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**WORD AND MISTERY IN THE**  
**ORTHODOX LITURGY**

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# WORD AND MYSTERY IN THE ORTHODOX LITURGY

## SUMMARY

### *Keywords:*

**Liturgy, Word, Eucharist, Gospel, catechumens, ectenion, antiphons, Trisagion, prokeimenon, apostle, pericope, sermon, mystery, lectionary, Bizantine, hymnography, symbol, sacrament, tradition, liturgical, mystagogy.**

The Divine Liturgy is the *Mystery* of the New Covenant by which the sacrifice of the Savior Jesus Christ on the Cross is actualized for the purpose of being shared with the faithful through the power and work of the Holy Spirit. Father Stăniloae described the Liturgy as the *ascent* that humanity makes towards the communion of the Most Blessed Trinity and a foretaste of the Kingdom of Heaven or the ark of the Kingdom. In this spiritual Mystery humanity is filled with the *infinite life of the communion of the Holy Trinity*<sup>1</sup>. But the Divine Liturgy is also *Epiphany*, that is, the revelation of God's presence in a special way through sacramental acts. It is the Gospel ever actualized, a progressive revelation, a gradual ascent from step to step towards an ever deeper understanding of the divine mystery until full communion is achieved through communion with the Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. But until the full communion realized through the Eucharist, believers experience a series of many other *Epiphanies* revealed through sacramental acts. The Trinity is first revealed through the blessing at the beginning of the Divine Liturgy, when the Kingdom is proclaimed as the final goal and ultimate purpose of salvation. Then, through the Psalms, hymns and prayers, the time before the beginning of the preaching of Christ, the time of the prophets, can be grasped. Through the Gospel votive on which the icon of the Resurrection is inscribed, it is shown that the time of perfect revelation and the time of preaching have drawn near, and through the reading of the Gospel the very words of the Lord can be heard. Through the word of the Gospel the Lord enters into the being of those to whom He addresses Himself and calls them to the perfect communion of the Most Blessed Trinity, marking known and felt His love for them, and this bring about a response on their part, which is realised in prayer. Then, through all that is accomplished, the Redeeming Sacrifice accomplished by the Savior Christ for our salvation and our elevation to the dignity of sons of the Father and heirs of the Kingdom is remembered.

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<sup>1</sup> Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Spiritualitate și comuniune în Liturghia Ortodoxă*, 2nd edition, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2004, p. 14.

The unitary chain reflects the inseparable link between the *Gospel* and the *Sacrifice*. There is a complementary relationship between them, because the sacrifice of the Savior Jesus Christ is based on the Gospel, and it is the Gospel which sustains and grounds the Sacrifice. The interdependence between *Word* and *Sacrament* makes the whole being of the Church a permanent actualization and incarnation of the Word. The Word and Mystery cannot be dissociated, and this has been categorically affirmed by the Father Schmemmann: „The Word regards the Mystery as its fulfillment, for in the Mystery Christ the Word becomes our life. The Word gathers the Church to become incarnate in her. By severing the Word from the Mystery, the Mystery is threatened to be understood as magic, and the word without the Mystery is threatened to be reduced to doctrine”<sup>2</sup>.

It has been complained several times that the liturgical rites of the Orthodox Church are archaic and would need constant updating to be adapted to the present day, but Father Schmemmann emphasized that it is not the worship and its ancient rites that are responsible for their limitations and low impact, but the perversion of the Christian conscience towards their actual reception and understanding. The content of worship has not been changed or replaced, only its experience and understanding. In this context the dissociation of the Sacrament from the Word and the reduction of the Sacrament to a set of external values designed to *sanctify life* in a juridical rather than ecclesiological form constitutes the real mutilation of its real meaning. According to the Christian tradition, the Sacrament is precisely the fulfillment of the Word, but at the same time it is also the foundation of the interpretation of the Word, as the *source* and *criterion* of the theology itself. However, this authentic understanding of the relationship between Word and Sacrament has suffered a perversion. The Word and the Mystery were interpreted as two separate and self-sufficient entities in themselves, and this led to a secularization of the Mystery, which was understood as an act of personal sanctification and the Word as a mere means of transmitting criteria on the basis of which the „effects” of grace are obtained.

#### *Motivating the choice of the theme*

The basis and rationale for placing the Liturgy of the Word as the introductory foundation of the Eucharist Liturgy is a topic that has not been fully explored and sufficiently clarified, and the debates on this subject are far from over. Alexander Schmemmann has shown that the relationship between Word and Sacrament has become more and more alien to the

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<sup>2</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *Euharistia Taina Împărăției*, trans. by Pr. Boris Răduleanu, Editura Sophia, București, p. 84.

authentic spirit of the ancient Church, and for this reason a return to the fathers and to the living spirit of the early tradition is more than necessary.

The complementarity between Word and Sacrament tends to be abstracted and ultimately reduced to the cause-effect principle. The repeated emphasis on the didactic dimension of the Word, on the one hand, and the sacramental nature of the Eucharist on the other, produces a separation between the two and implicitly a paradigm shift, and the association of the two becomes ornamental rather than ontological. They are no longer seen as parts of the same whole but as autonomous sections fulfilling different functions. The Word is reduced to the didactic, and the Eucharist to the sanctifying. But according to the Christian tradition, the role of the Word is not limited only to its pedagogical meanings, but also carries within itself a sacramental dimension, just as the Eucharist does not have only the purpose of „sanctifying” the faithful, but above all that of realizing the unity of the Church. Both are works of the Holy Spirit which communicate the love of the Most Blessed Trinity and make man a sharer in the divine mystery in the most intimate way possible. This work is gradual, suited to the human capacity for assimilation. Through the word, the human senses are prepared for this continual uplifting which the Divine Liturgy entails, and through communion, the full fulfillment of the Body of Christ crucified and risen, that is, the Church, is achieved.

The relationships between the Word and Mystery have often been misinterpreted, and for this reason, a constant updating of the authentic meanings that have characterized the ancient tradition of the Church is imperative for the preservation unaltered of the original principles that shaped the liturgical journey of the early Christians. The Holy Liturgy was finalized almost a thousand years ago, after a lengthy process of standardization and unification, but the profound meanings hidden in its complexity have often been reduced to principles inferior to their actual dimensions.

### *The Relevance of the Topic*

In Father Schmemmann`s vision the Liturgy of the Word has been interpreted as a *necessary beginning* of the Eucharistic service, and indeed, it is inconceivable today for the Holy Liturgy to be celebrated without being prefaced by the Liturgy of the Word. However, in reality, this section of the Holy Liturgy has often been underestimated and quite superficially analyzed in specialized manuals. Modern theology has particularly focused on the Eucharist as the target and final goal of the Liturgy. To achieve this mystical work, the Liturgy of the Word has often been considered a „didactic” preparation for the Eucharist, but its ecclesiological and even sacramental dimension has been too simply overlooked.

The biblical readings constitute the core of the Liturgy of the Word, but all the other components that have been added to this core together form a succession of epiphanic revelations that aim to elevate the faithful towards the Eucharistic feast and to achieve the mystical unity of incorporating everyone into the Body of Christ. Through each liturgical act, the grace of the Holy Spirit is manifested, uniting and elevating humanity towards understanding the divine mystery, and the faithful are gradually sanctified by partaking in the endless and inexhaustible love of the Holy Trinity.

Father Schmemmann proposed a return to the ancient thinking specific to the Church's tradition, in which the relationship between the Word and Mystery was conciliatory, complementary, and alive. If these relationships characterized the old practice, then a revision of the current position regarding the relationship between the Word and Mystery is appropriate, and this dissertation proves its usefulness.

#### *Research objectives*

In current theological definitions, the Mystery of the Word is inseparably linked to the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist. It fulfills a preparatory role, through *word* and *prayer*, for the Eucharistic service, but the implications of this office are deeper than this brief description, and the objectives of this work are aimed at clarifying some of these implications:

O1. To identify the relevance of the Word in the Church's service from a didactic, ecclesiological, and sacramental perspective.

O2. To determine whether there has always been an intrinsic connection between the Word and the Mystery and how the relationship between the two has evolved.

O.3 To demonstrate whether the „Liturgy of the Word” is indeed a necessary beginning of the Holy Eucharistic Liturgy and its role in achieving the unity of the Church.

O.4 To identify the logic and pedagogy of the biblical pericopes throughout the liturgical year and how they contribute to the spiritual preparation of the faithful.

O.5 To highlight the contemporary significance of the mystagogical meanings of the Liturgy of the Word as hidden rationales of sacramental acts.

#### *Methodology*

Several research methods were employed in the preparation of this dissertation. The first was the historical method. This research approach facilitated a detailed exposition of the topics covered in the present work, based on the latest investigations in the field by established researchers who have proven their relevance and stood the test of time. Identifying the historical

particularities that generated changes in the Liturgy of the Word is essential for understanding and its current reception, and in this regard, a historical overview is key to achieving this goal.

The second method used in our research was comparative analysis. This method was necessary to identify commonalities and regional differences concerning the evolution and standardization of the offices specific to the Liturgy of the Word. Moreover, this research method was employed in the chapter dedicated to the Holy Gospel. The analysis of the evolution of the pericopes was based on liturgical lectionaries from different regions, focusing on highlighting common points to identify, if they exist, traces of a prototype lectionary. The differences identified in the analysis of these lectionaries were also valuable, as they hypothetically indicated the reasons behind the selection of the pericopes.

Other research methods utilized in our investigation included analytical, synthetic, and multidisciplinary approaches (historical, dogmatic, and spiritual). Through the analytical method, each component part of the Liturgy of the Word was distinctly analyzed to identify its origin and importance as an addition or core of this office. The synthetic method was used to summarize and structure all the information from the liturgical document resources employed, to provide a coherent picture of the evolution and foundation of the Liturgy of the Word as an integral part of the Eucharistic ritual. Achieving all these goals required a multidisciplinary approach because liturgical study cannot be the subject of a unilateral vision.

The Holy Liturgy was instituted at a specific time, and until its current form, it went through several stages and was influenced by various factors. These particularities bear a strong historical imprint. Then, the significance of the liturgical acts has a sacramental role. They are not simple ritual gestures but are the visible signs of unseen realities. These things have been made known through the enlightened minds of the saints of the church by the Holy Spirit. Finally, liturgical formulas reflect not only the ancient tradition of the Church but also its doctrine, as all prayers and liturgical compositions carry a strong doctrinal content.

## STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

The structure of this dissertation is organized into four parts, tracing the evolution, significance, and historical and spiritual implications of the Liturgy of the Word in relation to the Eucharistic Liturgy.

### **PART I: *THE EVOLUTION OF THE LITURGY OF THE WORD IN THE FIRST THREE CENTURIES OF THE CHRISTIAN ERA***

Christian worship was initially considered a „sect” of the Jewish religion, similar to the many other sects that were already part of this framework. The early individualization of Christianity and its universal preaching attracted hostility from the Jews towards Christians, leading to a complete separation of Christian worship from Jewish worship before the end of the first century. Most liturgists today believe that the individualization of Christianity occurred against the backdrop of Jewish worship, which was not entirely abolished but adapted to new conditions in light of the New Covenant. After Christians were rejected by Jewish communities, they regrouped in private homes of wealthier Christians where *the breaking of bread*, as mentioned in New Testament writings, became the central and defining element of the new faith. In these private gatherings, Christians also transferred parts of the Old Law worship, including the reading and explanation of Holy Scripture. Subsequently, this office of the Word became an introductory part and a necessary beginning of the Eucharistic service, resulting in the unique and unified structure of the current Holy Liturgy. The Word became the foundation upon which the Mystery is realized, and the Mystery became the act that fulfills the Word completely.

All these details necessitated a retrospective on the origin of the Liturgy of the Word, which is the subject of the first subchapter of the first part of this work. Since the office of the Word is considered a borrowing from the Jewish synagogue ritual, it was necessary to analyze to what extent the reading of Holy Scripture was definitive for the religious devotion of the Jews to understand its Christian dimension. It is well known that the synagogue is the primary Jewish institution for studying and deepening the Scripture, and for this reason, the first objective of this work focused on identifying the implications of the synagogue in the consciousness of the Jewish people. Starting with the history of this building, the functions that the synagogue fulfilled over time were analyzed. Among these functions, two appear as the main ones: the synagogue was both a) a school and a house of prayer and b) a venue for public activities, encompassing all aspects of Jewish social life. Worship and study were considered equally important in the consciousness of the Jewish people, and the synagogue was meant to

fulfill this dual requirement of religious devotion. However, the synagogue was never given a sacramental title, not even after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, although after this event, it took over some of the Temple's liturgical functions<sup>3</sup>.

Special attention was also given to synagogue architecture, which in some respects resembles later Christian churches, such as the positioning of the altar, the bema in the middle of the congregation, and the configuration of other elements<sup>4</sup>. Focus was also directed toward the personnel appointed to serve the needs of a synagogue, highlighting parallels between the synagogue's liturgical office during the Savior's time and similar features in the Christian order. The evaluation of Jewish influences as the background for the development of the Christian tradition concentrated on analyzing the Sabbath liturgical office. In Jewish tradition, biblical readings were initially introduced during festivals and later extended to every Sabbath<sup>5</sup>. However, outside of the festivals, there are no clear indications regarding the content of the readings for Sabbath days, nor can it be established whether a general rule for these readings existed. For this reason, an investigation into the system of readings borrowed by Christians from Judaism is practically impossible. It is certain, however, that the study of Scripture was interpreted differently by the Jews, leading to the emergence of various religious sects, among which the most popular were the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, teachers of the Law and scribes, Zealots, and Samaritans.

The next subchapter of the first part focused on the peculiarities of the Liturgy during and after the Apostles' time. The short-lived cultic coexistence between Christians and Jews and how Christians were forced to regroup in their own gatherings due to animosity with Jews was highlighted. Some researchers believe that the import of the office of the Word from the synagogue ritual into Christian synaxes was based on practical motivations, so Judeo-Christians would not have to participate in both the synagogue assembly and the private Christian gathering<sup>6</sup>. Whatever the reasons, it is certain that the new cultic conditions favored borrowings from Jewish ritual, but for Christians, these borrowings had entirely different connotations. The office of the Word borrowed from Jewish tradition was no longer seen as a time of awaiting promises but as a time of fulfillment and perfection of these prophecies in Jesus Christ, and for

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<sup>3</sup> Rachel Hachlili, *The Origin of the Synagogue: a re-assessment*, in „Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman period”, vol. 28, by Brill, nr. 1/1997, p. 46.

<sup>4</sup> Shaye J.D. Cohen, „The Temple and the Synagogue”, in William Horbury, W.D. Davies, and J. Sturdy, *The Cambridge History of Judaism – The Early Roman Period*, vol. 3, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 298-325.

<sup>5</sup> Adolf Büchler, *The Reading of the Law and Prophets in a Triennial Cycle II*, in „The Jewish Quarterly Review”, vol. 5, nr. 3/April-1893, pp. 423-432.

<sup>6</sup> Paul F. Bradshaw, *Early Christian Worship – A Basic Introduction to Ideas and Practice*, Second Edition, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 2010, p. 47.



this reason, the Old Law was also relevant for Gentile Christians. Soon, however, New Testament writings also became part of this office, appearing concurrently as a clear testimony to the certainty of the fulfillment of promises, as related by some eyewitnesses present at these events.

The main documents under scrutiny that identified these particularities and the relationships between the Word and the Eucharist are the New Testament writings and other early documents from the first century, including the Didache, the so-called Second Epistle to the Corinthians by St. Clement, and the Epistle of Barnabas. However, none of these are liturgical documents, so information about the form and structure of the ritual is sporadic. Nevertheless, a close connection between the Word and the Mystery can be identified from the earliest times.

The final section of the first part of this dissertation presents the conditions of Christian worship in a hostile and illicit environment specific to the first three centuries of Christianity. The context of persecutions from Roman authorities<sup>7</sup>, among others, was generally adverse to the organic and systematic growth of Christianity. For this reason, the second century was characterized by scholars more as a century of survival rather than expansion and development. Only from the third century can we speak of a maturation of Christianity, with occasional lulls in persecutions allowing Christians to regroup and adapt to these difficult conditions.

From the few Christian documents of the first three centuries, a summary structure of the Christian liturgy's cultic order can be outlined. In St. Justin Martyr and Philosopher's First Apology, the Holy Liturgy is presented as an office consisting of two parts, similar to current practice: the first part dedicated to the Word and the second to the Eucharistic ritual. The connection between the Word and the Eucharist is also suggested in the writings of other Christian authors such as St. Cyprian, Clement of Alexandria, Theophilus of Antioch, Athenagoras of Athens, Tertullian, and Origen, but not as directly as in St. Justin Martyr and Philosopher's Apology.

## **PART II: *THE LITURGY OF THE CATECHUMENS (OR OF THE WORD) DURING THE BYZANTINE ERA***

The second part of this dissertation is dedicated to the history and evolution of the Liturgy of the Word during the Byzantine era, up to its current form. This section focuses on the system of biblical readings that constitute the original core of the Liturgy of the Word,

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<sup>7</sup> Coord. Pr. Prof. Dr. Viorel Ioniță, *Istoria Bisericii Universale*, vol. I, 2nd edition, Basilica, București, 2021, pp. 106-146.

around which all other components of the current structure were added. The ancient office of the Word was different from the current one, as the biblical readings at the Liturgy included readings from the Old Testament. A reconstruction of the Old Testament readings established for liturgical use is not possible because no traces of such a lectionary have been identified. Additionally, there are no indications regarding the specific books from which the pericopes were chosen, their order, or their length. Most often, these aspects were left to the discretion of the bishop.

Another vital element that disappeared from the office of readings is the Psalms, from whose elaborate execution system only the prokeimenon has survived<sup>8</sup>, which is placed as a preamble to the reading from the Epistle, and sometimes a prokeimenon is also placed at the end of the Epistle. The Epistle was always established before the Gospel, and the Gospel, placed at the end as a crowning of this office, became the central part of the reading system. Its importance was highlighted by the standing position („stand up”) of the clergy and the faithful both at its display and at its reading, as well as by the fact that it was always read by a person consecrated to service (a cleric). The culmination of the office of the Word was marked by the exposition of the sermon, which connected the Word proclaimed by reading, invoked through prayer, and consumed through communion.

The addition of other elements that today make up the Liturgy of the Word was done gradually. Initially, the Liturgy began with the arrival of the bishop in the church, after which the biblical readings began immediately. This elementary structure was later solemnized by the bringing of the Gospel from the skeuophylakion, and today this solemn note of bringing the Gospel is retained by the current practice through a processional movement called the Small Entrance. Another element that was added to the structure of the Liturgy of the Word was the antiphons. The Office of the Antiphons was initially a service used at processional Liturgies, like the Trisagion hymn. Later, the antiphons were placed as an introductory part of the Liturgy to fill the waiting gap of the bishop after the synaxis formed in the church. Ultimately, this office became an integral part of the Liturgy of the Word after hierarchical Liturgies became rarer, just like the Trisagion, which for a long time was the hymn of entering the church. The Great Litany, which was initially placed before the Trisagion, was moved to its current position only in the 13th century, and the great blessing with which the Divine Liturgy begins today is an addition introduced sometime between the 10th-13th centuries, representing the practice of a local tradition that became generalized. The prayers for the catechumens and their dismissal

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<sup>8</sup> Juan Mateos, *Celebrarea Cuvântului în Liturgia Bizantină*, trad. și note Cezar Login, Editura Renașterea, Cluj-Napoca, 2007, pp. 1-12.

mark the end of the Liturgy of the Word, but their retention in current practice no longer has a real utility, being rather a vestige of a very complex tradition from the glory period of the catechumenate.

**PART III: THE HOLY AND DIVINE GOSPEL (THE BYZANTINE LECTIONARY)**  
*INDIVIDUALIZATION AND STANDARDIZATION*

Given the importance and centrality of the Gospel in the biblical reading system of the Divine Liturgy, the third part of this dissertation is dedicated to this liturgical book. The first subchapter focused on identifying the main peculiarities related to the reading and interpretation of the Gospel in the early period, after Constantine's edict, which is actually an intermediate stage of the Gospel's separation from the Bible. From this period, still marked by variety and diversity, the foundations of standardization and uniformity of the biblical pericopes used in liturgical practice were laid, although the number, length, and content of the Gospel pericopes were left to the discretion of the bishop. However, it is believed that the choice of pericopes was also conditioned by other factors: a) selection according to the celebrated event; b) continuous readings; c) thematic selections (determined by the bishop's sermon intentions).

The next goal was to identify a presumed primitive Byzantine lectionary, based on the immense corpus of St. John Chrysostom's sermons and other preachers from those times. To achieve this goal, the homiletic activity of St. John Chrysostom in Antioch, where he was a priest before becoming Archbishop of Constantinople, was first analyzed based on sermons that could be accurately dated by Frans van de Paverd and Wendy Mayer. From the information provided by St. John Chrysostom, it was found that during the Paschal season (Easter-Pentecost), the Gospel of John and the Acts of the Apostles were read, except on the Feast of the Ascension when Luke 24:36 was read<sup>9</sup>. During the rest of the year, all indications point to readings from the Gospel of Matthew, which was read almost throughout the liturgical year, including at the Feasts of the Nativity and Baptism of the Lord. In St. John Chrysostom's homiletic system, references to the Gospel of Mark are entirely absent, and references to events described in the Gospel of Luke appear sporadically, serving more to provide a clearer image of a subject rather than actual reading at the Divine Liturgy<sup>10</sup>. It is likely that after being enthroned as Patriarch of Constantinople, St. John Chrysostom brought with him some of the liturgical traditions of Antioch, including those related to the system of biblical pericopes, given the well-known influence Antioch constantly exerted on Constantinople.

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<sup>9</sup> Gary Philippe Rackza, *The Lectionary at the time of Saint John Chrysostom*, Notre Dame, Indiana, 2015, p. 226.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Carter, *The Antiochene Biblical Canon 400 AD*, in „*Orientalia Christiana Periodica*”, vol. 72, 2/2006, Roma, pp. 417-431.

From the same period, we have the homilies of St. Gregory of Nazianzus, delivered during his brief tenure as Patriarch of Constantinople (379-381), which complement and confirm the existence of stable rules regarding the lectionary. St. Gregory's homilies clearly attest that the pericopes of the current lectionary system were used in ancient practice, and their later elaborations conformed to the evolution of the calendar outlined either on biblical chronology or on spiritual logic.

Another series of homilies analyzed were those of St. John Chrysostom during his tenure as Patriarch of Constantinople and those of Severian of Gabala (who temporarily replaced St. John Chrysostom in 401 when St. John was away in Asia Minor). Some similarities can be observed between the homilies of the two, indicating that a certain order of the reading system might have been established, but the differences could also suggest the contrary.

For the following centuries, the sermons of other patristic authors like Proclus of Constantinople, Severus of Antioch, and a certain Leontius, a presbyter of a parish in Constantinople, as well as the kontakions attributed to St. Romanos the Melodist, are relevant. These show a considerable enrichment of the calendar, and comparing the pericopes identified in their homilies with those indicated by the Typikon of the Great Church of Constantinople (10th century) shows either content correspondences or exact matches of both the pericope and the day for which they were assigned. The novelty of these homilies results from the special attention given to the Gospel of Luke. The birth of St. John the Baptist and the Annunciation, as narrated by Luke, were placed in the two Sundays preceding the Feast of the Nativity of the Lord to emphasize biblical chronology, an idea that would develop further in the following period. The same is visible at the Feast of the Resurrection of the Lord, which attracted a series of other holidays: Palm Sunday, Passion Week, Thomas Sunday, Ascension, and Pentecost, all linked to biblical chronology. All other indications seem to suggest the continuous reading trend in the practice of the Byzantine capital following this arrangement: the Gospel of John during the Easter-Pentecost period, the Gospel of Matthew from Pentecost until close to the Feast of the Nativity of the Lord, and the Gospel of Luke in the remaining period, with continued absence of references to the Gospel of Mark.

Next, the particularities that contributed to the formation and evolution of the Jerusalemite lectionary, known to have a special influence on the evolution and finalization of the Byzantine lectionary, were analyzed. The sources used for this endeavor were first described, followed by a brief overview of the liturgical situation in 4th-century Jerusalem, based on information provided by the travel notes of the pilgrim Egeria. Based on the information provided by the Armenian Lectionary, the pericopes read at that time on most of

the days and places mentioned by Egeria could be identified with great precision. Notably, most of these pericopes were harmonized with the time or place of celebration due to the privilege offered by the topographical configuration of the Holy City.

Analyzing the tables presenting the scriptural pericopes used in Jerusalem, provided by the Armenian Lectionary, shows a varied selection and does not seem to adhere to the lectio continua specific to Constantinopolitan practice, focusing exclusively on harmonizing the reading with the celebrated time or place. At some points of traditional holidays, the pericopes coincide with those of the Typikon of the Great Church of Constantinople (10th century), but the arrangement of other pericope selections is entirely different.

Another subchapter aimed to identify the significant moments of the fusion between the Byzantine and Jerusalemite lectionaries. First, the similarities and differences in the historical development of the two traditions were analyzed, and then the influences they exerted on each other were identified. Initially, Jerusalem's liturgical influences on Constantinople were more prominent, but from the first half of the 7th century, the influences became reciprocal. Eventually, from the early 11th century, Constantinople's influence on Jerusalem became dominant<sup>11</sup>. The evolution of the Constantinopolitan lectionary was relatively uniform, not necessarily an original creation but rather the result of a conservative tradition<sup>12</sup>, unlike the more varied Jerusalemite lectionary<sup>13</sup>, which deeply reflects the profound cultural, social, and political transitions, especially liturgical, during Muslim rule<sup>14</sup>. The weakening of the Hagiopolitan tradition, the hegemony of the Constantinopolitan tradition, monastic influence, and Studite reforms were among the main determinants of the „Byzantinization” of the Hagiopolitan tradition resulting from the Byzantine synthesis. Eventually, the Jerusalemite lectionaries also adopted the Constantinopolitan tradition, highlighted by a comparative analysis of some Jerusalemite (Hagiopolitan) manuscripts with the Typikon of the Great Church of Constantinople.

Unlike the Jerusalemite lectionaries, which begin with the Feast of the Nativity or the Baptism of the Lord, the Byzantine tradition starts with the Feast of the Resurrection, and the Johannine prologue, set for the Easter night liturgy, marks the beginning of the continuous reading of the Gospel of John until Pentecost. The Gospel of John is also arranged in the Hagiopolitan lectionaries for this period, but the Hagiopolitan pericopes do not generally

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Taft, *The Byzantine Rite: A Short History*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1992, pp. 56-57.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 53-54.

<sup>13</sup> Daniel Galadza, *Liturgy and Byzantinization in Jerusalem*, Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 66.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 104.

coincide with the Byzantine ones. For the period between Pentecost and the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, the two traditions also share pericopes from the Gospel of Matthew, but their placement is generally different, and the coincidences seem rather accidental. The Gospel of Luke is assigned by the Byzantine tradition for the period between the Exaltation of the Holy Cross and the beginning of Great Lent, unlike the Jerusalemite tradition, which assigns pericopes from the Gospel of Luke for Lent (for which the Byzantine tradition has selected pericopes from the Gospel of Mark).

In the subchapter concluding the third part of this work, the rationale for the arrangement of pericopes in the current structure of the Gospel is analyzed, reflecting three selection principles: selective pericopes (for major feasts and certain holidays), continuous readings (for ordinary weekdays), and typological pericopes (for feasts of the Mother of God, the Holy Apostles, and other biblical figures). Structurally, the Gospel is divided into two categories: the movable cycle and the fixed cycle, which establish different criteria for the reading of the pericopes. The movable cycle includes pericopes starting from Easter and continuing until Holy Saturday of the following year. Within this cycle, the Gospels are read as follows: the Gospel of John is read during the period from Easter to Pentecost, the Gospel of Matthew from Pentecost to the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, the Gospel of Luke from the Exaltation of the Holy Cross to the beginning of Great Lent, and the Gospel of Mark during Great Lent. The Gospel pericopes read within the fixed cycle are varied selections generally relevant to the celebrated event. For the fixed-date Imperial Feasts: the Nativity (December 25), the Circumcision (January 1), the Baptism (January 6), the Presentation (February 2), and the Transfiguration (August 6), the Gospel pericopes theme the celebrated events. For the feasts of the Mother of God, except for the Annunciation, the same typological pericopes are set: Luke 1:39-49 and 56 for Matins and Luke 10:38-42 – 11:27-28 for the Divine Liturgy. At the Feast of the Holy Cross, pericopes referring to the Cross or the Crucifixion of the Savior Jesus Christ are read, while for other feasts, the Gospel pericopes are more or less relevant to the commemorated event. On ordinary days throughout the liturgical year, the pericopes are read according to the principle of continuous reading. There are also several feasts set according to an exact biblical chronology: the Annunciation was set exactly nine months before the Nativity, and the Circumcision eight days after the Nativity. Forty days after the Nativity, the Feast of the Presentation was established, according to the time indicated by the Gospel. In relation to these feasts, two of the feasts dedicated to St. John the Baptist were also established. His conception was set six months before the Annunciation on September 23, and the feast of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist nine months after his conception, on June 24.

The same subchapter also includes a *Case Study* on the relevance of the Gospel pericopes for the hymnographic structure of the Triodion. The composition of the Triod was entirely inspired by Scripture. The themes of the Gospel pericopes on the Sundays before Lent, with the exception of the one ordained for the Sunday of the Exodus of Adam from Heaven, are the sources of inspiration for the hymnographic creations of those days. It is not the same is true on the Sundays of Lent, when the Gospel pericopes seem to correspond to a prebaptismal preparation, while the hymnography is inspired by the theme of *repentance*. Each Sunday belongs to a sequence in which the spiritual dialects of Lent are progressively revealed, with the Resurrection as their final goal. In Holy Week of Sorrows, the hymnography and the Gospel pericope go hand in hand, harmoniously interweaving to create an atmosphere full of spiritual charge, as the tension reaches its peak during this week.

#### **PART IV: THE CONNECTION BETWEEN WORD AND MYSTERY IN THE HOLY LITURGY**

Because the Liturgy is not only what is seen and heard but points towards deeper meanings accessible only to the eyes of the mind, it was deemed necessary for the final chapter of this work to be dedicated to the profound and hidden meanings revealed through the Holy Liturgy, perceived through the insights of spiritual figures from the Byzantine era and updated in modern neo-patristic writings. The writings of notable mystagogic authors were considered in this regard: St. Dionysius the Areopagite, St. Maximus the Confessor, St. Germanus of Constantinople, St. Nicholas Cabasilas, and St. Symeon of Thessalonica. Each of these figures contributed significantly to a superior understanding of the Holy Liturgy, showing both its cosmic dimensions and its depiction as an icon of God's economy realized in history. These unique mystagogic visions were complemented by a corresponding spiritual life, and for this reason, their works cannot be considered mere imaginative constructs or pretentious philosophical treatises. The Liturgy of the Word is a successive Epiphany of the heavenly Kingdom through symbols, ritual acts, and prayers, but to see beyond what is visible, a transformation of the mind and purification of thoughts is necessary. St. Maximus the Confessor, speaking of the epiphanic character of the Holy Liturgy, states that the grace of the Holy Spirit „transforms and changes each of those present, rebuilding them divinely according to their attributes, and elevating them to what is indicated by the mysteries being performed, even if they do not feel it, if they are still children in Christ and cannot see into the depth of what is happening. The Holy Spirit activates in them the grace of salvation, indicated by each of the divine symbols performed, leading them step by step and in order from the nearest things

to the ultimate end of all”<sup>15</sup>. In other words, through symbols, one does not see the sign of an absent reality but rather expresses that reality itself. The image is what it represents but is expressed in a mysterious, not inaccessible, manner. The symbol is never separated from reality but is reality itself, though in a hidden form.

Even before the beginning of the Holy Liturgy, some of the mystical meanings of the service can be perceived. The entrance of the bishop and the faithful into the Church was considered by St. Maximus as a depiction of the time of the Lord’s First Parousia and the return of the world from sin to virtue. This same vision is found in the interpretation of St. Symeon of Thessalonica, according to whom the vesting of the hierarch symbolizes the descent and Incarnation of the Savior Christ for the redemptive work of Salvation. Each vestment of the hierarch signifies a particular detail of the Incarnation: the sticharion: light and purity (if white) or the marks of the Passion (if purple); the epitachelion: the grace given from above; the zone: strength, prudence, and purity; the epigonation: victory over death and the Resurrection of the Savior; the cuffs: the power of God; the sakkos: the mantle of the Passion and providential grace; the omophorion: salvation and the recall of the lost sheep and the Crucifixion.

The blessing at the beginning of the Holy Liturgy is both a doxology and a proclamation of the Kingdom. It is an end, according to Father Schmemmann, because it marks the Church’s entry into heaven, at the supper of Christ. Therefore, the beginning of the Holy Liturgy has a dual significance. On the one hand, it is a descent of Christ to His own, but at the same time, it is an elevation of the Church to what it has been called. Through the Great Litany, it is shown that the Church is entrusted with the mission of raising prayers for the entire creation, highlighting the cosmic dimension of salvation. Father Stăniloae emphasized that through the Holy Liturgy, we are urged to form a single, multifaceted „I” in a unity devoid of any selfishness, where each person’s love for God is strengthened by everyone’s love, and this effort is supported and strengthened by every sacramental act of the Holy Liturgy. The antiphons symbolize the time of the prophets, the period of preparation before the Coming of the Savior, and also the Holy Trinity, being three. Through the showing of the Gospel at the Small Entrance, the manifestation of Christ is highlighted, for the Gospel symbolizes Christ and His teachings. It is the Epiphany at the Baptism of the Lord, in Cabasilas’ vision, and the time of the beginning of Christ’s preaching. The entrance of the Gospel symbolizes the coming of the Son of God among people, the Ascension to Heaven, or the Resurrection of the Lord, and the seating of the

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<sup>15</sup> Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Cosmosul și sufletul, chipuri ale Bisericii*, trad. Pr. Dumitru Stăniloae, în „Revista Teologică”, an. XXXIV (1944), nr. 7-8, p. 347.



hierarchy in the high chair, the Final Judgment. Through the Trisagion Hymn, all humanity and the choir of angels unite in a common doxology, praising the Trinity.

The core of the Liturgy of the Word, focused on the biblical readings first through the Apostle and then through the Gospel, reveals the hierarchy of revelation. The Apostle symbolizes the sending of the Apostles to preach, preparing the way for the Gospel, which is the Incarnate, Crucified, and Resurrected Son of God Himself. The singing of the Alleluia and the censuring after the Apostle depict the grace that prepares the Gospel, with the incense smoke interpreted as the fragrance of the Apostles' teachings. Through the reading of the Gospel, the Lord Himself speaks, and after the Gospel is read, the people are sealed with the sign of the Cross by the minister with the icon of the Resurrection facing them. This action illustrates the intimate connection between the Cross and the Resurrection. Only through the Cross can one reach the Resurrection, and the Resurrection is a confirmation of the Cross. After the Gospel, the dismissal of the catechumens would occur, symbolizing the separation of believers from non-believers at the end of times.

## CONCLUSIONS

The reading of Scripture in Christian worship represents an adaptation of a practice borrowed from Jewish worship. For the Jews, Scripture was not merely literature or a simple collection of religious texts but a living literature and an essential guide covering the entire set of norms and values for living, intimately tied to the identity of the chosen people. The first Christians, being from among the Jews, transferred part of the Jewish tradition into Christian assemblies, particularly Scripture and the writings of the prophets, as they believed the promises announced by the prophets were fulfilled in Christ. This was primarily a borrowing of a framework rather than the actual content of the Jewish tradition. The appeal to Scripture was essential, especially in newly established communities, as Scripture represented the verified foundation of the proclamations about Christ. For this same reason, New Testament readings were introduced very early on. These fulfilled both a kerygmatic role and served to establish the new frameworks presumed by the covenant of love. The preaching of the Apostles was nothing other than the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ, and in this context, Scripture represented the foundation of their mission. It is evident that the Apostles' endeavor also had a didactic dimension, as their teaching focused on highlighting the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies in Jesus Christ, but their primary concern was fulfilling the command given by the Lord before His Ascension, to „preach to all nations”, which expresses nothing other than the universality of salvation.

After Christianity became the official religion of the Byzantine Empire, the sense of preaching underwent a paradigm shift. Preaching became almost exclusively an attribute of Christian assemblies, being effectively carried out through the reading and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. This shift led to the role of preaching being directed and adapted to organized Christian congregations, united by the same ecclesiological aspirations. In this new context, the sermon took the place of preaching and became the official element of scriptural interpretation within worship, serving to maintain unity and uniformity at the ecclesiological level and to gather everyone in the same Spirit.

The reading of Scripture has been considered of utmost importance throughout Christian tradition and patristic testimonies, but its liturgical use was placed on an even higher level, giving it a sacramental dimension. The Gospel has become a key liturgical piece, carried in procession, venerated, and kissed with reverence, with it being used to bless the people. The Gospel has grown more revered than all other biblical books among the faithful; for example, no one goes to venerate the Apostle. Through its presentation, Christ Himself is shown, and the words read from it are the words of Christ, through which He Himself speaks. The Office of the Word thus becomes a charisma of the Church founded on the teachings of Christ and sealed with the power of the Holy Spirit, while also being the most concrete act, directly and immediately experienced in the liturgical assembly. The Word, liturgically speaking, is filled in the most concrete way with the presence of the transcendent and thus has a sacramental dimension, sanctifying both those who listen and the one who speaks, for it is the same Spirit who opens both the mouth of the preacher and the hearts of those who listen.

In Western thought, the Word and the Mystery have often been viewed as two distinct realities. In Orthodoxy, these two are inseparable because they create an ascending bridge of communion between man and God. The revelation of the Word is gradual, and this is most clearly visible in the Holy Liturgy. The Word is revealed first as didactic revelation, but it also takes on a doxological form, of praise to God, until it reaches the form of prayer. The Word is not powerful in itself but through the grace of the Holy Spirit, which works only in the Mysteries of the Church, hence the deep connection between Word and Mystery emphasized in Eastern tradition. The Word is actualized through sacramental acts, and through ritual gestures, the Word is expressed in the most intimate way possible. In this context, the Mystery appears as a fulfillment of the Word and the actualization of all that is preached, a continuous Incarnation of the Word through the recapitulation of God's entire economy, and a foreshadowing of future things, a foretaste of the Kingdom of Heaven. The Word cannot be separated from the Mystery, nor can the Mystery be conceived apart from the Word. The Word without the Mystery remains

mere doctrine, and the Mystery without the Word becomes magic, as highlighted by Father Schmemmann.

The writings of mystagogic authors concerning the Holy Liturgy clearly show that the sacramental acts performed in the Holy Liturgy are symbols of higher realities, which are not accessible to the physical eyes but only to the sensitivity of the eyes of the mind. Therefore, they can only be contemplated, as they are realities of the future Kingdom, accessible only partially in this world. However, by partaking of them, we are invisibly sanctified and fully participate in the entire divine economy. As we become more like Christ and die to this world through ascetic struggles, we make transparent the things of the life to come.

#### *Proposals for Future Research*

This dissertation does not exhaust the subject addressed, which remains quite promising for further exploration. It is rather a starting point for new research avenues. The methodology used in this research can be adapted and applied to future studies that have not been fully clarified by this dissertation. Topics that could complement this work might include a more detailed examination of the evolution of the Liturgy of the Word during the first three centuries of the Christian era and its relationship with the Eucharistic Liturgy. Other subjects in continuity with this dissertation could involve identifying a presumed archetype of the Byzantine lectionary or contributing further to identifying the spiritual reasons behind the current structure of the lectionary.

Additionally, other research directions that could help develop insufficiently examined topics in this work might focus on analyzing the mystagogical interpretations of the Holy Liturgy. Such an investigation could lead to a more eloquent understanding of the liturgical mystery and implicitly contribute to resolving contemporary liturgical crises. Recently rehabilitated, mystagogical interpretations are truly useful in understanding the hidden depths of sacramental acts, and their reintegration into neo-patristic interpretations of modern theology is entirely welcome and useful.

Although this dissertation has provided relevant answers regarding the evolution and foundation of the Liturgy of the Word as a necessary beginning of the Eucharistic Liturgy and has opened new perspectives in this direction, there remain a considerable number of questions and directions to explore. We hope that this work will inspire future researchers who will take an interest in this subject, and that their contributions will enhance scientific progress and bring further clarity to the topics analyzed, overcoming the insufficiencies and limitations of this study.