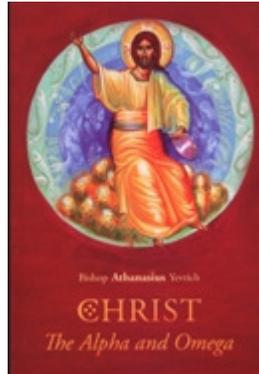


LITURGY AND SPIRITUALITY

by

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1. The Liturgy is found at the very center of life, experience and understanding of the Orthodox Catholic Church of God and consequently at the center of Orthodox Theology. For the being and life itself of the Orthodox Church consists of the Liturgy, because the very being of the Church of Christ is *liturgical* and Her very life *eucharistic*.

The whole creation of God, the whole world is conceived and created by God in such a way so as to become one great *oikonomia* (οἰκονομία- οἶκος-νέμω) of God in Christ, «the *oikonomia* of grace», according to the words of the Apostle Paul, which means to become one *community*" (κοινωνία) of everything created with God, to become the *Church*: the *Body of Christ* and the *House* of the Father in the Spirit (Eph. 1:22-23; 2:21-22), to become one «*blessed kingdom*,) of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, the kingdom of «the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit».

The life and the proper functioning of this world and of such a world having such a purpose as that of God's created world, and especially man as the crown of the entire creation, should have been one continuous *liturgy* (λειτουργία), i.e. one permanent *communion* with God, the *eucharistic* way of living, acting, and participating with God and in God: everything is received from God as a *gift* of his Goodness and Love and everything is returned with gratitude (thanksgiving — εὐχαριστία, εὐ-χαριστέω) and offered as liturgy (anaphora), so that again everything would be returned by Him as divine grace for life and immortality. «*Thine own of Thine own we offer unto Thee, in behalf of all and for all*».

However, through the fall of man, this communion with God was broken, and liturgical and eucharistic living, offering and functioning of the world and man was distorted, ruined, and cut off. For that reason, man and with him all creation fell under the law of captivity and corruption, under «*the law of death*», since there is no and can be no life free of incorruption without the *eucharistic* life in God and with God?, without the serving of the eucharistic liturgy. Instead of the natural life in God and the attaining his own fullness and authenticity in Him, man slid into an unnatural and sick state of «*living in death*». He experienced this because, as it was nicely stated, he experienced «a non-eucharistic life in a non-eucharistic world» (Fr. A. Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*). Instead of freely and thankfully serving — performing the liturgy (λειτουργεῖν) — the Good God in the Holy Spirit, and in that (act) finding his *spiritual service* (πνευματικὴ λατρεία) and his *spiritual life* (πνευματικὴ ζωή), man came into captivity and chains of «*bodily desires and passions*» and therefore could no longer *serve* (λειτουργεῖν), no longer *offer* (προσφέρειν) his being and all creation, himself,

and his life to God, and through these things *commune* (participate) in His life and holiness (I Peter 1,15-16; II Peter 1,3-4; Hebr. 12,10). Because «No one who is bound with the desires and pleasures of the flesh is worthy to approach or draw near or to serve Thee, O King of Glory» (Liturgy of St. Basil the Great), the only *Holy One*, for the holy things are given only to the holy.

However, even if man forsook God and communion with Him, God did not forsake man, but rather through His Son established a *second communion* («δευτέραν κοινωνίαν – St. Gregory Theol.) of God and man. Christ's *oikonomia* of salvation: Through the incarnation, voluntary suffering, the giving of Himself «for the life of the world» at the Last Supper, through offering Himself to death on the Cross, and by His glorious Resurrection and Ascension, and finally, through the granting and pouring forth of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost on everybody and all creation, —re-established and furthermore, exceeded abundantly that *eucharistic liturgy* in the world and among man. A *new communion*, between God and man was created, the *New Testament* in the Blood of the God-Man, a new *covenant* between God and men — and that is the *Church* as the assembly (συναγωγή– σύναξις – σύνοδος), communion of the «first-born among many brothers» (Horn. 8, 29), as the «communion (κοινωνία) of the Body and Blood of Christ» (I Cor. 10, 16-17). The realization of this is, in fact, first of all the Holy liturgy of the Church - the Divine Eucharist as a God-assembled *synaxis* and gathering (σύνοδος) of the people of God, assembled and united in one Body - the Body of Christ — through the participation and unification of one *Bread* and one *Spirit*. Therefore, St. John of Damascus rightly says that the performing of the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist (Liturgy) in the Church «fulfills in itself the entire spiritual (πνευματικὴν) and supernatural economy of Christ's incarnation» (P.G. 95, 408C). This is most clear and every Orthodox theologian will agree with it: the *Liturgy* of Christ's Church is identified with the whole of Christ's *economy* of incarnation and salvation.

2. But why does St. John of Damascus use the words «the *spiritual* (πνευματικὴν) economy» in the cited text when speaking of the incarnation of God the Word? And isn't the liturgy — the Eucharist of Christ — truly, first of all, the bread and wine, and then the Body and Blood of Christ, our true food and drink?

Yes, but it is not only that. In the Divine Liturgy the holy gifts of the bread and wine, which are offered by the Church to God, are *truly* changed into the *Body* and the *Blood* of Christ, but it is performed through «the invocation and descent of the Holy Spirit» (διὰ τῆς ἐπικλήσεως καὶ ἐπιφοιτήσεως), as it is said by the same saint, St. John of Damascus (*De Fide* IV, 13), and so repeated by so many other Orthodox theologians, among whom the liturgical Fathers were most prominent: St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St. Basil the Great, and St. John Chrysostom. Precisely because of this sanctificatory activity of the Holy Spirit, the liturgy is called in the Orthodox theological — liturgical tradition the «spiritual mysteries», (πνευματικὰ μυστήρια), «spiritual sacrifice», «spiritual service», «spiritual feast», «spiritual body» «spiritual chalice», «the source of the Spirit» («πηγή»).

Consequently, the Liturgy of our Church is fully *pneumatic*, but not in the sense of an «idealization» or «spiritualization», not in the sense of any *dematerialization* of the liturgical gifts and liturgical service (bread, wine, and water are material realities of this world which are truly changed into the true Reality — not a docetic one — of the Body of Christ), but in the sense of their *blessing, sanctification, consecration, and pneumatisation* by the power and energy of *God's Spirit*, of their fulfillment in the *divine grace* of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Church Fathers say that the Divine liturgy, the eucharistic gifts which the Church offers and celebrates, and of which all the faithful partake, is not only bread and wine which become the Body and Blood, but it is at the same time the Divinity of Christ: «If Christ is God and man», says St. Symeon the New Theologian, «then His Holy Body is not just a *body* (σάρξ) but the body and God indivisible and unmingled, the visible bread and invisible Divinity» (*The Ethical Sermon* X. SC 129. p. 314; cf. 272). St. John of Damascus says that, in Holy Communion we

faithful «are united with the Body of the Lord and His Spirit... For the Body of the Lord is the life-giving *Spirit* (Πνεῦμα ζωοποιούν), since it is conceived by the life-giving Spirit. For that which is horn of the Spirit is spirit (Jn. 3:6). But this does not destroy the nature of the body, but I want to manifest its life-giving and its *divinity* (τὸ θεῖον αὐτοῦ)» (*De Fide*, IV, 13).

We think that it is not necessary to insist any longer that the liturgy in the Orthodox Church is totally *spiritual* (πνευματική). This is testified to undoubtedly by the very texts of liturgical prayers (and they are the best confession and witness of the understanding of the Church), in which during the whole Liturgy, the Holy Spirit is called upon to descend «upon us (the celebrating priests) and upon these offered gifts and upon all the people» of God in order to consecrate by His spiritual power «the *spiritual* offering» upon «the *spiritual* table» and to unite all of us through «the one Bread and Cup», i.e. the Body and Blood of the One Christ, to unite into «*the fellowship of the one Spirit*» (Liturgy of St. Basil).

The *spirituality* (πνευματικότητα) of the Divine Liturgy, which is found in it due to the invocation and descent and action of the Holy Spirit, is characteristic not only for the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, but also for all other sacraments and all services of the Orthodox Church, and for each order, rite, act, and event in the Church of Christ on earth. In his brilliant book *On the Holy Spirit*, St. Basil the Great says: «For is it not all the beautification (διακόσμησις;) of the Churches clearly and indisputably due to the action of the Holy Spirit?» (in the Church). Then, quoting the well-known ecclesiological verse from I Corinthians 12:28, he adds: «That order (τάξις) in the Church is *given and ordered* (διατέτακται) by the distribution of the gifts of the Holy Spirit». (Chpt. 39). But, in the liturgical service of Pentecost, that same idea is expressed even more clearly: «The Holy Spirit gives everything (πάντα χορηγεί)... He constitutes and upholds (συγκροτεῖ) the whole institution of the Church».

3. If this is so, if precisely the Holy Spirit, the soul of the Church, truly fills, animates, and executes (accomplishes) all in the Church, and especially in Her Divine services and Liturgy, as the center and pinnacle of these, — is it then possible that the order, not less important side of the Church's being and existence, i.e. the other (remaining) rest *life* of the members of the Church organism, the life outside the Liturgy and common worship, be not from the Holy Spirit and without the Holy Spirit? Is it possible that the «non-liturgical» life of the faithful in the Church (if one can say such a thing), the so-called «moral» or even «spiritual» life in every-day living and work, not be from the Holy Spirit or be without the Holy Spirit?

The total experience of the Orthodox Church throughout the centuries testifies to the contrary. It testifies namely that all the rest of the Church's life through all her members, as members of Christ, is also *spiritual* (πνευματική), because it is nothing less than *ell from the Holy Spirit* and *in the Holy Spirit*. When we call that life, as we commonly do, the «spiritual life», then, for the Orthodox experience throughout the centuries, in no way does this mean only the «moral», «ethical», «intellectual», «ideal», or «spiritual» life, for in that case, such a life would be only physical, bodily (σαρκική), or in the best of cases, it would be only «sensual» (ψυχική), *psychological*. Even carrying the name of «spiritual» life, it would be the life «without the Spirit», without the Spirit of Christ, without the Holy Spirit. The Orthodox understanding of the *spiritual life*, and consequently of spirituality, has always meant and means – the life *from the Holy Spirit* and *in the Holy Spirit* or the *life in Christ through the Holy Spirit*.

This *spiritual* life among the faithful» the life in Christ through the grace of the Holy Spirit, is entirely liturgical in its origin and character. As the whole Divine liturgy of the Church consists of the «proclamation of the death and resurrection of Christ until He comes», so also the life of the faithful in Christ consists of the *co-crucifixion* end dying with Christ, and in

resurrecting with Him (See Rom. 6, 4-14). And as in each Liturgy the whole economy of the God-man Christ the Saviour is repeated and given, i.e. is actualized liturgically *hic et hunc*, so also the *whole life of Christ* is again experienced in the Christian spiritual life of the Orthodox man, as is spoken by the Holy Apostles, especially, by St. Paul and John, and likewise by nearly all the Holy Fathers. For example, St. Gregory of Sinai says: «Everyone who is baptized into Christ should pass through and achieve *all of the heights of Christ* (πάσας τὰς μεθελικιώσεις). For to these Heights (man) has in advance been given the power, and he could attain and know (these heights) through the observance of the commandments» (*Philokalia* IV, 53). And further, finally, as in the Holy Liturgy, Christ is really and actively present and, by the changing grace of the Holy Spirit, the bread and wine are changed into His Body and Blood, He gives Himself as food and life for all the faithful, so in the spiritual life of every faithful *He forms* Himself (μορφώνεται see Gal. 4:19) through the same grace of the Holy Spirit in every faithful and abides in him, so that in principle every member of the faithful can say with the Apostle; «It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me» (Gal. 2:20). In this way, Christ reveals Himself not only as the foundation and basis and head of the Church as of His Body in general, and the Bread of Life for all the members of the Church collectively as members of His own Body, but He also becomes their continual *life* (see Col. 3: 3-4; 2:6 et. al.) and «the beginning and foundation and hypostasis of every virtue» in them (St. Gregory of Sinai and St. Maximus the Confessor). The Liturgy and liturgical life of the Church are undoubtedly the foundation and source of the spiritual life for the faithful, whereas the further ascetical effort and life of the faithful is the result, *fruit*, and *continuation* of that same and unique life of the Christ among the Faithful, and of the Faithful in Christ. This and this type of liturgical-ascetical experience and vision of life, the liturgical — ascetical *ethos*, which is so characteristic for Orthodoxy, reveals in fact that fundamental truth of Christianity in general, the truth of the Gospels and the Holy Tradition: that «God so loved the world that He sent His Only - begotten Son into the world that we might *live through Him* (I John 4:9). Therefore, the liturgical — spiritual life and experience of Orthodoxy reveals to mankind and to the world that fundamental mystery of Christianity, according to which, on the one hand, in the Liturgy all the faithful as *the Church*, as the *Body* of Christ, are identified with Christ *and* all become «*one in Christ*» as St. Paul says (Gal. 3:28), or as St. John Chrysostom say, all become «*one Christ*» (*Homily* 8,2 *on Colossians*, PG 62:353). On the other hand, thanks to the incorporation (ἐνσωμάτωσις) into Christ through baptism and eucharist, the faithful, in their greater ascetic life according to Christ, become *annointed* (κεχωρισμένοι, χριστοί), they become *christs-as* says St. Methodius of Olympus, as well as many other Fathers: «become christs through the fellowship of the Spirit».

4. The *Holy Spirit* is the One who accomplishes and performs all things not only in baptism and the Liturgy but also in the ascetical effort of the spiritual life of the faithful. He confirms and sanctifies the faithful by His grace and makes them *Christ - like and Christbearers*; He makes them *holy* and *Pneumatophors*, spiritual. Without the Holy Spirit there is neither *sanctification* nor *holiness* and consequently no *union* and *communion* (fellowship) with God. «Without the Holy Spirit», says St. Athanasius the Great, «we are foreign to and far away from God, and only through the fellowship (μετοχη) of the Spirit are we united with the Divinity» (*Against the Arians* III, 24). Basil the Great says likewise: «There is no sanctification (and holiness) without the Holy Spirit» (*On the Holy Spirit*, 38J, and St. John of Damascus testifies: «There is no union of God with men without the Holy Spirit» (*Homily on the Nativity of the Theotokos*, 3). And finally, St. Symeon the New Theologian says: «Nobody could be perfectly called a believer if he does not receive the Holy Spirit... for only the fellowship in the Holy Spirit makes us

communicants and partakers of the Divine Nature» (see II Peter 1:4. – *Ethical Sermon IV*, SC 129, p. 36 and X, p. 294. See also St. Athanasius the Great, *Dialogue on the Holy Trinity I*, 7). All these quotations and testimonies of the Church Fathers confirm and reveal this other foundation of Christianity: that the Holy Spirit is, namely, sent from God and given by Christ in the Church to be in Her for all the faithful the Animator, and Inspirer and Comforter and Consecrator and Deifier. «that good agent of holiness (ἀγιοποιός) of the Church, Her helper, and defender, and great protector, and great teacher, steward of souls, solace of those in temptations, illuminator of those led astray, and giver of crowns to the victors – the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, as is said by St. Cyril of Jerusalem (*Catechism* 16, 14 and 19; 117, 13). For that reason the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church has (possesses) the Holy Spirit, and thus is called *Catholic* (Καθολική), having the *total fulness* of the *gifts of grace of the Spirit*. «It is called Catholic (καθολική)», says St. Cyril of Jerusalem, «also because entirely-catholically (καθολικῶς) has in itself every type of virtue, in words, in deeds and in *every spiritual gift*» (καὶ ἐν πνευματικοῖς παντοίοις χαρίσμασιν = in all types of gifts of grace, *Catechesis* 18, 23, cf. also 17,29 etc.).

In view of this, *spirituality* in the Orthodox Church completely originates from the Liturgy; it is completely liturgical, and therefore is totally *Christological* and *Pneumatological*, totally *pneumatic*, hence making those who experience it spiritual (πνευματικούς). As St. Irenaeus of Lyon also says, «They are spiritual (πνευματικοί) by virtue of participation in the Spirit, and not by virtue of the subjugation of the body» (*Against the Heresies V*, 6, I). The *spiritual* man, thus, in Orthodoxy, i.e. the man who possesses and experiences *spirituality* does not mean simply a moral, virtuous man, but rather the man *who has the Holy Spirit and the fruits of grace of the Holy Spirit* (Gal. 5,

On the other hand, Orthodox hesychasts are also like this, and with the same commitment (resolve) also thrown out the Western moralistic-humanistic conception of spirituality, which was understood only as a moral «imitation» of Christ, or only as a «virtuous habit» (*habitus*) acquired by human asceticism, along with the help of the grace given by God, but *created* grace, not *uncreated* divine and deifying energy of the Holy Spirit. Such a conception of spirituality, such as Barlaam of Calabria held in the 14th cent., negates the reality of the experience of the Saints» the experience while still in this world of the eternal and uncreated *grace of Divinity* (manifested as energy of light, of love, etc.), and blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, because the salvation in Christ and the spiritual life (life in the Holy Spirit) is reduced to mere «improvement» of the fallen human state and way of life, thus throwing out the *divinization* — θέωσις — of mankind as the true purpose and *authenticity* of man. Such a conception to which adhere many moralists and pietists both before and after Barlaam even today, and even if this concept would like to remain ecclesiastical in some way (i.e. to represent the spirituality of the Church), in reality it unconsciously reverts back to the non-ecclesiastical and non-charismatic spirituality of the Massalians, as St. Gregory Palamas says. This is testified to in the *Tomos Arghioritikos*: «He who says that perfect unity with God can come without the deifying grace of the Holy Spirit, but rather comes only through imitation and relation (like those who share the same ethic (ὁμοῦθεις) and share common love of one another), and also likewise he who feels that the deifying grace of God is only a habit (*habitus*) of intelligent beings acquired through imitation, but does not consider grace to be the supernatural and inexpressible illumination and the divine Energy, which is invisibly seen and incomprehensibly understood by those who are made worthy, – such a man should know that he unknowingly has fallen into the error of Massalianism» (*Sygggrammata*, II Tomos, p. 670).

From the above-stated words, it is not necessary to conclude that Orthodox spiritual life does not encompass true human morality, the moral-spiritual humanization of man and man's ascetic effort to imitate God through virtue (St. Basil the Great and other Fathers say: «Christianity is the imitation of the divine nature»), but rather is necessary to understand that through virtue and imitation of God the whole depth of Orthodox spirituality is not exhausted. «Every virtue of ours and our imitation of God,» says St. Gregory Palamas, «makes man more suitable (ἐπιτήδειον) for union of God, but that inexpressible union is accomplished only by the grace of the Holy Spirit» (*Aghioritikos Tomos*, 2, *ibid.* p. 571). The Orthodox spirituality is a *theandric* spirituality, made possible and given by the hypostatic union of God the Logos with our human nature, and subsequently in the Church is realized by the Holy Spirit as the union by grace of every believer with God. For this reason this is a *liturgical* spirituality, for it

general the prayerful theology of the Church, in the experience of Orthodox spirituality, theology is constantly a prayerful and doxological *sanctifying action* which simultaneously both feeds and upholds spirituality, and that theology itself is fed and sustained by spirituality. As that famous word said by St. Irinaeus of Lyon, «our belief is in accordance with the Eucharist and the Eucharist confirms our belief» (*Against the Heresies IV*, 18,5), confirms the identity of the Church's Liturgy and the Church's faith (and its theology as well), so also our Orthodox spirituality, which is baptismal and eucharistic (liturgical) in origin, is entirely in accordance with the faith and the theology and, on the other band, it testifies and confirms the authenticity of the theology of the one having that spirituality.

The aim and the content of Orthodox spirituality is *communion* (κοινωνία) *with God*, and in the same way it is the climax and the aim of the authentic Orthodox theology. For that reason in Orthodoxy the theology is not only «περὶ Θεοῦ τι λέγειν» (speaking about God) but firstly «τῷ Θεῷ συντυγγάνειν» (to be together with and to unite with God) as is said by St. Gregory Palamas (*Triades I* 3, 42), Only on the basis of that experience of *communion with God* can the theological testimony of those things seen and experienced, testimony in expressions worthy of God (or in words, concepts, or categories) and in God-pleasing and salvific confessions and doxologies.

7. However, «the theology» learned from books, ideas, and categories is known to us today and was known to the Holy Fathers long before us; but according to the Holy Fathers, such theology was never sufficient and certain, but rather, if it was without humility and merely proud «technology» («a skillful play on words» — St. Basil the Great), then it presents a direct danger, fantasy of heresy. As St. Simeon the New Theologian says: «For if it were only through learning and study that we attain the true wisdom and knowledge of God (i.e. theology), to what end, then, would faith, the Divine Baptism, and the participation in the Holy Mysteries be used?» (*Ethical Sermons IX*, SC 129, p. 226).

By this the saint wants to say that without participating in the Holy Mysteries of the Church, mere theological scholarship (science) still does not represent the true theology. The same saint-ascetic-theologian continues: «May 'no one be deceived by empty and sophisticated words, that it is possible to conceive the divine mysteries of our faith without the Holy Spirit, Who initiates and illuminates; neither can anyone become a vessel of the gifts of grace of the Holy Spirit without the virtues of weakness and humility of mind» (*Ethical Sermon IX*, SC 129, p. 252). St. Gregory Palamas is even more precise in this distinction of the academic theology from the authentic *charismatic theology*. In his *Triades*, written in apology of the hesychastical-charismatical theology, he writes: «There is a theory (contemplation) which contains a certain

knowledge of God and God's stated words of St. Gregory Palamas that there is no true and authentic theology save that theology which proceeds from the spiritual experience of the *union with the grace of God*, i.e. which proceeds as the fruit of spirituality in the Holy Spirit. One can find a countless number of ascetical-theological testimonies from the centuries of Orthodox spirituality. We shall state some of these testimonies. For example, Diadochos of Photik: «The gift of grace of theology is not given by God to anyone who has not prepared himself» (*Chapt. 66*). Or Kallistos Kataphygiot: «When someone, living in the virtue and in humility of mind... comes (abides) in the heart of the life-creating and eternal-spring (unoriginate) power and energy of the Holy Spirit, which illuminates greatly in him spiritual strength, such as the mind of man and the grace become "one spirit" (I Cor. 6,17), then the mind... through the energy and light of the life-creating Holy Spirit achieve the revelation of the divine mysteries.... and he in humility and prayer is *caught up* («συνεργουμένοις) by God Himself in the Holy Spirit, then he is not out of the realm of theologizing, but rather at that very moment is the *true and authentic theologian* («αὐτὸς θεολόγος»), and he can do nothing but continually theologize» (*Philokalia*, t. V, p. 51-52). Finally, let us illustrate yet another characteristic passage of St. Simeon the New Theologian: (Who makes in himself a place for Christ, he should understand that he will learn the mysteries from the treasury of the Holy Spirit... and will contain in his heart the whole Word of God and he will *theologize both new and old theology* and he will understand and fully comprehend all theology ever written or spoken, and he will become a well tuned instrument which will play and speak better than every music». (*Ethical Sermon XI*, SC 129, p. 348). (Obviously, these last words of St. Simeon are repeated in other expressions in those liturgical hymns through which the Orthodox Church glorifies the Holy *Fathers-theologians*, and in which they are called the «lyre of the Holy Spirit» and the «all-golden mouth of the Word», for they «clearly transmitted the *mystery of theology* to the Church»).

Out of all the things said, it becomes obvious that the closest relation between true Orthodox theology and true spirituality which is in Orthodoxy is always *liturgical and full of grace*. Without the experience of grace of that and that sort of spiritual life, it is difficult for an Orthodox theologian to escape being «like many which corrupt the word of God; for in that case he does not theologize like the Holy Apostle "as of God, in the sight of God in Christ," (II Cor. 2: 17), and he does not theologize thusly because on the face of his soul and mind he doesn't reflect the transfigured and deified glory of the Lord, "as by the Spirit of the Lord"» — II Cor. 3: 18). Therefore Orthodox spirituality represents the proven ascetical and charismatic school of the initiation in the mystery of the Living and True God, a school of charismatic participation in a mystagogia into which the Holy Spirit makes us worthy and capable, «that we also may offer the *wealth of Orthodox theology* to God the Saviour of our souls», («Διὸ σοὶ προσφέρομεν καὶ ἡμεῖς... ὀρθοδόξου πλουτισμὸν θεολογίας »). (Service of the Nativity of Our Lord; 'Glory' on the 'Praises').

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