

# Divine Worship between Theology, Piety and Digital Reality: Some Thoughts and Concerns

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## Introduction

Nowadays, the close relationship between divine worship, theology and piety<sup>1</sup> is being tested by the digital reality. It would be no exaggeration to say that the latter, along with the AI's rapid spread, is the modern "Wild West" where uncontrolled misinformation is perhaps the greatest danger for our theological tradition and its accurate reception and understanding. At the same time, the experience of COVID lockdown and its resulting consequences regarding matters of worship, such as the celebration of services without a congregation and their digital broadcasting, obliges us to reflect on what it really means to participate in divine worship.

The Church is consequently facing a huge pastoral challenge. How do we shield the faithful from the internet's self-appointed "elders", "wise men" and "experts", who with disproportionate influence have overwhelmed the intangible digital reality? How do we understand the faithful's physical presence and participation in the Divine Worship when the possibility, or rather the reality, of digital transmission and remote monitoring now exists? Does remote viewing constitute participation?

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1. I would like to note the way in which I perceive and use the terms: *worship*, *theology*, and *piety*. Divine *worship* is understood as the main devotional experience of salvation in Christ. The texts of divine worship, and in particular the texts of the Anaphora of Basil the Great and St. John Chrysostom, are the most official theological texts of the Church, which primarily (should) form the believer's theological consciousness (*theology*), morality and Christian life (*piety*).

These questions are linked to the corresponding question posed by the conference's rationale: "The Orthodox Theology on its way to the Late Modernity's 'immaterial' reality", i.e. "to what extent is our theological tradition being altered by the mediation of technology"<sup>2</sup>.

As an initial response to these challenges, this short article will focus on the divine worship and propose the reintroduction of the worship discourse (the texts of divine worship) as a starting point for the (re)catechesis of clergy and people, so that its experience and understanding could eventually be made as independent as possible from external factors and influences of the digital reality; it will also emphasize the necessity of the communal physical presence in worship, especially in the Eucharist. The liturgical life through digital means cannot necessarily be accepted as an equal alternative to the Eucharistic physical assembly. Within the time frame available to me, I intend (1) to emphasize the priority of liturgical texts as the preeminent official theological expression of the Church; (2) to note their catechetical dimension; (3) to propose the approach of divine worship as a missionary event; (4) to emphasize the materiality and corporeality of worship as factors that impose physical presence in worship; (5) to use Basil the Great's Holy Anaphora as a working hypothesis, and, finally, to end with some concluding thoughts.

## 1. The Liturgical Texts as the Church's Main Official Theological Expression

The structure and content of the "discourse" in worship is not accidental. The texts of worship are mainly carefully crafted texts<sup>3</sup>; thus, this particular discourse, whether in prose or in meter, and irrespective of its form –praise, appeal, invocation, request, etc.–, is always theological: it expresses the biblical revelation and the evangelical preaching of salvation in Christ, rooted in the experience and life of the Church from

2. See <https://www.ecclesia.gr/theologia100/skeptiko.pdf> [9.10.2023], p. 3.

3. For example, see D. J. Sheerin, "The Anaphora of the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom: Stylistic Notes", in: D. Jasper – R. C. D. Jasper (eds.), *Language and the Worship of the Church*, The Macmillan Press, London 1990, pp. 44-81.

the apostolic times to the present day, articulated through the experience of the ecumenical councils and the patristic tradition. The “discourse” of the worship is by definition theological; the ways we express ourselves in the worship of the Triune God always indicates what we believe about Him, how we believe it and why we believe it. “The worship constitutes the Church’s manifestation of the faith and experience”<sup>4</sup>. In other words, the relationship between *lex orandi* and *lex credendi* is indissoluble and interconnected in the Orthodox liturgical tradition<sup>5</sup>.

The theological significance of the liturgical texts is also emphasized by their biblical character<sup>6</sup>. Worship is not only the natural space, time and place of the biblical preaching and biblical texts’ presentation; the texts of worship are themselves biblical. A careful reading of Basil the Great’s and John Chrysostom’s *Anaphora*<sup>7</sup> suffices for us to realize that these texts are essentially a summary of the Divine Economy, which lies at the heart of the Scriptures. The same applies to the texts of the Holy sacraments<sup>8</sup> – their biblical scope and their soteriological significance is always emphasized through the careful inclusion in their eucharistic discourse of many allusions –direct or indirect– to the biblical text.

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4. Fr. G. D. Metallinos, *Η Θεολογική Μαρτυρία τῆς Εκκλησιαστικῆς Λατρείας*, Harmos Publications, Athens 1996, p. 37.

5. Regarding the relationship between worship and theology see, among others: Al. Schmemann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, transl. A. E. Moorhouse, St. Vladimir’s Theological Seminary, Crestwood, NY 1986; Th. Fisch (ed.), *Liturgy and Tradition: Theological Reflections of Alexander Schmemann*, St. Vladimir’s Theological Seminary, Crestwood, NY 1990; G. Metallinos, *Η Θεολογική Μαρτυρία τῆς Εκκλησιαστικῆς Λατρείας*, op.cit; D. Fagerberg, *Theologia Prima: What is Liturgical Theology*, Hillenbrand Books, Chicago 2004; M. Aune, “Liturgy and Theology: Rethinking the Relationship”, *Worship* 81, 1 (2007), pp. 46-68; 81, 2 (2007), pp. 141-169; K. Irwin, *Context and Text: A Method for Liturgical Theology*, Revised Edition, Liturgical Press Academic, Collegeville, MN 2018. In this literature, which is simply indicative, is undeniable that Fr. Alexander Schmemann has greatly influenced the contemporary writing on liturgical theology.

6. P. Vasileiadis, «Ο βιβλικὸς χαρακτήρας τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης Λατρείας», in: *Τερουργεῖν τὸ Εὐαγγέλιον: Η Ἁγία Γραφὴ στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Λατρεία, Πρακτικά Ε΄ Πανελλήνιου Λειτουργικοῦ Συμποσίου Στελεχῶν Τερῶν Μητροπόλεων*, Poimantiki Vivliothiki 10, Klados Ekdoseon Morfotikis kai Epikoinoniakis Ypiresias tis Ekklesiastis tis Hellados Publications, Athens 2004, pp. 35-66.

7. See P. Trempelas, *Αἱ Τρεῖς Λειτουργίαι κατὰ τοὺς ἐν Ἀθήναις κώδικας*, Sotir Publications, Athens 1982.

8. See P. Trempelas, *Τὸ Μικρὸν Εὐχολόγιον* v. I, Athens 1950 and v. II, Athens 1955.

The theological importance of the liturgical texts is also emphasized by their exegetical character. The essential constitution of the Holy Scripture canon within the worship of the Church<sup>9</sup>, the Holy Scripture arrangement according to the liturgical year<sup>10</sup> and the liturgical context of their exposition<sup>11</sup> provides a specific exegetical perspective which cannot be ignored. Furthermore, hymnology and hagiography are aspects of this particular liturgical exegetical perspective, aiming in its entirety not only at worship but also at the believers' catechism, since the latter partake through the worship of both the Scriptures and their correct interpretation<sup>12</sup>. Indeed, Fr. Eugene Pentiuk, in his book on the liturgical exegesis of the

9. H. Y. Gamble, *The New Testament Canon: Its Making and Meaning*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, OR 1985.

10. See the arrangement of the extracts from the Old and New Testament (Gospels, Apostle, Prophets).

11. See the importance and prominent position of the Apostle and the Gospel readings in the Divine Service and the Old Testament extracts in the Vespers of major feasts.

12. We find the same approach in Jerusalem during the fourth century. Aetheria in her *Itinerary*, describing the services of Good Friday, characteristically says in chapter 37: “A seat is placed for the bishop before the Cross, and from the sixth to the ninth hour [i.e. from 12 p.m. to 3 p.m.] nothing else is done except the reading of passages from the Bible. First the *Psalms* that refer to the Passion are read. Then, passages from the apostles, either from the letters or the *Acts*, are read, referring to the Passion of the Lord. Next, the passages that refer to the Passion from the Gospels are read. Afterwards, texts from the prophets are read, where they said that the Lord would suffer – and then texts from the Gospels are read, where [Christ] foretells the Passion. So, from the sixth to the ninth hour, passages from the Bible are constantly read and hymns are sung, to show the people that what the prophets had said would happen regarding the Lord’s Passion can be shown to have come true, both through the Gospels and through the writings of the apostles. Thus, during these three hours, all the people were taught that nothing had happened that had not been first prophesied, and that nothing had prophesied that had not been fully fulfilled. Prayers are continually interposed, and the prayers themselves are suitable for the day”. The liturgical assembly, the prayers and hymns included, is configured both structurally and conceptually around the biblical readings related to the feast of the day, in this particular case the Passion of the Lord, with the aim not only to describe the Passion but also to emphasize the unity of the Scriptures in the proclamation of Christ as Savior and Redeemer. It is no accident that the Aetheria states that: “all the people were taught that nothing of what happened it had not been first prophesied, and that nothing of what prophesied it had not been fully fulfilled”. For the aforementioned passages, see the critical edition of the text: P. Maraval (ed.), *Égérie. Journal de Voyage (Itinéraire)*, Sources Chrétiennes 296, Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris 1982, pp. 284-290.

Old Testament based on the Orthodox hymnography, compares the role of hymnology in the Byzantine era to that of contemporary social media in terms of the speed and efficiency of the information's dissemination<sup>13</sup>.

Are we nowadays taking this dimension of the liturgical life seriously? Do we comprehend and treat worship as the Church's theological discourse par excellence, or as a mere process, the purpose of which is simply to utter the "letters"? Do we use worship as a place and time for the believer's catechesis and theological cultivation, or do we limit ourselves to sloganizing and granting the privilege of catechesis to every self-appointed internet "elder", "teacher" and "pastor"?

## 2. The Liturgical Texts as Text of Catechesis

If the liturgical texts are the Church's prominent official theological expression, then they are (should be) treated as the most important catechetical texts. The delivery of the liturgical discourse, whether in prose or in a poetic form, is the worship of the Trinitarian God, but also our intellectual understanding and participation in Holy Spirit of what is said, done and performed. As an example, I would like to refer to the Gospel blessing recited by the minister before the Gospel is read. The blessing is as follows:

Shine forth within our hearts the incorruptible light of Thy knowledge, O Master,  
Lover of mankind, and open the eyes of our mind to the understanding of the

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13. "And if one thinks of Byzantine society being Christian in its vast majority, one might dare liken the liturgical services of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages to the current online social media, such as Facebook or Twitter, in breaking the news faster than and prior to the nationwide traditional television channels". E. Pentiuc, *Hearing the Scriptures: Liturgical Exegesis of the Old Testament in Byzantine Orthodox Hymnography*, Oxford University Press, Oxford – New York 2021, σ 286. See also Damaskinos (Olkinuora) of Xenophontos, "Setting Forth as Images: Byzantine Canon Poetry as Spiritual Ekphrasis", in: Talvikki Ahonen, P. Metso, J. Riikonen (eds.), *Pappi, opettaja, parantaja: Isä Jarmo Hakkaraisen juhlakirja*, Karjalan teologisen seuran julkaisuja 4, Karjalan teologinen seura, Joensuu 2020, pp. 105-118 and J. H. Olkinuora, *Byzantine Hymnography for the Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos: An Intermedial Approach*, Studia Patristica Fennica 4, Julkaisija, Helsinki 2015, pp. 265-280.

preaching of Thy Gospel; instill in us also the fear of Thy blessed commandments, that, trampling down all lusts of the flesh, we may pursue a spiritual way of life, being mindful of and doing all that is well-pleasing unto Thee. For Thou art the enlightenment of our souls and bodies, O Christ God, and unto Thee do we send up glory, together with Thine unoriginate Father, and Thy most holy and good and life creating Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Ἐλλαμφον ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν, φιλάνθρωπε Δέσποτα, τὸ τῆς σῆς θεογνωσίας ἀκήρατον φῶς καὶ τοὺς τῆς διανοίας ἡμῶν διάνοιξον ὀφθαλμοὺς εἰς τὴν τῶν εὐαγγελικῶν σου κηρυγμάτων κατανόησιν. Ἐνθες ἡμῖν καὶ τὸν τῶν μαχαρίων σου ἐντολῶν φόβον, ἵνα, τὰς σαρκικὰς ἐπιθυμίας πάσας καταπατήσαντες, πνευματικὴν πολιτείαν μετέλθωμεν, πάντα τὰ πρὸς εὐαρέστησιν τὴν σὴν καὶ φρονοῦντες καὶ πράττοντες. Σὺ γάρ εἰ ὁ φωτισμὸς τῶν ψυχῶν καὶ τῶν σωμάτων ἡμῶν, Χριστὲ ὁ Θεός, καὶ σοὶ τὴν δόξαν ἀναπέμπομεν σὺν τῷ ὀνάρχῳ σου Πατρὶ καὶ τῷ παναγίῳ καὶ ἀγαθῷ καὶ ζωοποιῷ σου Πνεύματι, νῦν καὶ ἀεὶ καὶ εἰς τοὺς αἰώνας τῶν αἰώνων. Ἀμήν<sup>14</sup>.

This blessing, in a concise but comprehensive manner, summarizes the Orthodox exegetical approach to the Holy Scripture. This approach is fourfold: The first step deals with our receptivity to the Holy Spirit's illumination and inspiration (Shine forth within our hearts), based on our faith and our absolute trust in God. This first step leads us to the second one, which has to do with the understanding of the Scriptures «τοὺς τῆς διανοίας ἡμῶν διάνοιξον ὀφθαλμοὺς εἰς τὴν τῶν εὐαγγελικῶν σου κηρυγμάτων κατανόησιν» (“open the eyes of our mind to the understanding of the preaching of Thy Gospel”). It is no coincidence that in the original text this second step is also defined by the terms “mind” and “understanding”. God’s grace helps us to understand (with our intellect) what is said – a necessary condition for a conscious Christian faith translating into a conscious Christian life. This understanding of the Holy Scripture, as well as its subsequent acceptance, leads to the third step, which is none other than our personal transformation, by changing our way of life, overcoming our passions and living a spiritual life. The fourth step comes as a consequence of this personal transformation; it implies a Christian way of life (*and doing*). It is an action that does not

14. *Ιερατικόν/Hieratikon*, Apostoliki Diakonia tis Ekklisias tis Hellados Publications, Athens 2004, p. 118.

derive from an oppressive or hypocritical obedience to rules and morals, but one that freely and spontaneously, but also consciously (*being mindful*) expresses the Gospel's application in our daily life «πάντα τὰ πρὸς εὐαρέστησιν τὴν σήν» (“all that is well-pleasing unto Thee”)<sup>15</sup>. Schematically, we could render the above in the following table:

EYXH / BLESSING	BHMATA - ΣΤΑΔΙΑ / STAGES
Ἐλλαμψον ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν, φιλάνθρωπε Δέσποτα, τὸ τῆς σῆς θεογνωσίας ἀκήρατον φῶς	(1) Φώτιση, Ἐμπνευση (1) Illumination, Inspiration
καὶ τοὺς τῆς διανοίας ἡμῶν διάνοιξον ὀρθαλμοὺς εἰς τὴν τῶν εὐαγγελικῶν σου κηρυγμάτων κατανόησιν.	(2) Κατανόηση (2) Understanding
Ἐνθες ἡμῖν καὶ τὸν τῶν μακαρίων σου ἐντολῶν φόβον, ἵνα, τὰς σαρκικὰς ἐπιθυμίας πάσας καταπατήσαντες, πνευματικὴν πολιτείαν μετέλθωμεν,	(3) Προσωπικὴ μεταμόρφωση (3) Personal transformation
πάντα τὰ πρὸς εὐαρέστησιν τὴν σήν καὶ φρονοῦντες καὶ πράττοντες.	(4) Πράξη (4) Action

We could say that this wish is also an interpretive “key” to understanding not only the Holy Scriptures (the “gospel sermons” according to the blessing) but also divine worship. These four steps are embedded in almost every expression of the divine worship, the purpose of which is not only God’s worship but equally our own transformation to become “Christ-bearers” or, as the Apostle Paul says, «ζῶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγώ, ζῆ δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός» (“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me”)<sup>16</sup>. The prerequisite is our conscious participation in the divine worship, the Divine Grace’s receptivity on our behalf, our effort under the aegis of the Divine Grace to understand

15. St. Alexopoulos, “The Gospel Narrative in Byzantine Liturgy”, in: T. Nicklas, K.-W. Niebuhr, M. Seleznev (eds.), *History and Theology in the Gospel Narratives*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2020, pp. 235-246, here p. 239; St. Alexopoulos, “The Use of the Bible in Byzantine Liturgical Texts and Services”, in: E. Pentiuc (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of the Bible in Orthodox Christianity*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2022, pp. 243-260, here pp. 254-255; Fr. St. Alexopoulos, «Ἡ εὐθύνη μας εἶναι μεγάλη», *Σύναξη/Synaxi* 168 (Oct.-Dec. 2023), pp. 7-11, here pp. 8-9.

16. Gal. 2, 20.

with our intellect the message and essence of the acts performed, the conscious harmonization of our lives with God's will, and the conscious expression of this harmonization in our daily lives. The Church's liturgical life is the worshipful experience of salvation in Christ and the gospel sermons, which the blessing of the Gospel calls us, in the grace of the Holy Spirit, to understand them with our intellect to the degree we are capable of accomplishing that feat. Each liturgical act of the Church, mainly through its blessings, essentially explains to us who we are as Christians, what we do, and what the purpose of each liturgical act is<sup>17</sup>. The Church's liturgical life gives answers to these questions. In other words, the liturgical texts themselves give us the answers. As theologians and as clergy, our purpose is (or at least it should be) to help the faithful unlock the liturgical texts so that they are the first source of answers to the questions they have, not every self-appointed "theologian" and "elder" on the internet.

### 3. The Divine Worship as a Missionary Event

The full participation in divine worship is unquestionably a privilege of the members of the Church; this becomes structurally apparent by the catechumens' dismissal in the Divine Liturgy. Yet, the contemporary reality, with the digital invasion of the places of worship and –as a consequence– the remote access to the celebrations, often becomes a reason for scandalizing many believers and ridiculing from most of the non-believers. If we realize the breadth of our exposure as liturgists to the image and sound of the digital world, we should feel shocked and frightened. But if we conduct our services humbly and conscientiously,

17. Each invocative functional expression is usually followed by a final sentence explaining the purpose, the goal. For example, the invocation from the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom: «κατάπεμψον τὸ Πνεῦμα σου τὸ ἄγιον ἐφ' ὑμᾶς καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ προκείμενα δῶρα ταῦτα καὶ ποίησον...» is followed by the final infinitive sentence: «ώστε γενέσθαι τοῖς μεταλαμβάνουσιν εἰς νῆψιν ψυχῆς, εἰς ἄφεσιν ἀμαρτιῶν, εἰς κοινωνίαν τοῦ ἄγιου σου Πνεύματος, εἰς βασιλείας οὐρανῶν πλήρωμα, εἰς παρρησίαν τὴν πρὸς σέ, μὴ εἰς κρίμα ἢ εἰς κατάκριμα». See Τερατικόν, *op.cit.*, p. 133.

with respect for the order of the Church, and preach by interpreting the Holy Scriptures based on the Church's liturgical life and experience, and see each worship gathering as an opportunity to catechize God's people, then perhaps our worship through its transmission by digital means will be transformed into a missionary event.

Such a thing is not alien to our tradition. We are aware of the story of the Slavs' Christianization, which began when the ambassadors of Vladimir experienced worship in its full glory in Hagia Sophia, even though they were not Christians<sup>18</sup>. It is also a fact, especially in the diaspora, that many converts are attracted and eventually become Orthodox because of their exposure to the divine worship of our Church. Besides, as I've already mentioned at the beginning of my paper, in my opinion the divine worship represents the preeminent worshipful experience of salvation in Christ – the Gospel's worshipful experience. Divine worship has nothing to hide. Divine worship preaches the Christ – or, if you like, it is the voice of Christ that continues preaching. Our role is not to hide that preaching and make it the privilege of a select few, but to promote it.

The understanding of divine worship as a missionary event has, in my view, two axes that need further investigation: a) it is an invitation/ catechism for those who are not baptized members of the Church, and b) it is a kind of lifelong initiation rites for those who are baptized members of the Church<sup>19</sup>.

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18. *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, S. H. Cross – Olg. P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor (ed. & transl.), The Medieval Academy of America, Cambridge, MA 1953, p. 111.

19. For a fuller account, see our address: "Is Mission Related to Liturgy? Some Initial Thoughts on Liturgical Approached to Mission", in IOTA's conference at the Greek city of Volos (2023). It is interesting that, nowadays, even Protestant denominations not only recognize the importance of worship, but also study the latter's missionary dimension. For example, see Al. Kreider – Eleanor Kreider, *Worship and Mission After Christendom*, Herald Press, Harrisonburg, VA 2011 and Ruth Meyers, *Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission*, W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI 2014.

#### 4. The Materiality and Physicality of Worship

Perhaps the greatest challenge of the immaterial reality has to do with how one makes sense of the worship in the digital world's space. Before COVID's appearance, few people had seriously addressed this challenge<sup>20</sup>. But the experience of COVID lockdown and the subsequent pastoral and liturgical challenges, such as the closure of churches, the celebration of Mass and services without a congregation, and the digital broadcasting of services as the only possibility for the faithful to "attend service", have suddenly forced us to find ourselves into a digital liturgical space and time, putting under stress the notions of parish, Eucharistic community, physical presence in worship, the need for a shared worship experience, the notions of sacred space and time, the need for the presence of the other. This experience has forced us to reflect on what it really means worshiping together and participating in the divine worship.

To my mind, a first response to this contemporary challenge is the materiality and physicality of worship, factors that are absent in the space of the immaterial digital reality. Those two aspects of worship presuppose the physical presence and active participation of the church community in the celebrations, something that has been witnessed over time in Christian worship, from the earliest Christian congregations of apostolic times to the present day<sup>21</sup>.

By materiality we mean the use of matter in worship, which in the latter's context is consecrated and sanctifies the faithful. This material comes either from the natural world, such as water for baptism or holy

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20. In my opinion, the most coherent and serious approach is that by Teresa Berger, *@ Worship: Liturgical Practices in Digital Worlds*, Routledge, London – New York 2018. With the COVID's emergence, remarkable studies have been carried out; see for example the volume edited by H.-J. Feulner – El. Haslwanter, *Gottesdienst auf eigene Gefahr? Die Feier der Liturgie in der Zeit von COVID-19*, Aschedroff Verlag, Münster 2020; K. Irwin, *Liturgy and Sacraments in a COVID World*, Paulist Press, Mahwah NJ, 2021; J. Daniel – H. Schmitz, *Liturgie 4.0: Anforderungen des Homo digitalis in liturgischer Theorie und Praxis*, Theologie der Liturgie 18, Verlag Friedrich Pustet, Regensburg 2021.

21. P. Skaltsis, «Ο λαός ως πλήρωμα στὴ θεία Λειτουργία», in: P. Skaltsis, *Λειτουργικὲς Μελέτες*, P. Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki 2006, pp. 75-97.

water, or is the product of human activity with material elements from the natural world, such as oil for anointing and benediction, or bread and wine for the Eucharist. In other words, material elements (processed or not by man) is offered by the Church's members to the Church, so that they may be sanctified by the Grace of God, and as the latter's vehicles –within the context of the worship assembly-, the members of the Church are subsequently sanctified<sup>22</sup>.

The materiality of worship is linked to its physicality: the believer is anointed, sanctified, receives the Holy Communion and worships having his body as medium. By corporeality we mean human being's (as persons and as members of a community) participation and sanctification in worship. In this whole productive process, offering and sanctification of matter, man actively participates with his body, just as he physically participates in worship and receives sanctification through his body; man as an entity is sanctified, and the body cannot be exempted from this sanctification.

The worship's materiality and corporeality are theologically based on creation, where everything was “all good” («καλὰ λίαν»)<sup>23</sup>, but especially on the Incarnation, where salvation did not come immaterially and vaguely, theoretically or philosophically, but through the incarnation of the Word of God, as He “received back” the matter, sanctifying it; thus, in worship, too, materiality and corporeality are transformed – “are saved”<sup>24</sup>. Or, as St. Gregory the Theologian puts it: «Τὸ γὰρ ἀπρόσληπτον, καὶ ἀθεράπευτον. ὁ δὲ ἥγνωται τῷ Θεῷ, τοῦτο καὶ σωθήσεται»<sup>25</sup>. The worship's materiality and corporeality highlights the relationship between man and matter as well as that between people as a communion.

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22. For a theological approach on matter, see Metropolitan of Pergamon John Zizioulas, *Ἡ Κτίση ὡς Εὐχαριστία, θεολογική προσέγγιση στὸ πρόβλημα τῆς οἰκολογίας*, Akritas Publications, Athens 2011.

23. *Gen.* 1, 31.

24. K. Irwin, “A Sacramental World: Sacramentality as the Primary Language for Sacraments,” *Worship* 76 (2002), pp. 197-211 and, *Context and Text: A Method for Liturgical Theology*, Revised Edition, Liturgical Press Academic, Collegeville, MN 2018, pp. 123-186.

25. *Epistula 101.32*, Grégoire de Nazianze, *Lettres Théologiques*, Paul Gallay (ed.), Sources Chrétiennes 208, Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris 1974, p. 50.

The online worship experience is not an alternative option that replaces the bodily worship in the church in the midst of the Eucharistic community, but a tool, an extraordinary response to specific pastoral challenges, such as the COVID lockdown; the purpose of this tool is to lead, when circumstances again permit, to the individual's reintegration into the Eucharistic communion and community, not to an alternative worship experience. The materiality and physicality of worship demonstrate that the physical presence in the Eucharistic community is a component of the sanctifying worship experience.

## 5. A Case Study: Basil the Great's Anaphora<sup>26</sup>

If the liturgical texts are the Church's theological expression, if they are catechetical texts, and if divine worship can be perceived as a missionary event, how can such a perception be applied? On this point I would like to use Basil the Great's Anaphora as a working hypothesis<sup>27</sup>. I will selectively focus on six structural parts of the Anaphora: The preamble (immediately after the opening dialogue), the recollection/anamnesis (immediately after the triumphal hymn), and the invocation/epiklesis.

The Anaphora's proemium is a succinct, excellently worked out theologically text, which manages in a few lines and within the Anaphora's cultic context, to convey the Church's teaching on the Holy Trinity, whereas at the same time the presentation of the Triune God with each person's or hypostasis's characteristics, their relationship, and the justification of his worship is taking place<sup>28</sup>. To put it simply, the proemium explains

26. St. Alexopoulos, "Prayer at the Eucharist: Shifts in the Use of Scripture", in: H. Buchinger – C. Leonhard (eds.), *Liturgische Bibelrezeption: Dimensionen und Perspektiven interdiziplinärer*, Forschung in the series Forschungen zur Kirchen und Dogmengeschichte 108, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2022, pp. 411-427 here pp. 415-417.

27. As it is well known, Basil the Great's Anaphora belongs to the western Syrian textual type. For a review of studies related to Basil the Great's Anaphora, see C. Streza, "Modern Theological Research: The authorship of the Byzantine Anaphora of Saint Basil under Investigation with the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae database", *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 77, 4 (2021), pp. 1-8 (open access in: <https://hts.org.za/index.php/HTS/article/view/6684> where someone can also find the relevant literature in the footnotes).

28. *Τερατικόν*, op.cit., pp. 168-169: «Ο Ων, Δέσποτα, Κύριε Θεέ, Πάτερ Παντοκράτορ

and defines who we Christians believe and worship as God and how we perceive this God. The text is both devotional and didactic/catechetic.

After the triumphal hymn follows an extensive recollection, i.e., a presentation of the Divine Economy, from creation to salvation. It is essentially a summary of the Holy Scriptures. It is a text full of direct and indirect Scriptural references<sup>29</sup> in which the Lord's incarnation and its consequences for our salvation is the hub. The following text plays a decisive role as a transition point in the Anaphora:

προσκυνητέ, ἀξιον ώς ἀληθῶς, καὶ δίκαιον καὶ πρέπον τῇ μεγαλοπρεπείᾳ τῆς ἀγιωσύνης σου, σὲ αἰνεῖν, σὲ ὑμεῖν, σὲ εὐλογεῖν, σὲ προσκυνεῖν, σοὶ εὐχαριστεῖν, σὲ δοξάζειν τὸν μόνον ὄντα Θεόν, καὶ σοὶ προσφέρειν ἐν καρδίᾳ συντετριψμένη, καὶ πνεύματι ταπεινώσεως τὴν λογικήν ταύτην λατρείαν ἡμῶν, ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ χαροσάμενος ἡμῖν τὴν ἐπίγνωσιν τῆς σῆς ἀληθείας. Καὶ τίς ίκανός λαλήσαι τὰς δυναστείας σου; ἀκουστὰς ποιῆσαι πάσας τὰς αἰνέσεις σου; ἡ διηγήσασθαι πάντα τὰ θαυμάσιά σου ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ; Δέσποτα τῶν ἀπάντων, Κύριε οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς, καὶ πάσης κτίσεως, ὁραμένης τε καὶ οὐχ ὁραμένης, ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ θρόνου δόξης, καὶ ἐπιβλέπων ἀβύσσους, ἄναρχος, ἀόρατος, ἀκατάληπτος, ἀπερίγραπτος, ἀνάλλοιώτε, ὁ Πατήρ τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, τοῦ μεγάλου Θεοῦ καὶ Σωτῆρος, τῆς ἐλπίδος ἡμῶν, ὃς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τῆς σῆς ἀγαθότητος, σφραγίς ἴσοτυπος, ἐν ἑαυτῷ δεικνύς σε τὸν Πατέρα, Λόγος ζῶν, Θεός ἀληθινός, ἡ πρὸ αἰώνων σοφία, ζωὴ, ἀγιασμός, δύναμις, τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν, παρὶ οὐ τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ ἄγιον ἔξεφάνη, τὸ τῆς ἀληθείας Πνεῦμα, τὸ τῆς υἱόθεσίας χάρισμα, ὁ ἀρρέβων τῆς μελλούσης κληρονομίας, ἡ ἀπαρχὴ τῶν αἰώνων ἀγαθῶν, ἡ ζωοποίος δύναμις, ἡ πηγὴ τοῦ ἀγιασμοῦ, παρ' οὐ πᾶσα κτίσις λογική τε καὶ νοερά, δυναμούμενη, σοὶ λατρεύει, καὶ σοὶ τὴν ἀιδίον ἀναπέμπει δοξολογίαν, ὅτι τὰ σύμπαντα δοῦλα σά; Σε γάρ αἰνοῦσιν...» (“O Eternal Being, Master, Lord, God, Father almighty and adorable it is truly proper and just and befitting the magnificence of your holiness to praise you, to sing to you, to bless you, to worship you, to thank you, to glorify you, the only true God, and to offer you this, our spiritual worship with contrite heart and humble spirit; for you have granted us the knowledge of your truth. Who is able to proclaim your might, to make known all your praises, or to recount all your mighty deeds in every age? Master of all, Lord of heaven and earth and of all creation both visible and invisible, enthroned in glory yet fathoming the depths, eternal, invisible, incomprehensible, boundless, and changeless, **Father of our great God, Savior, and Lord Jesus Christ**, you are revealed through him who is our hope, the image of your goodness, and the seal bearing your likeness. He is the Living Word, True God, Eternal Wisdom, Life, Sanctification, Power, and the True Light through whom the **Holy Spirit has been revealed**: the Spirit of truth, the Gift of filial adoption, the Pledge of our future inheritance, the First-fruits of eternal blessings, the Life-creating Power, the Wellspring of sanctification through whom every rational and intelligent creature is empowered to worship you, and to offer you an unending hymn of praise; for all creation serves you” [With bold letters is the focal point – the transition from God the Father to Son and the Holy Spirit]).

29. *Τερατικόν*, *op.cit.*, pp. 170-171.

When the fullness of time had come (*Gal. 4,4, Eph. 1,10*), you spoke to us through your own Son, the very one through whom you created the ages (*Hebr. 1,2*). Although he is the reflection of your glory and the express image of your person, sustaining all things by his powerful word (*Hebr. 1, 3*), He did not deem equality with you, God and (*Phil. 2, 6*) *Father, something to be grasped; rather, while remaining everlasting God*, he appeared on earth and lived among men (*Baruch 3, 38*). *In becoming incarnate from the holy Virgin*, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave (*Phil. 2, 7*), conforming himself to the lowliness of our body, that he might conform us to the image of his glory (*Phil. 3, 21*).

Ὅτε δὲ ἥλθε τὸ πλήρωμα τῶν καιρῶν (Γαλ. 4, 4, Ἐφ. 1, 10), ἐλάλησας ἡμῖν ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ Γεῷ σου, δι’ οὗ καὶ τὸν αἰώνας ἐποίησας (Ἐβρ. 1, 2), ὅς, ὃν ἀπάγαυσμα τῆς δόξης σου, καὶ χαρακτήρι τῆς ὑποστάσεώς σου, φέρων τε τὰ πάντα τῷ ὁγματι τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ (Ἐβρ. 1, 3), οὐχ ἀρπαγμὸν ἤγγισατο τὸ εἶναι ἵσα σοὶ τῷ Θεῷ (Φιλ. 2, 6) καὶ Πατρί, ἀλλά, Θεὸς ὃν προαιώνιος, ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ὥφθη, καὶ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις συνανεστράφη (Βαρούχ 3, 38), καὶ ἐκ Παρθένου ἀγίας σαρκωθείς, ἐκένωσεν ἑαυτόν, μορφὴν δούλου λαβών (Φιλ. 2, 7), σύμμορφος γενόμενος τῷ σώματι τῆς ταπεινώσεως ἡμῶν, ἵνα ἡμᾶς συμβόρφους ποιήσῃ τῆς εἰκόνος τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ (Φιλ. 3, 21).

This text, almost composed in its entirety [exceptions in italics] from Scriptural passages, links the overview of God's creation and action preceded in the Old Testament, along with the consequences of the Incarnation that came after it. The following text explains theologically what it means to “conform the image of his glory” using a series of Scriptural passages<sup>30</sup>. Salvation in Christ is remembered and worshipfully celebrated in the Eucharist, as we are reminded by the phrase linking this anamnesis to the Lord's founding words: “But he left us these memorials of his saving passion, which we have prepared according to his command”, «Κατέλιπε δὲ ἡμῖν ὑπομνήματα τοῦ σωτηρίου αὐτοῦ πάθους ταῦτα, ἀ προτεθείκαμεν ἐνώπιόν σου, κατὰ τὰς αὐτοῦ ἐντολάς». Within this context there is a reference to sin, which has already been defeated by Christ: “God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering (*Rom. 8, 3*), for as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive (*1 Cor. 15, 22*)”, [«κατακρῖναι

30. *Col. 1, 10; John 17, 3; Tit. 2, 14; 1 Petr. 2, 9; Eph. 5, 26; Rom. 15, 16; Rom. 7, 6; Rom 7, 14; Eph 4, 10; Acts 2, 24; 1 Cor. 15, 4; Acts 2, 24; Acts 3, 15; 1 Cor. 15, 20; Col 1, 18; Heb. 1, 3; Rom. 2, 6.*

τὴν ἀμαρτίαν ἐν τῇ σαρκὶ αὐτοῦ (*Pωμ.* 8, 3), ἵνα οἱ ἐν τῷ Ἀδὰμ ἀποθνήσκοντες, ζωοποιηθῶσιν ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ Χριστῷ σου (*Α΄ Κορ.* 15, 22)»]<sup>31</sup>. In other words, our participation in the Eucharist celebrates our salvation in Christ, victory over sin, and participation in the Kingdom of God, as it is expressed immediately after the invocation in which the results of our participation in the Eucharist are clearly stated:

As we offer you the holy body and blood of your Christ in this form, we pray you and beseech you, O Holy of Holies, that, according to your kind favor, your Holy Spirit may come upon us and upon these gifts here offered; and bless and sanctify them and show this bread to be truly the precious body of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ and this chalice to be truly the precious blood of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ shed for the life of the world so that all of us who share this one bread and chalice may be united with one another in the communion of the one Holy Spirit, and that none of us partake of the holy body and blood of your Christ for judgment or condemnation.

‘Ημᾶς δὲ πάντας, τοὺς ἐκ τοῦ ἐνὸς Ἀρτοῦ καὶ τοῦ Ποτηρίου μετέχοντας,  
[1] ἐνώσαις ἀλλήλοις εἰς ἐνὸς Πνεύματος ἀγίου κοινωνίαν,  
[2] καὶ μηδένα ἡμῶν εἰς κρῖμα ἢ εἰς κατάκριμα ποιήσαις μετασχεῖν τοῦ ἀγίου Σώματος, καὶ Αἵματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ σου;  
[3] ἀλλ’ ἵνα εὑρωμεν ἔλεον καὶ χάριν μετὰ πάντων τῶν ἀγίων τῶν ἀπ’ αἰώνος σοι εὐαρεστησάντων...<sup>32</sup>

The celebration of the Eucharist and our participation in it confirms the salvation in Christ, based on the Divine Economy and the Word of God’s kenosis, a salvation worshipfully celebrated by the Eucharistic assembly of the faithful as the highest expression of public worship, as unity and communion of one another in the Holy Spirit, participating in the reality of salvation already present in the communion of the saints: «κτησάμενος ἡμᾶς ἔσωτῷ λαὸν περιούσιον, βασίλειον ἱεράτευμα, ἔθνος ἀγιον»<sup>33</sup>.

Likewise, we would say that the crux of the St. John Chrysostom’s Anaphora is the following passage from the Gospel of John: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever

31. *Τερατικόν*, *op.cit.*, p. 171.

32. *Τερατικόν*, *op.cit.*, p. 174 [the numbering is ours].

33. *Τερατικόν*, *op.cit.*, p. 171.

believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” («Ος τὸν κόσμον σου οὕτως ἡγάπησας, ὡστε τὸν Γιόν σου τὸν μονογενῆ δοῦναι, ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν μὴ ἀπόληται, ἀλλ’ ἔχῃ ζωὴν αἰώνιον»)<sup>34</sup>. St. Chrysostom’s anaphora is essentially the theological explanation of this excellent passage, performed in the Holy Eucharist, which is nothing other than the worshipful experience of salvation in Christ which is already a reality, for which we offer thanksgiving – the Holy Eucharist. We should note that in this reference the fact of salvation is considered to have been already accomplished:

*You brought us out of nonexistence into being, and again raised us up when we had fallen, and left nothing undone until you brought us to heaven and gave us your kingdom to come.*

Σὺ ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος εἰς τὸ εἶναι ἡμᾶς παρήγαγες, καὶ παραπεσόντας ἀνέστησας πάλιν, καὶ οὐκ ἀπέστης πάντα ποιῶν, ἔως ἡμᾶς εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀνήγαγες καὶ τὴν βασιλείαν σου ἔχαρίσω τὴν μέλλουσαν<sup>35</sup>.

Therefore, the extensive reference to the Divine Economy not only provides the Holy Eucharist’s theological background but also becomes an opportunity for the believer’s theological cultivation and spiritual formation<sup>36</sup> and, in the modern world, a simultaneous presentation of the Church’s “being”.

At the same time, the Divine Liturgy is the time and place where the Church finds its identity as the Body of Christ; Christians are invited to participate in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist by forgiving one another in the “Let us love each other”, («Ἄγαπήσωμεν ἀλλήλους») with the embracing of love<sup>37</sup>, before the Holy Anaphora begins. This act of forgiveness, which requires the faithful’s bodily presence and human contact, underlines the physicality of worship, but also the fact that it is the special place of human contact and reconciliation. “In the assembly

34. John 3, 16.

35. *Τερατικόν*, *op.cit.*, p. 131.

36. D. Krueger, *Liturgical Subjects: Christian Ritual, Biblical Narrative, and the Formation of Self in Byzantium*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 2014.

37. *Τερατικόν*, *op.cit.*, p. 129. This embracing of mutual forgiveness has been preserved today in our tradition only in the sacred concelebrations.

of the Church the people of God realize not only unity with Christ, but also unity among the members of the flock”<sup>38</sup>.

With our body we also receive communion in the context of the Eucharistic assembly and we are sanctified. St. Cabasilas states: «Αὐτὸς [ὁ Χριστός] ἐκέλευσεν ἄρτον καὶ οἶνον προσάγειν, αὐτὸς ἀντιδίδωσι τούτων ἄρτον ζῶντα καὶ ποτήριον ζωῆς αἰωνίου»<sup>39</sup>. while another passage from the same discourse is the following: «Ἐπειδὴν δὲ ἐπὶ τῆς τράπεζαν ἀγάγῃ [ὁ Χριστός] καὶ δῶ φαγεῖν τοῦ σώματος, ὅλον ἀμείβει τὸν τελεσθέντα καὶ πρὸς τὴν οἰκείαν μετατίθησιν ἔξιν; καὶ ὁ πηλὸς οὐκέτι πηλός, τὸ βασιλικόν δεχόμενος εἶδος, ἀλλ’ αὐτὸς ἡδη σῶμα τοῦ βασιλέως, τούτου μακαριώτερον οὐδὲ ἔστιν ἐνθυμηθῆναι»<sup>40</sup>. This is where the relationship between physicality and materiality becomes apparent: the gifts –bread and wine–, are an offering of the flock; they are transformed into the Christ’s Body and Blood during the Holy Anaphora, and the faithful, by partaking of these consecrated Holy Gifts, are led to the road of salvation. The physical presence in the Eucharistic assembly, where matter and creation (the created man included) are consecrated, cannot be replaced by an intangible expression of worship.

## Conclusion

The contemporary digital reality poses to us great and many challenges. The answer to this intangible reality cannot be given only through the Church’s digital presence. I believe that if we perceive the liturgical discourse as the agent of the theology of the Church, if we see the worship event as an opportunity for catechesis and missionary work, if we treat worship as the space par excellence for the formation of the believers’ theological consciousness, if we understand worship as

38. Skaltsis, «Ο λαὸς ὡς πλήρωμα στὴ θεία Λειτουργία», op.cit., p. 86.

39. «Εἰς τὴν Θείαν Λειτουργίαν», Λόγος Δ, 2: Nicolas Cabasilas, *Explication de la divine liturgie*, S. Salaville, R. Bornert, J. Gouillard, P. Périchon (eds.), Sources Chrétiennes 4bis, Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris 1967, p. 76.

40. «Περὶ τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ ζωῆς», Λόγος Δ, 2: Nicolas Cabasilas, *La vie en Christ*, tom. I, *Livres I-IV*, Marie-Hélène Congourdeau (ed.), Sources Chrétiennes 355, Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris 1989, p. 264.

the place par excellence for the encounter of the other, only then can we hope that every believer will develop those criteria that will protect him from all kinds of digital misinformation and false authority, where the criterion of accuracy and truth will be the liturgical practice and experience of the Church.