibbling compared to what I have seen so far, and which has been revealed to me [...]”².

- 2 David Berger, *Thomas von Aquin begegnen*, Augsburg, 2002 (Hungarian trans.: *Találkozás Aquinói Szent Tamással*, tr. É. Trauttwein, Budapest, 2008, 83).

But Tocco did not really covet to resolve whether or not Thomas had a direct experience of God at Mass because its reality was open-and-shut to him, but rather yearned for asking what might have been so shocking to a man who had invented such an intellectual inheritance that in his brief statement about the vision, he specifically reflected on the knowledge of God and insufficient linguistic transferability as well³.

2. *The topicalness of the study*

The subject of my survey closely related to the seemingly poignant “epistemological” end of the Thomas event, which took place hundreds of years earlier, for the topic of the title carries unusual current issues in several ways regarding both the possibility of getting to know the self-shown God in the pilgrim, therefore, variable world of the Church, namely in the most sacred Liturgy, and the vital conduct of the service provider (δοῦλος).

I wish to record now that in this essay I do not focus on the possible historical evolution of the Byzantine Liturgy as liturgical historians, by applying chiseled way, investigating the development of the Liturgy, but on the characteristic and unavoidable approach of the ἀπόφασις which tightly connected to the ideology of the already mature Byzantine Liturgy, nowadays seen as *standard*, precisely from the point of view of the service provider’s *habitus* (ἔξις).

As is the case with many treatises, this essay was rested on an uncomplicated outline mulling over an irregular phenomenon, which implied the following series of questions in the author of the study, without setting up any pragmatic order: for example, why can you

3 But Tocco, as an almost contemporary biographer, was in all likelihood aware that the Angelic Doctor had received many wonderful visions throughout his life as a gracious result of the Trinity. Cf. Pius Cavanagh – Charles Anatole Joyau, *The life of St. Thomas Aquinas*, London, 1890, 136-146.

notice in clerical society the growing rejection of negative theology as a method of cognition that is met with above-average skepticism and a kind of denial laden with pessimism? The second question refers to why is it possible for the divine minister to go through secularization and a certain spiritual decline? Furthermore, remaining in this specific group, why are there many who are outright indifferent to the theoretical and practical side of knowing God? Another question can also be asked: why can there be a fact that many people do not even perceive the supportive effect of the Liturgy itself as a definitive way of a dominant and, at the same time, possible path of spiritual life in their conception when they openly let it wither? Moreover, why is the following gospel sentence forgotten: “And eternal life is that they may know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent”⁴. The succeeding question that arises is why a highly reducing approach emerges towards the Liturgy among those who perform the ceremony, that is, as if it were just the sacramental environment of the Eucharist and nothing more, while the perception of union with God becomes, for example, almost invisible and intangible amidst them? Finally, why can both the prayer and the theologian and cleric come to the conclusion that the divine Liturgy is merely an image of the mystical union with God from a human point of view: in short, why the Liturgy leading to unity is taken only as a rationalizing analogy, that is, only a reasonable ascension to God?⁵

4 Jn 17,3.

5 Miklós Vassányi, in his own study on the liturgy commentary of Maximos the Confessor, concluded that there was no real mystical union with man during the most sacred ceremony, as evidenced by a thorough analysis of a pertinent Maxim place. Despite this firm resolution, it is encouraging for me in the teachings of Gregory of Nyssa and many patristic Fathers on this subject that the “path” is always the goal itself, so that in the divine Liturgy *the fullness* of everything *really takes place*, inasmuch as the sacrificial priest, in the prayer of Ambo, prays precisely in order that God preserve the fullness of His Church, which has already formed during the Liturgy (τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς ἐκκλησίας σου

The role of the function of the servant (δοῦλος)

All these warm and remarkable questions prompted me to examine the potentiality of a mystical union generated by *the two paths of apophasis*, namely, that the Divine Liturgy is really only a sublimating image or ontological reality of union with God on earthly existence.

3. The importance of the manager service (δοῦλος) function

Without being able to give accurate answers to every question asked, I will outline a possible solution that, I feel, can provide some responses to these problematic questions. This path is about the function of the ministers of the ceremonies and their inevitable connection of the true apophasis in the Liturgy.

As we know, apophasis is primarily a denial according to dictionaries, but also a statement and a special counter-response in political terms. This essay, in terms of its subject, obviously seeks not only to grasp the primary meaning, but also, as we shall see, the second, conceived in a religious sense. For the servant, he also totally *expresses* his *habitus* (ἔξις) during the Liturgy, which includes, on the one hand, his prepared spirit, and, on the other hand, the openness of his intellect to his divine reception, and even his bodily manifestations. Professor Renczes, who has been teaching at the *Pontificia Università Gregoriana* for more than a decade, similarly sees the Cappadocian Fathers' teaching on this issue: "In questa accezione, può significare semplicemente 'lo stato del corpo umano' in senso generale (o eventualmente riferito ad un'età specifica che caratterizza una condizione tipica del corpo) oppure, in modo più particolare,

φύλαξον). In my reading, not only is it necessary to protect the Church by God from possible deviating ruptures, but also to defend the mystical unity established during the syntax, as the priest leading the worship front of the Trinity requires additional divine care for the community of believers. Cf. Vassányi Miklós, *Hitvalló Szent Maximos teológiája. Értelmezési kísérlet történeti összefüggésben*, Budapest, 2017, 222-234.

può riferirsi al fenomeno dei legami tra disposizioni dell'anima e del corpo, [...]»⁶.

At the forefront of the survey, it can be said almost as a thesis that the minister must take upon himself *the characteristic behavior of the apophysis* in order to meet God in the Liturgy and to know Him in this experience. Furthermore, not only in his encounter with the Trinity possesses a paramount importance for his own ascension, but he is also able to visualize and communicate, through himself, this experience to the believers entrusted to him⁷. Clearly, if the minister does not sign up for the apophysis mediated by Liturgy, that is, the possibility of participating in the supernatural and unknowable God, he excludes, in a sense, not only himself but also the believers entrusted to him from the loving reality of God's self-communication.

- 6 Saint Basil, who, according to liturgical historians, was the brilliant inventor of the basic structure of Byz-BAS as well as his younger brother Gregory and the bishop of Nazianzos, made important remarks about ἔξις. All of the three often applied this term for the human body as a typical measure of its state, but also, of course, for the structural relationship between the soul and the body, expanding their concept all the way to describe the condition of a particular person. At a higher level rested on Scripture, the Church Fathers of Cappadocia meant primarily spiritual maturity: an advanced state (ἔξις) that can be attained by a virtuous life that already goes beyond bodily perception. The Cappadocians also pointed out that a virtuous life is necessary because the consequence of the fall of Adam is a sort of change in the original condition of man, namely the yoke of evil (ἔξις). In their view, in the difficult struggles of the work of a virtuous life, it is the Holy Spirit, who, taking up dwelling in man, consolidates the relationship between divine activity and the moral state already developed in man. Cf. Philipp Renczes, *Agire di Dio e libertà dell'uomo: ricerche sull'antropologia teologica di san Massimo il Confessore*, Roma, 2014, 227-237.
- 7 One of the central individuals in the sharing of experience between the leader and the community is the allegorical figure of Old Testament Moses, also elaborated by several eminent authors. Cf. Philo, *De vita Mosis, I-II* (introduction, traduction et notes par Roger Arnaldez), Paris, 1967; Grégoire de Nysse, *La vie de Moïse ou traité de la perfection en matière de vertu* (introduction, traduction et notes par Jean Daniélou), Paris, 1955.

In addition, it can also be taken for granted that there are *stout barriers* to step into apophysis from the side of the service provider. Beside the physical circumstances, I would like to refer, firstly, to the lack of the neat spiritual preparation of the minister, secondly to the renunciation of all ascension, rooted in one's own ideal, that is, the ubiquitous presence of reductionist symbolism based strictly on ration, which in reality sees only symbols in the sacred events of the Liturgy⁸. Yet the consecrated cleric who can present the Liturgy has a particularly enormous potential. The Jesuit theologian Jean Daniélou in his pioneer monograph of *Platonisme et théologie mystique; essai sur la doctrine spirituelle de Saint Grégoire de Nysse*, commenting on the idea of the 4th century patristic author he examined, summed up who is really the New Testament servant: the person who can *approach God with an uncovered face and confidence*⁹. Moreover, the

- 8 By influential physical conditions I mean the war environment, the captivity that results from it, the priest's illness, and even the weather hardship. An eclectic example of human-based conceptualization limited to "symbolize-type" awareness is the identification of the candle with the ever-presiding role of Saint John the Baptist when the light is carried around during the Little Entrance before the Gospel Book which refers to Jesus Christ and His works on earth, while this kind of theory categorically rejects any explanation based on a more mystical reality.
- 9 It is worth recalling the followings from Father Daniélou's book: "Parmi les biens qui faisaient partie du patrimoine du premier Adam et que la grâce du Christ restitue à l'homme, il faut donner une place spéciale à cette réalité que Grégoire appelle d'un mot difficile à traduire en français, la 'parrhésie', παρρησία. On sait que c'est le terme par lequel, dans le grec classique, on désignait la liberté de prendre la parole à l'assemblée du peuple, le franc-parler qui était le privilège du citoyen libre par opposition à l'esclave. Dans la langue chrétienne il marque *l'assurance* qui résulte pour l'homme, dans ses rapports avec Dieu, de sa qualité de fils. Grâce à elle, en effet, *il peut lui parler avec une certaine égalité* – et non comme un esclave s'adresse à son maître". Cf. Jean Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique; essai sur la doctrine spirituelle de Saint Grégoire de Nysse*, Paris, 1954, 104-105.

repetition of this “slave” word in the Liturgy seeks to lay stress on and, at the same time, keep in mind the person who has received the sanctity of the ecclesiastical order, giving him the strength (δύναμις) to move boldly toward God on the path of apophysis, an example of which is the following prayer:

Ὁ τὰς κοινὰς ταύτας καὶ συμφώνους ἡμῖν χαρισάμενος προσευχάς, ὁ καὶ δυσι καὶ τρισὶ συμφωνοῦσιν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί σου τὰς αἰτήσεις παρέχειν ἐπαγγειλάμενος, αὐτὸς καὶ νῦν τῶν δούλων σου τὰ αἰτήματα πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον πλήρωσον, χορηγῶν ἡμῖν ἐν τῷ παρόντι αἰῶνι τὴν ἐπίγνωσιν τῆς σῆς ἀληθείας καὶ ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι ζωὴν αἰώνιον χαρίζομενος¹⁰.

On the top of it all, *the series of dialogues with the deacon* explicitly present in the Liturgy also support this authentic servant function (παρρησιαστικός) when called the chief celebrity as a despot, that is, a master in the event, for example, of the blessing of the chalice: “Εὐλόγησον, δέσποτα, τὸ ἅγιον Ποτήριον”¹¹. This encouraging aspect of the deacon is well-promoted by the passage of the famous liturgical commentary of the Patriarch of Constantinople of Germanus (715-730): “And the deacons, who represent angelic powers, surround

10 All the Greek liturgical quotations used in the study were taken from the edition of Η ΘΕΙΑ ΛΕΙΤΟΥΡΓΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΕΝ ΑΓΙΟΣ ΠΑΤΡΟΣ ΗΜΩΝ ΙΩΑΝΝΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΧΡΥΣΟΣΤΟΥ published in Rome in 1950, while the Hungarian quotations were taken from A GÖRÖG SZERTARTÁSU KATHOLIKUS EGYHÁZ SZENT ÉS ISTENI LITURGIÁJA published in Nyíregyháza in 1920. The words, which appear five times in CHR, emerge in the following silent priestly prayers: the prayer of the 3rd antiphon, the prayer of the Trisagion Hymns, the series of prayers called “Let us all say” ectenia in the Hungarian Greek Catholic tradition, the prayer for the Catechumens, and finally the Nemo digmus prayer. In Byz-BAS, the word “slave” occurs with four more forms: during ectenia following the Great Entrance, twice in the Anaphora, and in the Epiclesis. From these data is tangible the invention of the editor of the Liturgy that he feels a need for keeping the minister in a state of apophysis spanning the whole Liturgy.

11 Η ΘΕΙΑ ΛΕΙΤΟΥΡΓΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΕΝ ΑΓΙΟΣ ΠΑΤΡΟΣ ΗΜΩΝ ΙΩΑΝΝΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΧΡΥΣΟΣΤΟΥ, Rome, 1950, 51.

them, like their wings, with an orarion made of thin linen, helping the souls they are destined to serve”¹². The deacon’s patronizing position in the Liturgy can be traced back to the neoplatonic feature of the Greek world of ideas, which is tautly derived from the theory that the eligible members of higher order serves as mediators for the lower order to pass on the knowledge of becoming gods, while luring the gods out of their aboriginal silence. This can rightly be supplemented by the fact that the theory of the mobilization of divine activity, generally known as theurgy, formulates an intent that the praying service provider should cause God to function in the world. In the ideal notion of Denis Areopagita, the theurgical activities of God are accurately realized in the undertakings of Jesus Christ, which can be applied especially with his mystical revelations in the sacrament of the liturgical Eucharist. What is more, in one of his comments on *De Beatitudinibus*, Gregory of Nyssa reports: “He who is invisible by nature will be visible by his actions, and we see him in some of the things around him”¹³. I believe that it can be stated with certainty that the Holy Liturgy between earthly beings is in any case one of the things around God, since He is undoubtedly present in the visible world despite His transcendence, because God pervades the universe. The Liturgy is, by all means, in contact with God and takes an uninsulated position in its relationship with the Unspeakable. As a result, from the theurgical perspective, beings regain the ability to participate in the forces of God with the help of the divine movement that emerges from Himself in the direction of beings¹⁴.

12 PG 98,393 C: “Οἱ δὲ διάκονοι εἰς τύπον τῶν ἀγγελικῶν Δυνάμεων ταῖς λεπταῖς τῶν λεπτῶν ὠραρίων πτέρυξιν, ὡς λειτουργικὰ πνεύματα εἰς διακονίαν ἀποστελλόμενα προτρέχουσι”.

13 PG 44,1269 A.

14 Jean Meyendorff, *Le Christ dans la théologie byzantine*, Paris, 1969 (Hungarian trans.: *Krisztus az ortodox teológiában*, tr. T. Imrényi, Budapest, 2003, 151-179).

It is noticeable, then, that both the repeated use of the word servant (δοῦλος) and the communicative purpose of the deacon construct the greatest honor from God, from which one can guess who this minister really is and what glory he is meant to reward.

As a conclusion, the hindering realities at the human level can be broken by God's plan for fulfillment and control in the ascending motion of the Liturgy if it is coupled with the will of the minister's open and thus broader world of ideas¹⁵.

4. *The advocating assignment and impact of the surrounding reality of apophasis*

The conceptual "conversion" of the service provider is especially facilitated by the accurate identification and appreciation of the natural value of apophasis¹⁶. However, for the admiration evoked

¹⁵ At the same time, it should be noted that in church practice there is still the possibility of a deacon's wide-ranging ministry (such as the role of visiting the patient and caring for the elderly or performing various functions in educational institutions, or, in certain cases, having the position of sacrificial office permitted in specific churches: *CCEO can. 709. 1. §.*) but it already has less of a systemic character than it did centuries ago. (In the Roman Catholic tradition, the administration of the sacramentals to the deacon is also provided by the relevant ecclesiastical legislation.) It can be stated that the social mission of the deacon service based both on the Byzantine model among believers and the Holy Scripture (Cf. Acts 6,1-3) has been reduced, while the deacon's participation in the liturgies has been strengthened and increased, in my view, due to the wider spread of the *theurgical* concept.

¹⁶ Pierre Hadot (1922-2010), a contemporary philosophical historian of French descent, whose specialty was Neo-Platonism, discusses apophasis as a process that needs to be treated *only as a method*. Cf. Pierre Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, Paris, 2002, 239. However, I can only partially agree with his thoughts expressed in the introduction. First, the word theology means not only "speaking of God" to me, but "experiencing God (also) through a transcended human intellect in the gloom of sober ecstasy". The latter is

by the accurate identification and appreciation of values, one must be conscious of the real types of apophasis present in the Liturgy that effectively endorse and aggrandize the ascension of the minister.

The one better known layer is squarely anchored in the peculiarity of human language, the antonym word pairs: here is the point of a grammatical formation in which we may be capable of articulating *God's attributes* in this shape turning to account of qualificative markers constructed from noun or verbal phases conjoined tightly

another dimension in the encounter between God and man, as if it were merely cognitive insight. In my view, as long as we take *the reality* of mystical union with God out of the concept of theology and preserve the meaning of the idea only in the context of “talk about Him”, it will be impossible to present the significance of apophasis in a balanced way, as it must be preceded by *some* experience. Theology, then, is not only a speech about God, but at least so much a non-speech when we are unable to tell the absolute Transcendence in spite of the experience of the Presence. Second, when Hadot writes concretely that theology, if “negative”, should even deny its object, that is, the concept of divinity (and not the existence of God according to his article!), since it is (just) a perceptible definiteness – thus it cannot be denied because that we would run into a paradox – then, in my opinion, the extraordinary thinker is wrong again. For negative theology never claimed that divinity is its object, since *divinity* as an above-essential essence (ουσία) *was always demonstrated as ungraspable*, whether it was approached and advanced on a real or conceptual level. The theology, despite Hadot's suggestion, always argued that God himself as well as His inseparable concept, that is, divinity, is unknowable. Moreover, the Byzantine tradition does not define God as a subject at the time of the occurrence of the mystical union, according to the teachings of Denis the Areopagita, because He is beyond all: therefore, it cannot be asserted with testimony about Him that he is a subject at the level of human conception. Furthermore, it is with this very study that I would like to proclaim that *apophatism is not only a methodological tool* in the hands of theology, as it is shown by Hadot, but an *existential orientation on the part of man*, one of the most striking mediums of which is the divine Liturgy.

with a privative suffix¹⁷. From a theological and liturgical point of view, we perform this not only to draw attention to God's actual ignorance of His essence according to the decisive belief of the Byzantine theological world of notion, but also to inspire the soul, by employing atypical words to illustrate His impulsivity that uniquely affects human creation, to admire and adore Him¹⁸.

17 Of course, it seems impeccable on the part of the editors of the Liturgy to make a far-reaching commitment to maintaining balance in the Anaphoral prayer, which contains apophatic and cataphatic theological elements, when they sought to address the Creator of the universe, the Father. Cf. Robert Taft, *Byzantine Rite. A Short History*, Minnesota, 1992 (Hungarian trans., tr. F. Jeviczki, *A bizánci liturgia*, Budapest, 2005, 431). It is definitely worth recalling the privileged balance in the prayer as one of the thematic focuses of the Liturgy from the point of view of dogma history: “Ἄξιον καὶ δίκαιον σὲ ὑμνεῖν, σὲ εὐλογεῖν, σὲ αἰνεῖν, σοὶ εὐχαριστεῖν, σὲ προσκυνεῖν ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ τῆς δεσποτείας σου. Σὺ γὰρ εἶ Θεὸς ἀνέκφραστος, ἀπερινόητος, ἀόρατος, ἀκατάληπτος, αἰεὶ ὢν ὡσαύτως ὢν· σὺ καὶ ὁ μονογενὴς σου Υἱὸς καὶ τὸ Πνεῦμά σου τὸ Ἅγιον. Σὺ ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος εἰς τὸ εἶναι ἡμᾶς παρήγαγες καὶ παραπεσόντας ἀνέστησας πάλιν καὶ οὐκ ἀπέστης πάντα ποιῶν ἕως ἡμᾶς εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀνήγαγες καὶ τὴν βασιλείαν σου ἐχαρίσω τὴν μέλλουσαν. Ὑπὲρ τούτων ἀπάντων εὐχαριστοῦμέν σοι καὶ τῷ μονογενεῖ σου Υἱῷ καὶ τῷ Πνεύματί σου τῷ Ἁγίῳ· ὑπὲρ πάντων ὧν ἴσμεν καὶ ὧν οὐκ ἴσμεν, τῶν φανερῶν καὶ ἀφανῶν εὐεργεσιῶν, τῶν εἰς ἡμᾶς γεγενημένων. Εὐχαριστοῦμέν σοι καὶ ὑπὲρ τῆς λειτουργίας ταύτης, ἣν ἐκ τῶν χειρῶν ἡμῶν δέξασθαι κατηξίωσας, καίτοι σοι παρεστήκασι χιλιάδες ἀρχαγγέλων καὶ μυριάδες ἀγγέλων, τὰ Χερουβείμ καὶ τὰ Σεραφείμ, ἑξαπτέρυγα, πολυόμματα, μετάρσια, πεπερωτά”. Cf. *Η ΘΕΙΑ ΛΕΙΤΟΥΡΓΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΕΝ ΑΓΙΟΣ ΠΑΤΡΟΣ ΗΜΩΝ ΙΩΑΝΝΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΧΡΥΣΟΣΤΟΥ*, Rome, 1950, 47-48.

18 At the very start of the enarxial unity of the Liturgy, namely in the silent priestly prayer of the first antiphon, God, addressed with apophatic markers with a privative suffix, delivers to the minister the appeal of His own absolute transcendence. This outstripping transcendence, as an ontological dependence as well as plunging into the world experienced from man's point of view, does not remove δούλος from the Creator, but takes the form of creature admiration evoked by prayer: “Κύριε ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν, οὗ τὸ κράτος ἀνείκαστον καὶ ἡ δόξα ἀκατάληπτος, οὗ τὸ ἔλεος ἀμέτρητον καὶ ἡ φιλανθρωπία ἄφατος· αὐτός, Δέσποτα, κατὰ τὴν εὐσπλαγχνίαν σου, ἐπίβλεψον ἐφ' ἡμᾶς καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν ἅγιον οἶκον τοῦτον καὶ ποίησον μεθ' ἡμῶν καὶ τῶν συνευχομένων ἡμῖν πλοῦσια τὰ ἔλεή σου καὶ τοὺς

The second mark of apophysis, which is progressively fading in one of the theological horizons of Western culture (Roman Catholicism) and almost perfectly outlandish in the other (Protestantism), is *the existence-like constitutional attitude* that implies that knowing God is just the total unawareness of knowledge and, of course, its appalling effect recognized by human soul¹⁹.

This two-layered approach of apophysis, or its practical reality, pushes the minister into the privileged position of humility during the performance of the Liturgy. Furthermore, the experience of spirituality shows that in parallel with keeping the spirit of repentance on the horizon, the creature humility, in ceremony, will be exalted by the mystical self-communication of the Trinity. Thus, the objective apophysis, present with both layers and consciously incorporated into the Liturgy, implies a number of subjective results in the service provider: this includes the gradual formation of divine figure (θεοείδεια), which comes to be a precondition for contemplation in which God becomes known in a special way²⁰. Moreover, while the

οικτιρμούς σου”. Cf. *Η ΘΕΙΑ ΛΕΙΤΟΥΡΓΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΕΝ ΑΓΙΟΣ ΠΑΤΡΟΣ ΗΜΩΝ ΙΩΑΝΝΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΧΡΥΣΟΣΤΟΥ*, Rome, 1950, 24-25. Immediately as the initial thrust of the mysterious union with the Trinity, the worshiper can begin to delight and extol his Creator with a joyful heart. Just as in a mathematical function the domain of interpretation defines the elements of a set of values with a clear assignment, so God has specifically defined the imagery type of *man as a creature*. The resulting ontological distance does not separate, but *connects*, given the existential projection of the meaning of apophysis for man. Exploring the world of thought of Gregory of Nyssa, von Balthasar, in his in-depth study of διάστημα through a subchapter, notices just that: by the apophatic medium we move far away from the world rather than from God. Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Présence et pensée: essai sur la philosophie religieuse de Grégoire de Nysse*, Paris, 1988, 1-10.

19 Vladimir Lossky – Saulius Rumsas, *Essai sur la théologie mystique de l'Église d'Orient*, Paris, 2006, 14-25.

20 It is a vision that no longer shines through the veil of existing things, but the uncovered (ἀπερικάλυπτος) God.

divine obscurity illuminates the governing mind, the human soul in the meantime longs to forget itself. However, in becoming familiar with the presence of the Absolute, in union with the Trinity, factual admiration and valid worship of God is established. As Lossky argues, apophasis becomes a criterion for thinking in accordance with the Truth²¹.

5. *Apophasism in the Liturgy*

The two typical species of apophasis mentioned above, that is, progress through denials and existential attitudes on the part of man, are present in the Liturgy at the same time: thus the head question of my research is how the ordained service provider can progress towards his πλήρωμα blossomed out in the Liturgy²².

It is known that the basis of negative theology is considered by scholars to be the Hellenic way of thinking, be it a diversified cogitative structure rested on the Platonic *oeuvre*, an approach

21 Vladimir Lossky – Saulius Rumsas, *Essai sur la théologie mystique de l'Église d'Orient*, 24.

22 As a matter of course, I am not emphasizing the quantitative aspect of the word *pleroma* at this point, when one would mean the totality of something, but *perfection in the qualitative sense*. The former 4th century bishop of Nyssa descried that God created the whole world (κόσμος), and thus man in it, with hidden abilities (δυνάμει) “in the beginning”, so he believed that the *pleroma* of all creation was immediately took into shape. This *pleroma* will then develop continuously according to a specific order (τάξις). This theory of Gergely's *pleroma* can also be demonstrated in the Holy Liturgy, because just as his worldview sees the world as a *cosmos*, that is, an order in which a beauty-making direction works (τάξις), so there is an order (τάξις) in the divine ceremony which unfolds in harmony with God the *pleroma* of the minister acting in the order (κόσμος) of the Liturgy. Cf. Lucas Francisco Mateo-Seco – Giulio Maspero, *The Brill dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, Leiden, 2010, 626-628. (It is probable that this is why the ceremonies are called *taxis* in the Byzantine tradition).

derived from the orientation of the Aristotelian course, or a non-contingent combination of these. Consequently, this form of thinking, which marks out the nuances of apophatism and their flourishing in the Liturgy, first of all instigated to pick up a quarrel with the philosophical surroundings and, at the same time, loosen the theological environment that had existed until then, entailing a weird transformation in them²³.

It is plain that the multifold milieu, later labelled as the Byzantine world order, and the Christians in its territory certainly did not initially incorporate this new set of concepts into liturgical gatherings (in the 2nd and 3rd centuries) with the aim of reckoning them as definitive and indissoluble elements in the construction of the liturgy in the broadest sense, but, in contrast, they relied much more on the cultured reality of the apostolic-biblical tradition in their region, while in the fourth century, following the *suggestive theological activity* of the Cappadocian Fathers, there was a turning point in this field.

This far-reaching modification meant that learning about God was not an end in itself, as in philosophy, but exponentially *a means* of learning and practicing of the Christian life: as to the subject of my survey, therefore, the primary purpose of the whole Divine Liturgy is to form and perfect the Christian man. This, however, promptly required the Liturgy to be progressively critical of the traditional way of thinking, for the Liturgy yearned for breaking it from ordinary, empirical knowledge as well as from the formal sense of Greek philosophy in order to bestow a newfangled approach through the more and more advancing apophasis. Apophasis, which takes a proactive disposition and progresses through denials, gradually led to a kind of demand for the stripping of human mind after the Christians became aware of the key physical and spiritual role of

23 Vanyó László – Tóth Judit, *Nüsszai Szent Gergely teológiai antropológiája*, Budapest, 2010, 66-76.

purification in their relationship with God (καθάρισις). This unique operation, in turn, involved not only a meaningful turn-away from the otherwise beloved created reality, but from a recognition that was always built on perception. In the formation of the stripping of the cognitively operated mind, a view of the major theorists of Christians changed, namely they did not covet God in an excessively material and objective state in the process of cognition and, at the same time, they began to abandon the importance of intellectual activity built on the human reason, so that instead of perceiving their own subjectivity, they would be led to cognition by a mystical revelation from God, increasingly seen as authentic.

The discovery of the joy of non-knowledge (ἀγνοσία) became a prerequisite for entering the mystical gloom, as they experienced that knowing the supersensible things radiates the human intellect. These observations with non-positive formulations had a repercussion on the innovative narrative of actual theological experience. For this reason, the personal encounter with the revelation of God intimately highlighted the essential assisting duty of divine grace in human apophatic learning.

In order for the now newly dreamed-up function to be fulfilled by the Holy Liturgy, many of the ideas that crystallized from these experiential processes also had to be planted in its core material.

One of these is the reasonable acceptance that the limit of human empirical knowledge is the space-time constraint, as a result of which the scope of knowledge can necessarily extend only to created things, but not to divine action, so bridging units, capable of positioning by the supporting apophysis, had to be implanted in the Liturgy to keep the service provider's attention vivid. Uncreated *divine activity* was therefore emphatically *accentuated* in the structure of the Liturgy, which is echoed in the Trisagion Hymn, at the beginning of the Holy Anaphora, and in the prayer of the Bowing of Heads before the glorious Body and Blood of Christ: “[...] who *brought* all things *from non-being* into being; [...] You brought us from non-being, and when

we fell you raised us up again, [...] who in your infinite power *created all things* from non-being into being”²⁴.

Both the producer of the core material of the Liturgy and their supplements rested on the standpoints of developed dogmatic features also perceived over the centuries that human cognition, in itself, distorts visible and supernatural realities, for it is a finite process of the acquisition of knowledge about man. This unavoidable deformation of finitude also applies to self-mapping. Thus, it is by the Liturgy which is capable of genuinely demolishing this kind of encircling barrier by transmitting, fixed as a starting point, an unmistakable knowledge of man himself, namely that he is a creature of God: “[...] who created humanity in your image and likeness and adored them with your every gift [...]”²⁵.

Furthermore, the divine message of being created, on the whole, also establishes a kind of tension in man’s mind and soul, for he too indefatigably craves after being like God, while he incessantly must live the opposite, that is, he cannot be God himself in any sense. The subsequent idea consciously inoculated in the Liturgy not only alleviates the experience of this very crestfallen hunger, but also conveys man straight out of himself in order to swing towards the Cause that exists on the contrasted side of creation. Twelve times in the CHR, the celebrant remembers the uplifting and indescribably joyful *attraction of the mystery of the altar*, that the attitude founded on the existential disposition from apophasis should be not only the chances of the six-winged seraphim but also the chances of man living in the tension of finality, prestigious examples of which are the following parts of prayer: “We give thanks to you, Lord God of Powers, *for making us worthy to stand now at your holy altar* [...]”; and grant that

²⁴ *The Divine Liturgy*, Sydney, 2005, 21.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

*we may stand at your holy altar without guilt or condemnation*²⁶. It is also exceedingly perceptible that the contact of this special scarcity advances man in everyday life, and in the divine Liturgy, too. Until he transcends the boundaries of present metaphysical deprivation and existential destitution, he *seeks to appeal true values* through the ritual and its promoting support, just as the minister has the believers prayed, “Τὰ καλὰ καὶ συμφέροντα ταῖς ψυχαῖς ἡμῶν καὶ εἰρήνην τῷ κόσμῳ παρὰ τοῦ Κυρίου αἰτησώμεθα”²⁷.

The good and useful things for the human soul also conveyed to the minister and the faithful by the apophysis working in the Liturgy is the redemptive *selflessness* experienced through divine activity, which can also crack the firm layers of human thought that encourage his ownership and non-release manner of all earthly creations: “[...] and when we fall *you* raised us up again, and *left nothing undone until you brought us up to heaven* and bestowed on us your kingdom to come”²⁸. Thus, this renunciation of God, stored in an unharmed pose, can initiate in man the imitation of the Trinitarian emptiness to more and more correspond to the reality of correct self-denial based on the idea of penetrating apophysis.

Overall, through the acknowledgment and acceptance of this non-knowledge, man is able *to give thanks* for invisible divine help through liturgical prayer. Moreover, by solely taking an animated part in renouncing human cognition in the scientific sense, one makes a momentous decision in the process of growth before God, which is well-illustrated by the phrase of the silent priestly prayer found in the inclination of head²⁹: “[...] Look from heaven, Master, upon those who have bowed their heads to you; for they have not bowed to flesh

²⁶ *Ibid.* 43.

²⁷ Η ΘΕΙΑ ΛΕΙΤΟΥΡΓΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΕΝ ΑΓΙΟΣ ΠΑΤΡΟΣ ΗΜΩΝ ΙΩΑΝΝΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΧΡΥΣΟΣΤΟΥ, Rome, 1950, 56.

²⁸ *The Divine Liturgy*, Sydney, 2005, 71.

²⁹ Vanyó – Tóth, *Nüsszai Szent Gergely teológiai antropológiája*, 66-76.

and blood, but to you awesome God”³⁰. The consequence of this is that, on the one hand, he will see God in proportion to the power received, and, on the other hand, this man will have the right insight precisely communicated by divine *koinonia*: “The Body and Blood of Christ is given to (name), for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life”³¹.

The human insight restored in the Liturgy, which withdraw from all creation in its renunciation of everything, lands at a *state of heart function* (ἐνέργεια της καρδιάς), which is already free from all external influences, imbued with heavenly happiness: “Christ our God [...] *fill our hearts with joy and gladness*, always, now, and always, forever and ever and to the ages of ages. Amen”³².

6. Conclusions on apophysis existing in the Liturgy

My essay was primarily put down, despite the approaches that left ἀπόφασις behind, to explore the function of this entity actually present in the divine Liturgy in a two-layered way from the point of view of the consecrated Christian service provider (δοῦλος) entrusted with the leadership of believers gathering for synaxis.

Rather than contrasting opinions, which in many cases disagree with the Byzantine view, I argue in my research that the significant liturgical aspect of apophysis carries a unifying force for the minister that does not ultimately isolate him from the Transcendent, but connects with Him.

In my opinion, we must not sharply separate the coexistence of the visible and invisible world in the shadow of the danger of not being able to speak of the Liturgy in a balanced way. Hereat I see that the Liturgy is not simply a rationalizing image of the encounter with God

³⁰ *The Divine Liturgy*, Sydney, 2005, 89.

³¹ *The Divine Liturgy*, Sydney, 2005, 101.

³² *Ibid.* 109.

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on the ground of apophasis, but the ontological reality of the mystical union for man living in the obvious polar entity of body and soul. The Liturgy, which transmits an apophatic experience, is a place of delighted contemplation of the exact presence of the Holy Trinity, which does not lead to a conceptual end of faith according to the human imagination, but to its content-filled reality in the fullness of faith according to the Holy Spirit (“Ζέσις πίστεως, πλήρης Πνεύματος Ἁγίου”³³).

33 *Η ΘΕΙΑ ΛΕΙΤΟΥΡΓΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΕΝ ΑΓΙΟΙΣ ΠΑΤΡΟΣ ΗΜΩΝ ΙΩΑΝΝΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΧΡΥΣΟΣΤΟΥ*, Rome, 1950, 60.