

TEO, ISSN 2247-4382
71 (2), pp. 83-110, 2017

Epiphanism in the Orthodox Worship and Its Relevance to the Church Theology and Life

Lucian Farcașiu

Lucian Farcașiu

“Hilarion V. Felea” Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Arad, Romania
Email: lucian.farcasiu@yahoo.com

Abstract

This study aims to highlight the epiphanic dimension of the Church worship, as well as its implications for the Church theology and life. The cult re-enacts the history of salvation in the Church and offers a foretaste of the Kingdom of God. During the service, the oikonomy of salvation is revealed to us as a continuous present, in which humans unite with angels and the entire creation in glorifying God. Worship works with symbols, which are to be understood as means for revealing and participating in the transcendent realities, and creates the medium in which the the voice of the eternal Logos can be heard as a powerful word.

Keywords

Orthodox Church, liturgy, epiphanism, divine presence, symbol, liturgical Anthropology, faith, confession

I. Introduction

The life of the believer is an ecclesial one, a life

*“integrated and framed in the ecclesial rhythm and reality.”*¹

This means that „*the spiritual life suddenly becomes absolutely personal and fully communitarian or ecclesiastical*”, namely „*in the Church, man has the opportunity to participate and partake the divine abundance of life, that is to say the risen life of Christ, the life raised above death*”². Here “*...the believer receives the power and glory that make him similar to his Prototype - God!*”³

In the Orthodox Church, the service is not regarded as a simple compartment attached to everyday life, nor as an abstract sacred act, isolated from real life, or as a simple category of worship done for itself and to fulfill a purely typiconal formality. On the contrary, it is understood as “*sensitive concrete forms showing and including the real presence of God and His work in our world*”.⁴ Thus from an Orthodox perspective “*the services are the gateway God walks into our world through and which give man the opportunity to be a part of the divine way of being*”.⁵ Through Orthodox services “*the believer ... becomes the man who lives and updates the divine-humanity of Christ*”⁶, according to Sf. Paul’s phrase: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ Who lives in me” (Gal. 2,20).

The Christian experience achieved by the integration into the liturgical content of the worship typicon has as its ultimate ground what the Liturgical Theology calls *the epiphanic character of worship*, that is, the sacramental realism of Church service as the work of the Holy Spirit that makes us, the faithful of the Church, to be integrated into the celebrated liturgical event. In this sense, we might say that the service becomes an early pre-tasting and an anticipated descent of the Kingdom of God among us. Unfortunately, for a long time the liturgical theologians have only partially referred to

¹ Pr. Vasile Vlad, *Temeiuri ale gândirii morale. Perspectivă teologică*, Editura Astra Museum, Sibiu, 2016, p. 15.

² V. Vlad, *Temeiuri ...*, p. 16.

³ V. Vlad, *Temeiuri ...*, p. 16.

⁴ V. Vlad, *Temeiuri ...*, p. 17. See also Nicolae Cabasila, *Despre viața în Hristos*, traducere Teodor Bodogae, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1997, p. 24-29.

⁵ V. Vlad, *Temeiuri ...*, p. 17.

⁶ V. Vlad, *Temeiuri ...*, p. 17.

Epiphany in the Orthodox Worship and Its Relevance to the Church...

this issue of understanding the Church service as an event of the Kingdom of God descended in our midst. They have accentuated especially the commemorative and anamnestic character as a memento of the oikonomy of the human race salvation through the Church worship, thus letting its epiphanic character somehow aside.

From a recovery perspective, the present study aims to highlight the epiphanic dimension of the Church worship, as well as its implications for the Church theology and life.

II. Terminological specifications

According to Greek-Romanian dictionary the word term *epiφania*, *ας*, means “appearance, apparition, manifestation of divine or shine” (glory, we may say)⁷. According to Fr. Andre Scrima the term *epiphany* means “God who reveals” designating “something hidden, which by revealing itself constitutes a reality newly brought into existence, not yet manifested”⁸.

III. Epiphany in the divine worship. The liturgical present

In the study of *General Liturgics* by Rev. Prof. Ene Braniște, there are a few references to the epiphanic character of the cult. He highlights the fact that “our divine services are not «simple memories and symbols», but mysterious actions and theophanies, that make us really re-live the events from the history of our redemption”⁹.

The Church is the living expression of the Holy Spirit’s presence. The Holy Spirit updates the entire oikonomia of humanity in an epiphanic way. This happens during the Church services.¹⁰ The salvation brought to the world

⁷ Prof. Dr. Mauri ce Carrez și Francois Morel, *Dicționar grec-român al Noului Testament*, traducere Prof. Gheorghe Badea, Editura Societatea Biblică Interconfesională din România, București, 1999, p. 117.

⁸ Andre Scrima, *Biserica liturgică*, traducere Anca Manolescu, Editura Humanitas, București, p. 129.

⁹ Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene Braniște, *Liturgica Generală*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1993, p. 80.

¹⁰ See it extensively at Pr. Dr. Viorel Sava, *Cultul ortodox – spațiul prezenței și lucrării Duhului Sfânt*, in “Dialog Teologic”, Journal of the Roman Catholic Theological Institute, year I (1998), no. 1, p. 112-123.

through the redemptive work of Christ remains pure potential unless it is updated by the work of the Church. It is precisely the Church service that makes present this oikonomia of humanity salvation updating the history and the events of salvation through the Holy Spirit's work. This work of the Holy Spirit is experienced as an active presence in the Church through her services and rites. Not only the Holy Mysteries, but the entire divine worship makes us partake the divine, sanctifying and deifying grace, understood in the Christian East as a personal grace that is made accessible to men through the person of Christ or the Holy Spirit. In this respect, the relationship between the oikonomia of the Son and the oikonomia of the Holy Spirit is perichoretic, that is, of mutual interdependence, their point of meeting being precisely the liturgical life of the Church. From this perspective we may say the liturgical rite not only recalls the past, but makes us part of the narrated event and introduces us to the feast through the Holy Spirit's work, partaken through the rite. In the divine worship the temporal distance is cancelled so that in and through service we are integrated into the timeless dimension of God's Kingdom, to which we are made partakers "today". The whole course of Church services would only update the oikonomia of salvation as "today" of God's Kingdom. In this sense, the Annunciation troparion says: "Today is the beginning of our salvation..."¹¹; the kontakion of our Lord's Nativity exclaims: "Today the Virgin gives birth to the Transcendent One..."¹²; at the Epiphany the liturgical text contains:

"Today the Master bendeth His neck to the hand of the Forerunner ... Today John baptizes the Master in Jordan's streams ... Today the Master buries the mankind sins in the waters ... Today the Master is witnessed beloved Son from Heaven... Today the Master receives Baptism from the Forerunner hand ... Today the Maker of heaven and earth comes in flesh at Jordan asking for baptism ... Today the creation is lighted... Today the nature of water is sanctified".¹³

¹¹ *Mineiul pe Martie*, day 25, Small Vespers, Troparion, Editura Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2007, p. 211.

¹² *Mineiul pe Decembrie*, day 25, Matins, Kontakion, Editura Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2005, p. 441.

¹³ *Mineiul pe Ianuarie*, day 6, Prayer from The Great Blessing of Water, Editura Editura Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2006, p. 130.

Epiphany in the Orthodox Worship and Its Relevance to the Church...

At Palm Sunday we hear: “today Christ enters the city...”¹⁴; in the Holy Week we sing: “Today, He who suspended the earth in the waters is suspended on a cross. The King of the Angels wears a crown of thorns. He who wraps the sky in clouds is wrapped in a fake purple robe...”¹⁵; and at Pascha night we praise: “Today is salvation to the world for Christ is risen almighty as He is...”¹⁶ As we can easily see in Church services

“there is an existential meeting between us and Christ at His birth, crucifixion or resurrection. The holy events are mysteriously present here and now. We re-enter every feast so it becomes a unique and re-inspiring work of salvation for us today. Thus, far from being a cold and lifeless embodiment of the facts of the past, the liturgical year is a personal and alive encounter with Jesus today”.¹⁷

This *today* that we meet as continuity in all the liturgical ordinances of our Church is more than a story or remembrance and commemoration, “it is an event that happens *now*”¹⁸. The believer participates in the Church service as it is today, because all the events described in the liturgical hymnography are not past and concluded moments in history

“for He who has done them, though He has fulfilled them in time, is above all time and out of time, and His work brings the past and the future in an eternal present and today, in an event which manifests itself whenever the Eucharistic liturgical synaxis (assembly) is realized”.¹⁹

Anthony M. Coniaris specifies:

“For anyone who has the living experience of the service, the frequent repetition of today is not just a figure of style. For the very fruit of the Liturgy is indeed that whatever Christ has done

¹⁴ *Triod*, Matins of Palm Sunday, Glory..., after Psalm 50, Editura Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2000, p. 534.

¹⁵ *Triod*, Stichera of the Ninth Hour from the Holy Friday, p. 634.

¹⁶ *Penticostar*, The Pascal Canon, Ode 4, Irmos, Editura Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2012, p. 36.

¹⁷ Anthony M. Coniaris, *Introducere în credința și viața Bisericii Ortodoxe*, traducere de Constantin Făgețan, Editura Sofia, București, 2001, p. 93.

¹⁸ Pr. Dr. Vasile Vlad, *Dimensiunea liturgică a vieții religios-morale*, Editura Universității „Aurel Vlaicu”, Arad, 2009, p. 56.

¹⁹ V. Vlad, *Dimensiunea liturgică ...*, p. 57.

*to return to life in and through it, to be made present again, and updated in connection with us and our salvation”.*²⁰

Far from being a simple formula of style, *today* from the Church service “depicts the essence of liturgical consciousness. For all that Christ once did returns to life forever, it becomes secretly present in the present moment, passing beyond time, uniting the present with the past and placing each one of us in the holy works of history. They become events from (in) our life”.²¹

Therefore, during the service

*“there is an existential encounter between us and Christ at His birth, crucifixion or resurrection. The holy events are secretly present here and now. We rejoin every feast in such a way that it becomes a unique and rejuvenating work of salvation for us today. Thus, far from being a cold and lifeless embodiment of the past, the liturgical year is a living and personal meeting with Jesus today”.*²²

In this perspective during the Church service we do not regard the event as happened over two thousand years ago but we live it as a continuous present, integrating every moment in the perspective of the Kingdom “to come” and that “has come“. The liturgical celebration is thus

*“a re-entry of the Church in the event, and this ... means ... its lived and actual reality ... The celebration of this «today» of the Church is the time when a historical fact becomes an event for us.”*²³

Thus in the Church service, Christ’s redemptive work for us gets an everlasting and absolute value, and it can be manifested in the liturgical typicon of all time as an endless today, “as something that is now being done inside the faithful who surrounds his life liturgically”²⁴. So Christ

“comes today to be born in the manger of my soul and yours, and to bring us a new life. Today He gives me His Precious Body and Blood to save me. Today He is hanged on the Cross for me.

²⁰ Alexandre Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Life*, Dept. Of Religions Education, Orthodox Church in America, f. a., p. 19.

²¹ Anthony M. Coniaris, *Introducere ...*, p. 93.

²² Anthony M. Coniaris, *Introducere ...*, p. 93.

²³ Alexandre Schmemmann, *Postul cel Mare*, trad. Andreea și Laurențiu Constantin, Editura Doris, București, 1998, p. 107.

²⁴ V. Vlad, *Dimensiunea liturgică ...*, p. 58.

Epiphany in the Orthodox Worship and Its Relevance to the Church...

Today he is resurrected, and He rises me up with Him. Today He changes his image, and I change with Him. Today he ascends to Heaven, and I ascend with Him. This is how the wonderful word today breaks the walls of the past and of the future and makes Christ the Eternal One Who Is 'the same yesterday, today and forever' (Hebrew 3: 8) ... Each year, the liturgical calendar re-lives and makes present again the holy opportunities of our salvation, so that we are there when they take place. The past comes to light and unites with the present. God's works for His people are not buried in the past. They are alive now. History does not drain the grace. God is present through the ages, never ceasing to do His work which He began."²⁵

Referring to the experience of the past events as a perpetual present in the liturgical life of the Church, Paul Evdochimov emphasizes the following:

"The holy phrase at that time, the start of any liturgical reading of the gospel, means sacred time - in illo tempore - what happens now, what is contemporary. During the Christmas service, we witness the birth of Christ, and on the night of Easter, the resurrected Christ appears and makes those who commemorate it, the eyewitnesses of the events that happened in the great Time. There are no traces of dead time, or repetitions, but everything remains once and for all ... The same divine act happened at a certain moment in history and is always offered in the Mystery. It has the power to open time and to dwell within every moment with the true content of all the moments."²⁶

In fact the feast regarded as an event is an anticipation of the eternal celebration in the Kingdom of God²⁷. It relates us to eternity, being "an anamnesis, a reference to the primordial reality amid the usual time"²⁸. Therefore the memorial of our salvation history is sacramental and from this perspective the Russian theologian Sergei Bulgakov speaks of "the realism of the Eastern rites"²⁹.

²⁵ Anthony M. Coniaris, *Introducere ...*, p. 93-94.

²⁶ Paul Evdochimov, *Ortodoxia*, traducere de Dr. Irineu Popa Ioan, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1996, p. 226.

²⁷ See P. Miquel, *La liturgie une oeuvre d'art. L'ouvre de Dieu célèbre par son peuple (vie monastique 13)*, Bellafontaine, 1981, p. 107.

²⁸ P. Miquel, *La liturgie ...*, p. 181.

²⁹ S. Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, Londra, p. 150, apud Tomas Spidlik, *Spiritualita-*

In the divine worship “we become contemporaries of the Biblical events from Genesis to Parousia that we live in a concrete way as eyewitnesses.³⁰ In this respect we talk about an incessant “liturgical present” for in the Church service

“the past is lived as present and the future is tasted by anticipation. Paradoxically, (...) we do not know past, present and future, but all becomes a continuous present through the Holy Spirit.”³¹

IV. The eschatological dimension of the worship

The Church Fathers repeatedly emphasize the eschatological dimension of the cosmos the humankind must continually have in attention, directing their life in an eschatological way. In this respect, St. Basil the Great states the following:

*“What lesson do these animals teach man? They not only show us in our Creator a care which extends to all beings, but a certain presentiment of future even in brutes. Then we ought not to attach ourselves to this present life and ought to give all heed to that which is to come.”*³²

Saint Maximus the Confessor shows that as complete fulfillment of the human nature, the eschatological state is in fact the deification of man. And the soul of man must constantly tend to this state of deification:

“Repletion of desire is the ever-moving rest around the Desirable of the ones who desire. Ever-moving rest is the continuous and never-ending enjoyment of the Desirable. The continuous and never-ending enjoyment is partaking of the divine supernatural goods. And partaking of the divine supernatural goods is the

tea Răsăritului Creștin. IV. Rugăciunea, trad. diac. Ioan I. Ică jr., Editura Deisis, 1998, p. 105.

³⁰ Olivier Clement, *Trupul morții și al slavei - scurtă introducere la o teopoetică a trupului*, traducere Eugenia Vlad, Editura Asociației Filantropice creștine Christiana, București, 1996, p. 24.

³¹ Pr. Prof. Dr. Mircea Basarab, *Liturghia după Liturghie: o aspirație și un stil de viață creștină*, in “Mitropolia Banatului”, year XXIX (1979), no. 7-9, p.521.

³² Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, *Omilii la Hexaimeron*, IX, 3, in “Scrieri”, part I, in col. “Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești”, vol. 17, trad. Pr. D. Fecioru, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1986, p. 173.

Epiphanism in the Orthodox Worship and Its Relevance to the Church...

likeness of those who partake. The likeness of those who partake with the One they partake means the up-to-date identity of those who partake by resembling, as much as possible, with the One they partake. And the up-to-date identity of those who partake by resembling with the One they partake is the deification of those who are worthy to be deified”³³.

Deification of man actually means his transfiguration, and along with him of all the cosmos. It also means his indwelling in the light of the resurrection to come in an eschatological condition. In this respect, Saint Maximus goes on as following:

“Then the present man will resurrect together with the world, as the part together with the whole and the small world together with the great world, acquiring the power not to be corrupted again. And then the body will be like the soul, and the sensible ones like the intelligible ones, concerning honour and glory. And according to each person, a single divine power will be manifested in all through a luminous and active presence. And this power will preserve undivided the bond of unity for endless ages.”³⁴

Man’s struggle to acquire this state of future happiness starts from here, from this world, by integrating the Christian in the Church life which is the real anticipation of the kingdom “to come”, and in this respect “has come”. The holy services of the Church “give the creature the unique chance to be a part of the Uncreated One because they are the place where the divine transcendence becomes fully experienced.”³⁵ In this respect, St. Justin Popovich shows that:

“Each Mystery forms and depicts the image of Christ within us until all the Mysteries and all the virtues are joined together and alive within us will form it perfectly, so the eternal living image of Christ, the God-Man may be revealed in us. The above-mentioned things begin through the Holy Mystery of Baptism. This Mystery is the first to depict the icon of the Saviour within the Christian.

³³ Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Răspunsuri către Talasie*, 59, in “Filocalia”, vol. 3, trad. Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Editura Harisma, București, 1993, p. 320-321.

³⁴ Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Mistagogia, cosmosul și sufletul chipuri ale Bisericii*, VII, trad. Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2000, p. 27.

³⁵ V. Vlad, *Temeiuri ...*, p. 176.

Further, this icon is preserved, complemented and perfected by the other Holy Mysteries and Virtues: the Holy Eucharist, and by confession, faith, love, prayer, fasting, and gentleness. This process continues throughout our lives until Christ is formed in us too."³⁶

What we show in the previous sub-chapter of this study about the pre-tasting of the future as anticipation in the liturgical order of the Church is in fact the pre-taste of the Kingdom, which man can acquire on the coordinates of the liturgical life. In fact, the liturgical epiphany is intended precisely to refer to this eschatological dimension of the Church's liturgy. By celebrating the service in the Church we situate ourselves just in the anticipated reality of the Kingdom, which the theologian Alexandre Schmemmann put it in an appropriate and already well known collocation, that we are between the "already and not yet"³⁷. Explaining the meaning of this expression, Father Schmemmann says:

*"Every day, every week, every year is thus transformed and made into this double reality, into a correlation between the «already» and the «not yet». We could not have prepared ourselves for the Kingdom of God which is "yet to come" if the Kingdom were not «already» given to us. We could have never made the end an object of love, hope and desire if it were not revealed to us as a glorious and radiant beginning. We could never have prayed: «Thy Kingdom come!», if we did not have the taste of that Kingdom already communicated to us".*³⁸

In the light of these considerations, we consider that our worship is entirely the icon of future goods, and these goods are the Jerusalem above, immaterial and not made by human hand. Thus, through the liturgical dimension of the Church life, even being in the space and time of this world, the Christian already participates at the "brightness of the future life that makes room in this world"³⁹, because the Kingdom of God already came to us through the Church service, as the life of the Christian is nothing but

³⁶ Arhimandritul Iustin Popovici, *Omul și Dumnezeu-Om. Abisurile și culmile filosofiei*, traducere Pr. prof. Ioan Ică și diacon. Ioan I. Ică jr., Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 1997, p. 178.

³⁷ Alexandre Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh – studiu liturgic al Botezului*, traducere Pr. Prof. Ion Buga, Editura Symbol, 1992, p. 37.

³⁸ Alexandre Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh ...*, p. 37.

³⁹ Nicolae Cabasila, *Despre viața în Hristos*, p. 31.

Epiphany in the Orthodox Worship and Its Relevance to the Church...

“an appearance of the eternal in time ... the tent of God in the world, the way of the Presence, the way God himself capitalizes the creature on the coordinates of eternity, and man exploits the presence of God in himself by a co-work to build his existence in the sense of the eternal kingdom.”⁴⁰

Of course, this anticipation of the Kingdom is the fruit of the Holy Spirit work. The beginning of the Church's work is linked precisely to the Descent of the Holy Spirit, so that the Church lives the eschatological gift from the very first day of her existence in the world. And this outpouring of the Holy Spirit is a continual work. In this respect, Saint John Chrysostom wrote: „Pentecost is an unceasing feast - for if the Spirit were not present, the Church would not exist”⁴¹

The liturgical prayer “takes place in time, but through its being, it is beyond time” so “the soul has already settled in the happy reality of the world to come.”⁴² In this sense, committing the liturgical service of the Great Feasts and the Church feasts in the liturgical year makes us who attend the Church witnesses and direct participants in these events, on the one hand. On the other hand, it places us in the renewed life of the Kingdom in advance. This is because the events related to the oikonomy of our salvation, although begin here on earth, are fulfilled beyond in heavens. The Christ's work in the world, although begun through kenosis or decrease of His divine glory, was made perfect by His sitting in glory at the right hand of the Father. In this regard, we affirm the Great Feasts and the Church feasts - as theophanies of Lord's work in the world - although start here in space and time reality of the terrestrial existence, are accomplished in the Eschaton. Thus Annunciation, Nativity, Passion, Death and Resurrection as works of our salvation are fulfilled in the next age through the Ascension and the glorious sitting at the right hand of the Father. Therefore although every liturgical celebration of an event in the oikonomy of the world salvation captures its development in this world dimension that Christ assumes to its salvation, it is accomplished in the new Eon, the next age.

We can say that the existence of the Christian in the Church is an anticipated experience of the Kingdom of God through the Mystery of the Church, the

⁴⁰ V. Vlad, *Temeiuri ...*, p. 176-177.

⁴¹ Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *De S. Pentecoste*, P.G. t. 50, col. 454 D, quoted by Thomas Spidlik, *Spiritualitatea Răsăritului Creștin. IV. Rugăciunea*, p. 110.

⁴² Thomas Spidlik, *Spiritualitatea Răsăritului Creștin. IV. Rugăciunea*, p. 109-110.

icon and the image of God. From this perspective Saint Simeon the New Theologian shows that in the Church, “being a house of the Trinity even from here, the Christian will live in it as in the very Kingdom of Heaven.”⁴³ In this respect the Church life does not come from or identify its source in the world, but it takes its origin from communion or partaking of God. Thus, St. Justin Popovich shows that

“in reality salvation means life within the Holy Trinity. In other words, salvation is the struggle to become a part of the Church through grace, to be incorporated into the God-Man and a part of the divine-humanization process, and to enter into the communion of the Holy Trinity as a part of the Trinity. In the Church all is divine-human and triunical. Through the God-Man they are always led to the Trinitarian Divinity.”⁴⁴

V. The divine worship as an image of the cosmic doxology

Spent in the space-temporal dimension the seen reality is placed in an unshaken unity with the everlasting, heavenly reality through the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus the Holy Spirit puts us in relation to the immanent in a transcendental way.

By the virtue of this truth and through the epiphanic character of divine worship, we may say that in the Church service we are anticipatedly placed in the Kingdom of Heaven reality, that is, we become a part of the angel's action in Heaven to the glory of God. The whole cosmos participates to the doxology action of the King of the Age. Thus, “the liturgical action ... slowly destroys the veil of sin that still conceals the transfigured universe.”⁴⁵

Therefore, a specific feature of the Orthodox worship is its universalism or pan-cosmism in the sense that along with the man it sanctifies all creation and the entire frame. All creation participates in the divine worship, praising its Creator.

⁴³ Sfântul Simeon Noul Teolog, *100 de capete practice și teologice*, cap. 79, in vol. Simeon Noul Teolog, “Imne, Epistole și Capitole, Scrieri III”, traducere diac. Ioan I. Ică jr., Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 2001, p. 384.

⁴⁴ Arhimandritul Iustin Popovici, *Omul și Dumnezeu-Om...*, p. 205.

⁴⁵ Olivier Clement, *Biserica Ortodoxă*, traducere Alin Ionescu, Editura Universitas, p. 98.

Epiphany in the Orthodox Worship and Its Relevance to the Church...

The seen reality from a space-time dimension is set in an unshakable unity with the eternal and heavenly reality by the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, on the eve of feasts the Church blesses the bread, oil, wine and wheat. For the day of Pentecost the churches adorn themselves with plants and branches. At Transfiguration the fruits are blessed and at Theophany blessing the water sanctifies the very lifeblood of the universe. The surrounding nature with all its components is thus offered to God to be transfigured. We also remember the prayers of blessing the fields that Church ordained, the prayers against the plague that haunts over the animals and cattle or St. Tryphon's prayer for scaring the locusts that spoil gardens, etc. St. Cyril of Jerusalem shows that:

“Afterwards we think of heaven, earth, sea, sun and moon, stars and all creation, the speaking or speechless creatures, Powers, Principalities, Dominions, Thrones, Cherubims with many eyes and we repeat meditating the words of David - magnify the Lord with me!”⁴⁶

Most liturgical texts contain the idea of cosmic service or encompassing the entire mystery of God's descent to lift all creation, man and nature to perfection, through the action of the Trinity who is above understanding.⁴⁷

To exemplify this meeting between the militant and triumphant Church and the whole cosmos involvement in the work of doxologizing the Emperor of the ages, we present a passage from a Church service, the great prayer of water consecration from Epiphany, made by Patriarch Sophronius of Jerusalem:

“... today we have reached the time of the Feast, and the rank of saints gathers with us, and the angels celebrate with humans. Today the grace of the Holy Spirit hath descended on the waters in the likeness of a dove. Today has shone the Sun that setteth not, and the world is lighted by the light of the Lord. Today the moon shineth with the world in its radiating beams. Today the shining stars adorn the universe with the splendour of their radiance.

⁴⁶ Pr. Prof. D. Stăniloae, *Liturghia și unitatea religioasă a poporului român*, în “Biserica Ortodoxă Română”, an LXXIV (1956), nr. 10-11, p. 1084.

⁴⁷ Pr. Ioan Bărlănescu, *Sensul cosmic al Liturghiei Ortodoxe și cel al lăcașului de cult*, in “Altarul Banatului”, year III (1992), no. 4-6, p. 44. See also Pr. Prof. Dr. Viorel Sava, *Iubirea lui Dumnezeu față de creația Sa reflectată în cultul ortodox*, in “Teologie și Viață”, year VII (1997), no. 1-6, p. 43-50.

Today the clouds from heaven moisten mankind with showers of justice. ... Today the waters of the Jordan are changed into healing by the presence of the Lord. Today the whole universe is watered by mystical streams.... Today the celestials celebrate with the terrestrials, and the terrestrials commune with the celestials...”.

“The waters saw Thee, O God, the waters saw Thee; they were afraid. Jordan turned back when it beheld the fire of the Godhead coming down and descending upon it in the flesh. Jordan turned back at beholding the Holy Spirit descending in the likeness of a dove and hovering over Thee. Jordan turned back when it saw the Invisible visible, the Creator incarnate, and the Master in the likeness of a servant. Jordan turned back and the mountains shouted with joy at beholding God in the flesh. And the clouds gave voice, wondering at Him Who cometh, Who is Light of Light, true God of true God...”.

“For by Thy will Thou didst bring out all things out of nonexistence into existence; and by Thy might Thou dost control creation, and by Thy providence Thou dost govern the world. Thou it is Who didst organize creation from four elements, and crowned the cycle of the year with four seasons. Before Thee tremble noetic powers; Thee the sun praiseth, the moon worshippeth; the stars submit to Thee, the light obeyeth, the tempests tremble, the springs worship Thee. Thou didst spread out the heavens like a tent; Thou didst establish the earth upon the waters. Thou didst surround the sea with sand. Thou didst pour out the air for breathing. Thee do the angelic hosts serve; Thee the ranks of the archangels do worship, the many-eyed cherubim and the six winged seraphim, as they stand in Thy presence and fly about Thee, hiding in fear from Thine unapproachable glory...”⁴⁸

From the content of the text cited above it is easy to see the liturgical service of the earthly Church is founded upon doxology of the heavenly Church and we on earth serve together with the heavenly hosts. Our co-celebration with heavenly hosts is marvellously captured in the prayer of the Little Entrance from the Holy Liturgy:

⁴⁸ *Molitifelnic*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1992, p. 630-632.

Epiphany in the Orthodox Worship and Its Relevance to the Church...

“O Master, Lord our God, Who has appointed in heaven orders and hosts of angels and archangels for the service of Thy glory: Grant that with our entrance there may be an entrance of holy angels, serving with us and glorifying Thy goodness...”⁴⁹

The reality of our worship in the Church Militant together with the angelic hosts from the Church Triumphant is also based on the fact that within its worship the Liturgy service of the Church

“is not a human convention, but an expression of living together with God by pre-tasting the Kingdom. It is not us who formulate the ritual; during the service we live in an already formed reality, for all that was laid and ordained in the Church was laid down by the Providence through the grace of God.”⁵⁰

On the other hand, as we can see from the content of the water consecration prayer the liturgical service is not just for humans, but for the entire nature, since Christ's redemptive work expressed by the Church service throughout its development transfigures all creation along with the human being.

VI. Symbol and symbolism. The meaning of the symbol in Church service, as basis for fighting the humanist pietism

The epiphanic character of the Church service involves another issue too: the symbol and the worship symbology. The worship reveals a presence in the sense that during the Church service we do not only remember or commemorate a particular event occurred at a certain time, but we are even in the time and space of that event by the presence and work of the Holy Spirit. Thus the event is updated, making us direct participants to it.

For a long time the Orthodox liturgists emphasized more the commemorative and anamnestic character of the Church service, overshadowing its epiphanic character that we see as fundamental. On the other hand, in the past the service symbolism was always regarded as an allegory that just signified or re-memorized a certain time without actually discovered it. Here is how the Western theologian Thomas Spidlik summarizes this trend:

⁴⁹ *Liturghier*, Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, Prayer from The Little Entrance, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2012, p. 140.

⁵⁰ Thomas Spidlik, *Spiritualitatea Răsăritului Creștin. IV. Rugăciunea*, p. 103.

“The liturgists are periodically tempted to allegorize the rites, i.e. to submit them to an analysis that conceptualizes the dissociated elements: the candle is the figure of Christ; the wax is humanity; the smoking flax is Divinity; the flame is the Spirit”. And he concludes: “this is an often improper intellectualization which eliminates the fundamental meaning of the symbol and plucks the initial perception of the image from its popular soil.”⁵¹

Through its liturgical exegesis made perfect by Saint Maximus the Confessor, the Patristic theology largely uses the symbol when referring to the reality that is happening in the worship place during the Church services. It combines elements of worship and rich symbolic meanings that emphasize the liturgical realism present in our services.⁵² In this respect, Saint Dionysius the Areopagite shows that God gave the divine ones to His creation in two ways: to the beings above the world (the angels) in a non-material and spiritual (intelligible) way, and to humans through the holy *symbols*⁵³ embodied in the words of Scripture and the Church services.

⁵¹ Thomas Spidlik, *Spiritualitatea Răsăritului Creștin. IV. Rugăciunea*, p. 109-110.

⁵² In this regard, we offer some examples from the *Mystagogia* of St. Maximus the Confessor, who emphasizes the mystical-symbolic meaning of the worship place: “the holy Church of God is ... the icon and only of the sensitive world itself. Its heaven is the divine Hieration, and the beauty of the nave is its earth. Also, the world is a church, the Hieration being its center, and the ornament of the earth its nave” (Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Mistagogia – Cosmosul și sufletul, chipuri ale Bisericii*, p. 17). And on the mystical-symbolic significance of the hierarch and the people entrance for the celebration of the Holy Liturgy, St. Maximus shows the following: “the first entrance of the hierarch to the holy Church is the image and icon of the first coming into the world of the Son of God and our Savior Jesus Christ through the flesh ... And the entrance of the hierarch into the Hieration and by sitting on the priestly throne, it is the symbol for His Ascension and sitting again into Heavens and on the throne above the Heavens, after living in the world ... The entrance of the people in the holy Church at the same time with the hierarch, means turning the unbelievers from ignorance and wandering to knowing God and moving them from sin and ignorance to virtue and acquaintance ... entering the Church ... depicts ... the correction by repentance of each of us who believe, but ignore the commands of the Lord through unbridled living and impious life ... Any such man will be counted as truly entering with Christ, our God and our High Priest to virtue, who, figuratively, is a church” (Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Mistagogia – Cosmosul și sufletul, chipuri ale Bisericii*, p. 28-30). And the examples could go on.

⁵³ Sfântul Dionisie Areopagitul, *Despre Ierarhia Bisericească*, I, 4, trad. Pr. prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, in vol. Sfântul Dionisie Areopagitul, “Opere complete și Scoliile Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul”, Editura Paideia, București, 1996, p. 72.

Epiphany in the Orthodox Worship and Its Relevance to the Church...

In contemporary theology we say that “*all the elements of the Church services are symbolic*”⁵⁴, and that “*in the liturgical celebration (which) is a symbolic whole, whose elements are all ... in interdependence*”⁵⁵, in the sense of understanding the symbol as a part of the reality it symbolizes. Moreover, we really have to mention from the beginning that the original meaning of the word *symbol* is different from “*prefigured*”. The Russian theologian Alexander Schmemmann writes that “*the function of the symbol is not to imagine (which implies the absence of the «prefigured»), but to discover and participate with the discovered.*”⁵⁶ From this perspective, the Church services deify us, that is by “*sharing the things above the world*”.⁵⁷ From this perspective Saint Dionysius the Areopagite shows that “*they put the heavenly ones in sensible image, the divine in human forms, and the non-material ones in material forms.*”⁵⁸

The symbol “*does not resemble the reality it symbolizes, but it partakes this reality. The symbol is the discovery and the presence of another in certain circumstances, a real another which can be found only in symbols.*”⁵⁹

Symbol “*is the incarnation of a reality into another*”.⁶⁰ Moreover, the very etymology of the word symbol - (from Greek *σимвαλλω* meaning “*together*”, “*hold together*”, “*put in*”, “*meet*”⁶¹) senses it enough. The symbol holds together the seen and unseen - “*not logically (when “this” means “this”), not by similarity (“this” prefigures “this”) or through cause and effect (“this” is the cause of “this”)*”⁶²).

The symbol detects a presence in an epiphanic way and that means “*a reality reveals another reality, but ... only insofar the symbol participates at the spiritual reality and is able to incarnate it.*”⁶³. So we understand the

⁵⁴ Constantin Andronikof, *Le sens de la Liturgie – la relation entre Dieu et l'homme*, Les Éditions du Cerf 29, Paris, 1988, p. 54.

⁵⁵ Claude Duchesneau, Michel Vethey, *Musique et liturgie (le document „Universa laus”)*, Paris, 1988, p. 25.

⁵⁶ Alexandre Schmemmann, *Euharistia – Taina Împărăției*, traducere Pr. Boris Răduleanu, Editura Anastasia, f.a., f.l., p. 44.

⁵⁷ V. Vlad, *Temeiuri...*, p. 174.

⁵⁸ Sfântul Dionisie Areopagitul, *Despre Ierarhia Bisericească*, I, 5, p. 73.

⁵⁹ Alexandre Schmemmann, *Euharistia – Taina Împărăției*, p. 45.

⁶⁰ Alexandre Schmemmann, *Euharistia – Taina Împărăției*, p. 45.

⁶¹ Conform *Dicționarului grec-român al Noului Testament*, p. 271.

⁶² Alexandre Schmemmann, *Euharistia – Taina Împărăției*, p. 45.

⁶³ Alexandre Schmemmann, *Euharistia – Taina Împărăției*, p. 45.

symbol “*in its essence unites immeasurable realities of which one remains relative to another - absolutely different.*”⁶⁴

Therefore the liturgical symbol reveals Divinity to the humankind in an epiphanic way, uniting the heavenly and earthly realities. It is the “point of contact” between the “seen and unseen”⁶⁵, occasioning knowledge of the divine “as much as possible”, especially by interceding its partaking, according to the image ontologically ordained by God Himself.⁶⁶

Church services are symbolic in the sense that they are “the works of God in the world”⁶⁷, as in the expression of St. Irenaeus of Lyon.

In the same sense Saint Nicholas Cabasilas shows that the Church services are:

*“divine works where Christ dwells ... the dwelling of Christ within Christians ... the unification of man with Christ more profoundly than the union of man with himself, the perfect union with Christ, that we become partakers and together living with Him, making us His members and forming one body with Him.”*⁶⁸

And St. Ambrose of Milan also shows that in the services “... *there is the presence of the Godhead. Do you believe in its work and do not believe in its presence? Where would the work come from, if it were not the presence in advance?*”⁶⁹

So, in the light of the Orthodox tradition,

“the liturgical act unites the seen world with the divine one, bringing God to people and moving people by grace to God. The Orthodox worship is the Creator’s penetration and stability in the heart of the creature. Far from being an artificial and abstract ritual, a religious magic formula or just a frame of manifestation of individual piety, Church worship is a true

⁶⁴ Alexandre Schmemmann, *Euharistia-Taina Împărăției*, p. 45.

⁶⁵ Pr. Prof. Dr. Ion Bria, *Credința pe care o mărturisim*, București, 1987, p. 205.

⁶⁶ Pr. Dr. Vasile Grăjdian, *Teologia cântării liturgice în Biserica Ortodoxă. Aspect de identitate a cântării liturgice ortodoxe*, Editura Universității „Lucian Blaga”, Sibiu, 2000, p. 36.

⁶⁷ Sfântul Irineu al Lyonului, *Adversus haereses* II, 30, 7, quoted by Paul Evdochimov, “Ortodoxia”, p. 243.

⁶⁸ Nicolae Cabasila, *Despre viața în Hristos*, p. 24-29.

⁶⁹ Sfântul Ambrozio al Milanului, *Despre Sfintele Taine* III, 8, trad. pr. prof. Ene Braniște, in col. “Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești”, vol. 53, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1994, p. 11.

Epiphany in the Orthodox Worship and Its Relevance to the Church...

manifestation and work of God in the world and with the world, so that the liturgical act is a real encounter and unity between God and man, between the One who is untangible and the one who is created."⁷⁰

Through the liturgical order of the Church, God Himself walks as a subject in front of man, penetrating and filling his entire existence with His presence and work.⁷¹

In this regard, we should understand the trend of the past liturgists to consider the symbol a sign or an allegory is unacceptable and unsubstantiated. Thus, theologian Paul Evdochimov said:

*"neither the sign nor the allegory are at all «epiphanic». On the contrary, in the spirit of the Holy Fathers and according to the liturgical tradition, a symbol contains in it the presence of what it symbolizes. It performs a function of revealing «sense» and, at the same time, constitutes an expressive receptacle of «the presence»."*⁷²

So, it should be noted that not all reality is revealed and embodied in the symbol. The symbol is always "part"⁷³ of reality which detects it because our knowledge here in the terrestrial sphere cannot be complete "for we know in part, and we prophesy in part" (I Cor. 13, 9). The symbol unites immeasurable realities, and therefore its function is precisely to grasp a presence and to intensify our longing for this reality. Therefore after partaking Christ at the Divine Liturgy the priest says: "grant that we may more perfectly partake of Thee in the never-ending day of Thy Kingdom."⁷⁴

Thus the symbol *reveals*, but it does not destroy, cover or *exhaust* the Divinity mystery, in the sense that "God has become ... known, as far as we can understand Him".⁷⁵

⁷⁰ E. H. Schillebeeckx, *Le Christ, sacrament de reconte de Dieu*, in "Foi vivante", Paris, 1960, p. 100-101, quoted by V. Vlad, *Temeiuri ...*, p. 175.

⁷¹ Pr. prof. Ilie Moldovan, *Spiritualitate și responsabilitate în viața creștină*, in "Studii Teologice", an 1985, nr. 1-2, p. 135.

⁷² Paul Evdochimov, *Arta icoanei – o teologie a frumuseții*, Editura Meridiane, București, 1992, p. 143.

⁷³ Paul Evdochimov, *Arta icoanei ...*, p. 143.

⁷⁴ *Liturghier*, ed. cit., p. 193.

⁷⁵ Sfântul Ioan Damaschin, *Dogmatica*, traducere Pr. Dumitru Fecioru, Editura Scripta, București, 1993, p. 155.

As for the function of the symbol, it is

“not to sanctify a part or another of «this world» - of its space, matter or time - but to see in the symbol and to acknowledge the expectation and thirst for perfect spiritualization when God «will be everything in all» (I Cor. 15, 28)”⁷⁶.

So, not only worship sanctifies the cycles of this world, but senses a presence and reveals it, though not in full, but in the sense of a pre-tasting.

The symbol thus viewed goes beyond the sphere “of symbolism as non-reality - because reality is known ... as the fulfillment of the symbol, and the symbol - as the fulfillment of reality. Divine Christian ministry is symbolic not because it embraces various «symbolic» prefigurations”. The divine Christian service is symbolic and mysterious because the essence of the Church and its purpose in this “world” reveals the fulfillment of this symbol, its realization as “the most real reality”.⁷⁷

As for the symbolism of religious services, the divine worship does not prefigure symbolically, but gives a pre-tasting. If we consider it only prefigured, then we refer only to the anamnetic and commemorating character of the service. But the commemorative character should always be placed in relation with the epiphanic character of the worship. Separated from it, worship would become a surrogate, meant to sweetly feed our feelings, which would be reduced to a false pietism.

Pietism is a consequence of misunderstanding the epiphanic character of the divine worship and, God’s mystery with man, that is the service becomes an event. Thus it becomes a counterfeit of the true experience and godliness, slipping out of the sphere of communion, which must define ministry in the Church, to individualism and personalism. Therefore, as a personal experience, which is not founded on the Church event that encompasses the person in the dimension of the liturgical synaxis, who is really in the presence of God through the worship service, thus pietism becomes

“a sentimental experience of faith that refuses and despises the theological-dogmatic truth ... He confines himself to practicing

⁷⁶ Alexandre Schmemmann, *Euharistia – Taina Împărăției*, p. 45-46.

⁷⁷ Alexandre Schmemmann, *Euharistia – Taina Împărăției*, p. 45-46. See also the work of Jean Borella, *Criza simbolismului religios*, traducere de Diana Morărașu, Institutul European, 1995; especially the chapters *Realismul simbolic* and *De la principiul semantic la simbolismul sacru*, p. 93-97, 301-305.

Epiphany in the Orthodox Worship and Its Relevance to the Church...

devotion in total indifference to dogmatic truth and to the ecclesial community. Salvation reduces its sphere to individual ethical quests, to the most devoted fulfillment of ethical obligations, and to the individual imitation of Christ's life".⁷⁸

Thus counterfeiting the understanding of participation in the ecclesial act and of the liturgical ministry, distorts the purpose and meaning of devotion, understood in an authentic way. From pietism,

"the goal of individual piety is finalized in achieving an improved behavior and character for the individual, and for the community in improving the social morals... nothing about the transfiguration of the human existence where corruption is changed into incorruptibility and death into life and resurrection. Piety has no ontological content anymore" and "Church's presence in the world is reduced to a utilitarian perspective of institutional type".⁷⁹

From the same perspective of pietism, the whole Church worship and liturgical services

"are stripped of the mysterious and theophanic character and are accommodated to the absolute needs of that Church members. Therefore from the liturgical historical and traditional thesaurus of the Church, only certain formulas are retained, and their content is permanently redefined according to the individual requirements".⁸⁰

Contrary to this narrow personalistic and individualistic vision, the epiphany character of divine worship highlights the liturgical realism of the Church's services, where every moment in worship becomes an event, and

"the liturgical event is more than the commemorative liturgical element. In the liturgical celebration, the past facts become events in the sense that the Church re-enters the commemorated event... We enter in the event Christ creates with us. It is a Paschal meeting He gives us. In the Church celebration the Paschal fact creates a "today" because the

⁷⁸ Pr. Dr. Vasile Vlad, *Asumarea (post) modernității. Perspectivă teologică asupra istoriei*, Editura Universității „Aurel Vlaicu”, Arad, 2010, p. 84-85.

⁷⁹ V. Vlad, *Asumarea...*, p. 85.

⁸⁰ V. Vlad, *Asumarea...*, p. 85.

commemorated historical element becomes a present event for me, a force in my life and the joy of my life. We receive the certainty of the divine presence not by the simple reminder of what happened or occurred sometime, but by the celebration of the event”⁸¹

The liturgical structure of the Church combines the mystery (supra-rational) with the symbol (infra-rational). And the essence of the symbol is to be “overcome” because it is actually a “starting point to reach the peaks of union with God”⁸².

VII. Liturgical Anthropology. Our place in the presence of God

Our location in the presence of God is realized both at the cosmic level - God being present everywhere - and at the ecclesial one, where the cosmos itself is continually recaptured and transfigured. Jesus Christ is present throughout the universe as a reality created and redeemed by Him and in Him, but He is also present in the ecclesial space in a maximum closeness, as the Body of Christ extended in creation and history in order to transfigure them. That is why the liturgical anthropology is meant to make man aware of his cosmic-soteriological responsibility, which is achieved completely in the ecclesial space. All the liturgical reality of the Church urges man to realize that he is in the presence of God both in ecclesial and cosmic space. Man is a liturgical being precisely because he realizes that he is a theological being, thus concentrating his entire life - ecclesial and social-cosmic - in a theocentric way. A theocentric and ecclesiocentric life is the life of a man who is in maximum union with His Creator in the Mysteries of the Church. Man experiences his location in the presence of God both in the Church and in the cosmos, both in terms of exteriority and in the interior of his person seen in unity.

The believer’s location in the celebration places him in the presence of the One who is glorified, that is, in the presence of God, so that during the service

“the transcendent descends and reveals itself somewhat in the world, making the mortals feel its presence, and presume the ineffable fluttering of wings of the great unseen spirit... The

⁸¹ Pr. Prof. Dr. Vasile Vlad, *Curs de Teologie Morală – litografiat, an IV, sem I*, p. 13-14.

⁸² Thomas Spidlik, *Spiritualitatea Răsăritului Creștin. IV. Rugăciunea*, p. 99.

Epiphany in the Orthodox Worship and Its Relevance to the Church...

historical world is given the privilege of being elevated through a spiritual translation, to the kingdom of the ecstatic light of the transcendent”⁸³.

Therefore, the believer actually is in the presence of God at the service. And the dogma of God’s knowledge can only spring from the experience of the Church, manifested in worship. This highlights again the unity between dogma and liturgy and between the Dogmatic and the Liturgic Theology.

In a mystical way

*“this dwelling or presence within the believer is nothing but the glory (Doxa) shared by the Father and the Son - and this Glory is clearly linked to the Spirit that the Risen Christ breathes upon His disciples.”*⁸⁴

This Spirit is partaken in the Church through the worship service to the end of the ages. The Christian who partakes this grace of service “becomes himself «the place of glory» at least as possibility, - and in this sense - every Christian is called to be a «theophany»”⁸⁵. This is the way to understand St. Paul’s saying: “Do you not know that your bodies are a sanctuary of God, and that God’s Spirit lives in you” (I Cor. 3, 16). From this perspective, we come to say that: “Christ is the Temple; the church is the temple; the believer is the Temple.”⁸⁶

The mystery that is going on in the worship also concerns us, for it “must be fulfilled in us, we must enter into that history (the worship describes to us –our note). What was done by Christ is not past but present in the Risen One ... And we are called to participate to this everlasting but not timeless mystery”⁸⁷.

VIII. Faith and its confession viewed from the perspective of the epiphanic character of divine worship

Divine worship is nothing but a doxological confession of the entire dogmatic system, for “every liturgical formula is essentially a «confession of faith»...

⁸³ Ierom. Alexander Golitzin, *Mistagogia - experiența lui Dumnezeu în Ortodoxie*, trad. diac. Ioan I. Ică jr., Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 1998, p. 43.

⁸⁴ Ierom. Alexander Golitzin, *Mistagogia ...*, p. 44.

⁸⁵ Ierom. Alexander Golitzin, *Mistagogia ...*, p. 44.

⁸⁶ Vasile Băncilă, *Duhul sârbătorii*, Editura Anastasia, 1996, p. 57.

⁸⁷ Andrew Louth, *Deslușirea Tainei - Despre natura teologiei*, trad. Mihai Neamțu, Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 1999, p.105.

By its very nature, the liturgical act communicates what it preaches.”⁸⁸ The epiphanic character of the worship reveals the dimension of faith confession in the form of “the word of power”. This power springs from the service as a gift of the Holy Spirit. Thus through its doxological confession in the worship of the Church, faith exceeds the sphere of verbalization, becoming an experience. From this perspective, the Holy Fathers of the Church emphasize the necessity of a living relationship between dogma as a truth of faith and Christian life as the incarnation of the truth confessed.

In this sense we recall some texts of the Holy John Chrysostom’s *Homilies*, in which the Holy Father affirms the complementarity and unity between the confessed faith and life, between faith and works:

*“...and with right teachings give great attention to caring for your life (...) Your life may conform with your teachings, and your teachings reveal your life. After all, “faith without works is dead” and works without faith are dead. For even if we have sound teachings but fail in living, the teachings benefit us nothing; likewise, if we take pains with life but are careless about teachings, that will not be any good to us either. So it is necessary to shore up this spiritual edifice of ours in both directions. (...) This is the one called wise, the one giving evidence of deeds in the wake of words, whereas the one who stopped short at words was called a fool.”*⁸⁹

And elsewhere, the same Holy Father writes:

“After all, nothing is such an attraction to the way of truth as probity of life – in other words, people pay less attention to what we say than to what we do. As proof that this is the case – I mean even if we debate the issue thousands of times and argue about forgiveness but do nothing to demonstrate it in practice, the good our words do will not match the harm done by our behaviour; whereas if we give demonstration of it in practice, before out talking, we will be shown to be trustworthy in preaching what we practice, since Christ also has declared such people blessed

⁸⁸ Pr. Prof. John Breck, *Puterea cuvântului în Biserica dreptmăritoare*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1999, p. 143.

⁸⁹ Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omilia la Facere II,5*, in “Scrieri”, part I, in col. “Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești”, vol. 21, trad. Pr. Dumitru Fecioru, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1987, p. 44-45.

Epiphany in the Orthodox Worship and Its Relevance to the Church...

in the words “Blessed is the one who does and teaches – as proof, then, consider how he put doing before teaching. Let us therefore, in all cases give attention to teaching in action first, and later in words, lest we too here from St. Paul: „You teach others, but don’t you teach yourself?”⁹⁰

Or in another text, the Divine Father teaches:

“Let it be our concern to lay its sound teachings in our soul and be scrupulously careful about them and about our life, so that our life may witness to the teachings and the teachings may declare the integrity of our life. After all, it will be of no avail for us to get teachings right if we neglect our life; nor will we be able to gain any value for our salvation if we have life but neglect right teachings .(...) So too with the Christian: correct doctrine is of no benefit unless one attends to the business of living. Accordingly Christ declared such people blessed: „Blessed is the one who does and teaches”. I mean, far more dependable and trustworthy than the teaching in words is teaching in action. In fact, even without uttering a word, or else without being seen such persons (...)raise thanks and praise to the God of all on a thousand tongues and in many mouths; for it is not only those who knows them, the witnesses of their life, that will admire them and their Lord , but strangers who hear about it from others, people living far away and distant foreigners, not only friends but foes as well, who will respect the eminence of their virtue.”⁹¹

Similarly, St. Cyril of Alexandria shows the following: *“The dogmatic correctness and the right understanding of someone’s divine words does not help us to reckon him perfectly in virtue unless he adds to it the brilliance in deeds.”⁹²*

In the Church, the confession of faith is called the “Symbol of Faith”, and according to the Patristic teaching it means that confession, by virtue of its symbolic character,

⁹⁰ Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omiliile la Facere* VIII, 5, in „Scrieri”, part I, p. 104.

⁹¹ Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omiliile la Facere* XIII, 4, in „Scrieri”, part I, p. 154.

⁹² Sfântul Chiril al Alexandriei, *Închinarea și slujirea în Duh și Adevăr*, in “Scrieri”, part 1, col. “Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești”, vol. 38, trad. Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1991, p. 492.

“«re-presents» or updates the divine-human events that it relates in the experience of the confessional assembly...; in the assembly the confession updates the reality that it preaches...,it makes from the past salvific event a present reality in the life of the Church.”⁹³

The confession of faith during the service as a “liturgical narrative of the holy history is itself a saving affair - ... - for - the word is also preached and fulfilled”. Likewise,

“The kingdom becomes present in a proleptic way: not only ‘through anticipation’ but also as a transcendent reality that permanently penetrates the historical order to accomplish the ultimate transfiguration of man and the universe.”⁹⁴

The faith preached in Liturgy is no longer just hearing, or obedience, but sharing (or rather, partaking), participation in its very accomplishment, for “it is the Spirit that pours over the liturgical confessions ... the symbolic quality that makes the Word a present reality for those who receive Him with faith”⁹⁵. Therefore,

“it is one thing to know that by crying «My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!» the crucified Christ manifests His «kenosis» and humility. It is quite another thing to celebrate this event every year ... when without «rationalizing» it we know with all our conviction that these words, once offered, remain eternally real so that no victory, no glory, no «synthesis» can ever erase them. It is one thing to explain that Lazarus’s resurrection was «to the entrustment of common resurrection» (the troparion of the day), and it is quite another thing to celebrate this encounter of close vicinity between life and death.”⁹⁶

By virtue of these realities, all the liturgical readings of the Holy Gospel, which always begin with the saying: “At that time...”; “The Lord said...”, are not just memories of the moments of the salvation oikonomy and of Christ’s work in the world, but they present these events today, fitting us into the space and time of their doing by the Lord. During the liturgical year, all the Great Feasts and celebrations ecclesially celebrated in the Church service,

⁹³ Pr. John Breck, *Puterea cuvântului ...*, p. 128.

⁹⁴ Pr. John Breck, *Puterea cuvântului ...*, p. 135.

⁹⁵ Pr. John Breck, *Puterea cuvântului ...*, p. 136.

⁹⁶ Alexandre Schmemmann, *Postul cel Mare*, p. 107.

Epiphanism in the Orthodox Worship and Its Relevance to the Church...

make us partakers of these celebrated events, becoming manifested in the Church by the work of the Holy Spirit, that is a perpetual *today*. In this sense, all the verbs used in the liturgical hymnography of the Church are in the present time: “Today the Virgin giveth birth to Him Who is transcendent in essence...”; „*Today is the prelude of God’s goodwill and the prophecy of the salvation of men...*”; “Yesterday, O Christ, I was buried with Thee, and today I arise with thy arising...”, etc. All this shows that the events of the salvation iconony happen in the Church at the present time, believers being eyewitnesses to their doing.

IX. Conclusions

The above presented could give us an overview of what the epiphanic character of the divine worship is, and what are the implications and meanings this issue opens for the theology and life of the Church. Concluding, we will make some brief considerations:

1. Addressing theology issues should necessarily be done by integrating them into the epiphanic dimension of the worship. This would bring about the integration of the confession of faith into the ecclesial experience. Not only dogma does not remain at the level of the intellect, but it would be incarnated, thus becoming a work. That is why Dogmatic Theology and Liturgical Theology should be put together, so that what we think we should live and what we live we should think.

2. The epiphanic character of the worship reveals the history of salvation in the Church, in the form of the Great Feasts and up-to-date feasts, and in the form of a permanent “today”, anticipating and giving us pre-tasting of the Kingdom. During the service, the oikonomy of salvation is revealed to us as a continuous present.

3. The Church service is together doxologizing with the angelic hosts, the two realities meeting in the Church. In this sense, worship endeavors the whole cosmos to glorify God.

4. Worship is a symbol of the Eternal Reality it discovers and is a symbol in the sense of participation and union with the transcendental.

The commemorative character of the worship can never be viewed in isolation, but only in relation to its epiphanic character. In this respect to look at the divine worship and the whole cycle of the liturgical year only in

the dimension of commemoration, as anamnesis, means to fall within the sphere of formalism and formalist pietism. The epiphanic dimension of the Church worship reveals the liturgical realism as a fundamental foundation for combating individualist pietism.

6. Through epiphany it passes the divine worship reveals a presence. During the service we are in the presence of God in the most real way. That is why the knowledge of God cannot be separated from the liturgical experience. It must spring from the encounter with eternity in the ecclesial body. In this sense, theology must necessarily be expressed liturgically, that is, integrated into the dimension of experience.

The faith that is not ecclesially confessed is just resumption, and hearing, devoid of the “word of power” dimension. In order to be incarnate, that is, perpetuated, it must be confessed liturgically, in a doxological way. Only the presence of the liturgical event that the service brings can relate us to the eternal Logos. And only here we can take the “word with power”, the word of faith, full of the power of the Holy Spirit, present and shared to the faithful through the services of the Church.