

THE TRIUNE LIGHT AND HUMAN FREEDOM: DEIFYING GRACE, CHRISTIFORM SYNERGY, AND THE LITURGICAL AXIS OF THE KINGDOM

Vlad-Antonio MUREȘAN¹

ABSTRACT: *The Triune Light and Human Freedom: Deifying Grace, Christiform Synergy, and the Liturgical Axis of the Kingdom.* Deifying grace is the name given to that form of divine nearness in which the Triune God does not merely act upon the world from without, but gives Himself to the human creature so that it may live from His own life. The present article considers this mystery in its intrinsic relation to human freedom, drawing first on the Thomistic account of grace as created habitus ordered to an uncreated end, and then on the Palamite theology of the uncreated energies, in which the light of the divine doxa is confessed as both absolutely transcendent and truly communicable. Within the framework of exitus-reditus, habitual grace appears as the inner configuration that makes the person capax Dei, whilst the Eucharist manifests the primacy of uncreated grace as the sacramental presence of the crucified and risen Lord, source of every participation. In dialogue with Gregory Palamas, the study examines how synergeia and the ἔξις θεΐα express a cooperation in which human freedom is neither abolished nor idolised, but drawn into the filial “yes” of Christ to the Father in the Holy Spirit. Finally, the Byzantine lex orandi – especially the Paschal Vigil, the hymn Phōs Hilaron and the Divine Liturgy –

¹ Vlad-Antonio Mureșan is a Greek-Catholic theologian serving in the Metropolitan Curia of the Major Archeparchy of Alba Iulia and Făgăraș. He obtained both his Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in theology at the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum), Rome, with a specialisation in dogmatic and fundamental theology; email: vlad_antonio13@yahoo.com.



is interpreted as the concrete axis along which the Triune Light encounters and transfigures human existence, so that the Church may appear as the new Jerusalem, illumined by the Slava of the risen Christ.

Keywords: Deifying grace, human freedom, Triune Light, Christiform synergy, exitus-reditus, dyothelite Christology, essence-energies distinction, synergeia, Byzantine *lex orandi*, Divine Liturgy

1. Introductory Remarks: From Patristic Foundations to Scholastic Christological Systematisation

Patristic theology supplied the ontological and metaphysical foundations upon which any Christian theology of grace must be constructed. In the Fathers, there emerges what one may properly call a Christian metaphysics: a vision of created being ordered from within by the free self-communication of the triune God, and thus oriented to participation in the divine life. Yet this patristic inheritance is largely expressed in occasional forms – homily, polemic, catechesis, hymnody – rather than as a continuous *scientia*. With the rise of scholasticism, Latin theology assumes a more explicitly systematic shape: notions are stabilised, distinctions are refined, and the doctrine of grace is articulated within a coherent, ordered exposition of the *oeconomia salutis*, while remaining, at least in principle, rooted in the patristic deposit.

Within the Byzantine tradition, the same patristic dogmatic content has been preserved and developed above all through the *lex orandi*, especially in the Divine Liturgy. Here, the theology of grace is habitually expressed in the language of deifying light and Slava. Grace is not only spoken of, but sacramentally enacted. The Liturgy is perceived as the privileged locus in which the “energies” of the Kingdom are communicated to the faithful: the operation of the Trinity *ad extra*, proceeding from the *ὑπερούσια* (*hyperousia*, super-essence) of the divine life in order to draw rational creatures into communion.

In this framework, the Holy Spirit communicates to the Church the deifying light of the incarnate and risen Son. The faithful, receiving the Spirit, are made participants in the *φῶς* (*phōs*) of the *Φῶς Ἰλαρόν* (*Phōs Hilaron*), Christ the true Light who enlightens and sanctifies every human being coming

into the world². Under this illumination, it is not only the individual believer who is transformed; the very liturgical space – the consecrated church as assembly of the Body of Christ – is gathered into the radiance of the Trinity’s life, as an anticipation of the *βασιλεία* (*basileia*). In this sense, patristic metaphysics of grace and scholastic doctrinal analysis converge cristologically: both find their principle in the visible mission of the Son and the concomitant mission of the Spirit, and both are ordered to the same end – participation in the triune life, confessed in dogma, explicated in theology, and enacted in the worship of the Church.

2. Status Quaestionis: The Theo-Anthropological Encounter in the Christocentric Life of the Trinity, East and West

The freedom and peace which grace is ordered to bring about in the human person cannot be understood primarily in sociological or merely psychological terms. They have to be approached *theologically*, that is, from within the economy of the triune God. The human being becomes truly free only when he is drawn into a gracious covenant with a divine Hypostasis, and thus begins to “shine” in the light of divine *Slava*. Freedom, in its fullest sense, is participation: it consists in a filial relation to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit.

If the economy is ordered to such a covenant, this covenant must be understood as a real relation: on the one side, the self-gift of God, by which He communicates Himself through elevating grace; on the other, the response of the rational creature to this benevolent divine initiative. The proper form of this response is love, and to love God is to follow Him in His light. The theo-anthropological encounter therefore has an intrinsically dynamic, theandric-synergic character: it is a history in which human freedom is called to enter into cooperation with the grace that precedes and sustains it.

At this point, several systematic questions arise. How is this relation of grace and freedom conceptualised within Thomistic scholasticism? On which magisterial foundations does such a synergy rest? In what way does the

² Cfr. The Prayer in front of the Holy Doors at the *First Hour*, in *Orologhion*, Blaj, 1934, 115.

Thomistic doctrine of created grace differ from the Byzantine *lex orandi* tradition and from the Palamite teaching on deifying light and uncreated energies? More fundamentally still: what is the final goal of this graceful encounter, and what is the ultimate end of creation itself, when viewed from the liturgical centre of the Church?

A first, compressed answer may be given in terms of deification: the deification of the creature, the emergence of a “new creation” grounded in freedom and charity, in the deifying light that flows from the *Slava* of the Most Holy Trinity. Yet such a formula remains insufficient unless the process is unfolded by which the human being is actually transformed and elevated into the blessed βασιλεία (*basileia*) of *Slava*, which surpasses the whole created order. A theology of grace that wishes to remain faithful to the Church’s worship must therefore account both for the ontological transformation of the human subject and for the integrity of his freedom.

The present study proposes to approach this question in three tightly related perspectives. First, by examining the Thomistic account of uncreated and created grace, and of habitual grace as *habitus* rendering man *capax Dei*; secondly, by situating this within the Christological and magisterial decisions of the great Councils (Chalcedon, Constantinople III), in which the possibility of synergy is grounded in the unique Person of Christ with His two natures, wills, and operations; thirdly, by engaging the Palamite doctrine of essence and energies and the Byzantine liturgical patrimony, where the deifying light of grace and the free response of the Church are enacted in the *lex orandi*. In this way, the theo-anthropological encounter will be seen, in an explicitly Christocentric manner, as participation in the Trinitarian life through the missions of the Son and the Spirit, and as the proper horizon within which human freedom attains its fullness.

3. Grace and the Theo-Anthropological Meeting in Thomistic Perspective

3.1. A Thomistic Christological Outlook on Grace

Creation, in Aquinas’s vision, is not a closed edifice but an ordered movement of exitus-reditus: all things proceed from God and are called to

return to Him³. Within this teleology, grace is no extrinsic patch upon nature; it belongs to the Creator's intention that rational creatures be elevated to participation in His own life. The Christological axis is decisive: the visible mission of the Son, with the concomitant mission of the Spirit, grounds the creature's access to God, so that grace appears as the form taken by divine self-communication in Christ and through the Spirit⁴.

Thus the theo-anthropological meeting is neither competition nor confusion: God is first cause, the human agent true secondary cause. Divine causality causes free human acts as free; grace heals, elevates, and perfects liberty, eliciting a filial response that is at once God's gift and man's own act⁵.

3.2. *Uncreated Grace and Created Participation in Aquinas*

3.2.1. Finality and the Twofold Aspect of Grace

For Thomas, the ultimate end (*finis ultimus*) of the human being – beatitude – has an uncreated dimension in respect of its *object and cause*: God Himself, the uncreated Good, is our blessedness⁶. Yet there is also a created dimension in respect of the *subject who enjoys*: a habitual form is infused into the soul, rendering it *capax Dei* and disposing it to the act of cleaving to God. This is created grace – not a substance, but an entitative habitus in the soul, a stable participation that orders the person to God as end.

³ J. Ratzinger, *Theology of the Liturgy: The Sacramental Foundation of Christian Existence*, Ed. Michael J. Miller, trans. John Saward, et al., San Francisco 2014, 15.

⁴ Ratzinger, *Theology of the Liturgy* 15.

⁵ On the relation between divine primary causality and created secondary causality in the order of grace, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II, qq. 109-114, esp. q. 111, a. 2 (on God's interior motion of the will in grace) and q. 112, a. 3 (on the gratuitousness of the first grace), in Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae*. 8 Vols. Edited by John Mortensen and Enrique Alacron. Translated by Laurence Shapcote O.P. Lander, Wyoming: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012.

⁶ Cfr. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q.110, art. 1, resp., in: *The Library of Christian Classics, Vol. XI, Nature and Grace, Selections from the Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*, A. M. Fairweather, M.A., S.T.M. trans. & ed., Philadelphia 2016.

Thomas receives and corrects earlier lines (Augustine's *auxilium*, Lombard's identification of grace with the indwelling Spirit⁷): if grace were only the Spirit's indwelling, the human would risk becoming a mere instrument; by positing a created habitus, Thomas safeguards both the Spirit's indwelling (uncreated grace) and the creature's transformed subjectivity (created grace). The invisible mission of the Spirit is precisely to give this created participation and to dwell in it as in His temple⁸.

3.2.2. Eucharistic Orientation and the Primacy of the Uncreated

Sacramentally, the *Eucharist* is not simply one grace-bearing sign among others; it contains the very cause of grace, since it is the sacramental presence of Christ Himself, true God and true man, in the unity of His person⁹. In virtue of the *communicatio idiomatum*¹⁰, the humanity of Christ becomes the instrument of His divinity: it is through His assumed flesh that the uncreated life of God touches the creature. Consequently, the Eucharist stands at the heart of the Church's pilgrimage as the *locus* where created reality is most intimately ordered to its uncreated end¹¹.

In this perspective, one may indeed speak of a *quasi-chronological*¹² priority of created dispositions – faith, charity, sacramental configuration – by which the human subject is prepared for, and more deeply opened to, the indwelling of the Spirit. Sacramental grace presupposes faith and tends to charity; through repeated participation, the believer is conformed ever more closely to the Paschal form of Christ¹³. Yet, in a strict *ontological* sense, the

⁷ Cfr. Ch. Journet, *The meaning of Grace*, trans. A.V. Littledale, London 1996, 21.

⁸ Cfr. *ST I-II*, q. 112, art. 1, ad. 2.

⁹ Ratzinger, *Theology of the Liturgy* 16.

¹⁰ Cfr. Teofan, Mitropolit al Moldovei și Bucovinei, *Divino-umanitatea lui Hristos și îndumnezeirea omului în gândirea Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul*, Iași 2019, 44.

¹¹ Cfr. Teofan, *Divino-umanitatea lui Hristos și îndumnezeirea omului* 44.

¹² Quasi-chronological realisation in the sense that when one receives the created grace, that will be automatically at that very moment in God's being, i.e., in the uncreated grace. Since "the being of an accident is to inhere". Cfr. *ST I-II*, q.110, art. 2, ad. 2.

¹³ Cfr. *ST I*, q.43, art. 3, resp.

primacy belongs irrevocably to the *uncreated Gift*: it is the Holy Spirit, given through the glorified humanity of Christ, who brings about every created participation. What is first is not our disposition, but the presence of the Crucified and Risen One, offering Himself for us and to us.

Aquinas' teleological vision allows us to describe this in terms of *exitus-reditus*. The Eucharist is the sacramental summit of the *reditus*: in it, the Church advances "from sign to res, from sacrament to fruitio"¹⁴. The consecrated bread and wine already contain, in a veiled mode, the final reality toward which all creation is ordered: the *Christological fullness* in which the world is destined to be taken up and transformed. In the Eucharistic Body, matter itself is already, in anticipation, caught up into the worship of God. The Church's journey from altar to altar, from one celebration to another, is thus not a closed ritual cycle, but the concrete form of her movement towards the definitive vision and enjoyment of the triune God, whose uncreated light is already present and active in the sacramental mystery.

3.2. Habitual Grace and the Transformation of the Human Subject

3.3.1. Habitus and the Anthropological Pole

Aquinas receives the Aristotelian analysis of change and habit only to the extent that it serves a properly theological anthropology. He adopts and deepens certain Aristotelian terms in order to describe, as precisely as possible, what takes place in the *theo-anthropological relationship of grace*. The phenomenon of change – understood in a Christian sense as *metanoia* – had been analysed by Aristotle according to two basic schemes, both grounded in *hylomorphism*, which

¹⁴ On the sacrament as *signum* ordered to a *res* which surpasses the visible rite, see Thomas Aquinas, *ST III*, q. 73, art. 1; q. 79, art. 1, where the Eucharist is described as containing Christ Himself, the cause of grace and "pledge of future glory", and *ST III*, q. 62, art. 1, on the sacraments as instrumental causes. The final *res* of the sacramental economy is the *fruitio Dei* in the beatific vision: cf. *ST I-II*, q. 3, art. 4; q. 4, art. 1. For a synthetic presentation of this movement "from sign to res, from sacrament to fruitio" in a Christocentric and Trinitarian key, see also G. Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of St Thomas Aquinas*, Oxford 2007, 329-338.

distinguishes two ontological principles: matter – ὕλη (*hylē*) – and form – μορφή (*morphē*)¹⁵. Within this framework, change can be seen either as the passage from *potentiality to act* (δυνάμις / ἐνέργεια, *dynamis / energeia*)¹⁶, or as the alteration of *accidents* (συμβεβηκός, *symbebēkos*)¹⁷ while the underlying substance remains¹⁸.

Aquinas takes up this grammar in order to speak of a more radical, interior transformation. In the order of human acting, a *habitus* is a stable quality by which actions become not only possible, but in a certain sense *connatural* and “easy”¹⁹. The human person does not merely *have* habits as external additions; through them he in a real way *becomes* what he does. Some “accidents,”²⁰ such as knowledge and love, are so intimately bound to the subject that they come close to expressing what the person is²¹.

Within this horizon, *created grace* is understood as an *entitative habitus*: a supernatural form infused into the very being of the soul. It does not change the human substance into something other than human, but it elevates the subject, giving him a new capacity and orientation which exceed his natural powers²². The Christian *metanoia* is thus not merely a moral adjustment, but an ontological reconfiguration from within. Upon this entitative grace rest the *operative habits* – above all the infused theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, together with the infused moral virtues – through which the person is able to act in a way proportioned to God as his immediate end. In this sense, grace touches the *deep structure* of the human being and then unfolds into a new style of acting.

¹⁵ Cfr. Aristotle, *Metaphysics: Book VII*, §3, in: Jonathan Branes, *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, Vols. I&II, New Jersey, 2014, 1690.

¹⁶ Cfr. Aristotle, *Metaphysics: Book VI*, §6 1719.

¹⁷ Cfr. Aristotle, *Metaphysics: Book VI*, §4 1659.

¹⁸ Cfr. Aristotle, *Metaphysics: Book VI*, §6, 1719.

¹⁹ Cfr. *ST I-II*, q. 49, art. 1, resp.

²⁰ Cfr. Aristotle, *Metaphysics: Book VII*, §9, 1702. See also Aristotle, *Topics: Book I*, §9, 187.

²¹ Cfr. *ST I-II*, q. 110, art. 3, ad. 3

²² Cfr. *ST I*, q. 77, art. 6

3.3.2. Freedom, Virtue, and Cooperation

In Aquinas, divine causality is not an external force that pushes the will from without; it is an *interior motion*, by which God gives the will both the act and its freedom. God moves free acts *as free*, so that the more grace is active, the more the person truly acts himself. The traditional distinctions of *prevenient*, *concurrent* and *subsequent* grace are meant to safeguard precisely this: grace prepares, accompanies and brings to completion the human act, without suppressing its proper causality²³.

Within this dynamism, the *virtues* play a central role²⁴. Charity, as the form of all the virtues, gives their orientation and unity to the entire moral organism. Under its influence, the human subject is drawn into a *Christiform pattern* of existence: his judgments, choices and affections are gradually shaped according to the measure of the Son's love for the Father and for the brethren²⁵. Cooperation is not an independent contribution laid alongside grace, but the very mode in which grace becomes fruitful: through repeated acts of faith, hope and charity, the infused habits are strengthened, and the person is progressively conformed to Christ. In this sense, the synergy of grace and freedom is nothing other than the historical unfolding of a life lived "in Christ" and "from the Spirit".

3.3.3. Summary: Connaturalisation to the Divine Life

Habitual grace, in Aquinas, can thus be described as a work of *connaturalisation*. By grace, the human being does not simply know, from without, that God is his end; he begins to "taste" divine things from within, as one to whom they now correspond²⁶. The gifts of the Holy Spirit, and above all the gift of wisdom, express this connatural knowledge by which the believer begins to see and to judge according to God's own measure²⁷.

²³ Cfr. *ST I*, q. 38, art. 1, ad. 1

²⁴ Cfr. *ST I-II*, q. 55, art.1, resp.

²⁵ Cfr. D. Legge, *The Trinitarian Christology of St Thomas Aquinas*, Oxford 2017, 26-27.

²⁶ Cfr. *ST III*, q. 69, art. 6, resp.; Cfr. *ST I-II*, q. 110, art. 2, resp.

²⁷ Cfr. *ST I-II*, q.110, art. 2, resp.

The result of this process is not absorption or the loss of creaturely identity, but the emergence of true *filial freedom*. The human person, configured to the Son and indwelt by the Spirit, acts *in Christo* and *ex Spiritu*: his freedom becomes a participation in the Son's own yes to the Father. In this way, habitual grace anticipates, under the veil of faith and sacrament, what will one day be given in full clarity in the *visio Dei*: the uncreated end – God Himself – will become the beatifying act of the creature, without ceasing to be, in its origin, pure Gift²⁸.

4. The Magisterial and Christological Foundations of Synergy

4.1. The Trinitarian Economy and the Christiform Perspective

The economy of grace is, in its deepest structure, *Trinitarian* and *Christocentric*. The Father wills, from all eternity, to communicate His own life; the Son is entrusted with the realisation of this plan by His Incarnation and Paschal Mystery; the Holy Spirit is given so that this mystery may become interior to believers and to the Church. The goal is sanctification in the Spirit and filial adoption through the Son, ordered to the praise of the Father's glory²⁹.

This perspective is not an abstract scheme, but is reflected concretely in the *liturgical voice* of the Church, above all in the Byzantine tradition. The troparion of the Annunciation proclaims:

“Today is the fountainhead of our salvation and the manifestation of the mystery which was from eternity. The Son of God becometh the Virgin's Son...”³⁰.

Here the Incarnation is confessed as both the *source* of salvation and the *epiphany* of the eternal counsel. The Son, through whom all things were created, becomes the operative and exemplary form of our deification. The doctrinal decisions of the Church – conciliar and magisterial – will therefore

²⁸ Cfr. *ST III*, q.79, art. 3, resp.

²⁹ Cfr. Legge, *The Trinitarian Christology* 24.

³⁰ The troparia form The Annunciation, in: *Orologhion*, 401.

be read from this Christiform centre: they articulate under what conditions we may speak of a true synergy between divine grace and human freedom without undermining either the primacy of God or the integrity of the creature.

4.2. *The Incarnation of the Logos as Fountainhead of Salvation*

The Incarnation of the Logos constitutes the *ontological foundation* of every charismatic adoption. In assuming our nature, the Son unites the human to the divine in His own person, opening the possibility that men and women should become “sons in the Son”³¹. The hypostatic union is the unique and unsurpassable form of this communication; sacramental and ecclesial participation are its prolongation in history.

Liturgically, the Incarnation is contemplated as the moment when the “*mystery from eternity*” is manifested, and when the *Kingdom* is set in motion within history. By incorporation into the Mystical Body of Christ, believers – while remaining creatures – receive the *Spirit of sonship*, who enables them to cry “Abba, Father” (Rom 8,15; Gal 4,6)³². The Christological principle is decisive: participation in God is always *in Christo*, mediated by His humanity and actualised by the Spirit.

4.3. *Christiform Deification in the Light of the Chalcedonian Definition*

The Fourth Ecumenical Council (Chalcedon, 451) defined the mystery of Christ as *one person in two natures*, “without confusion or change, without division or separation”³³. While directed primarily against Christological heresies, this definition has immediate soteriological consequences. Only if Christ is truly God and truly man, with a complete human nature, can there be

³¹ Cfr. D. Tselenghidis, *Har și libertate în tradiția patristică a secolului al XIV-lea: contribuție la soteriologia Bisericii Ortodoxe*, Iași 2015, 65.

³² Cfr. Tselenghidis, *Har și libertate* 65.

³³ Cfr. Council of Chalcedon (Fourth Ecumenical): *The Chalcedonian Creed*, October 22, 451, DS §302, in: Peter Hünermann et al., eds., *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, 43rd ed. San Francisco 2012.

genuine healing and elevation of that nature: *quod non est assumptum non est sanatum*³⁴.

Applied analogically, the Chalcedonian adverbs provide a grammar for speaking of *grace and nature*. Deifying grace does not “mix” with nature into some intermediate entity, nor does it abolish nature; it unites with nature *without confusion*, and perfects it *without separation* from its own created reality. The human being does not become a “demigod,” but remains fully human while being reordered, from within, to participation in the divine life. Any valid theology of synergy must preserve, in this line, both the *ontological difference* between Creator and creature, and the *real communication* of the divine life³⁵.

4.4. Freedom in Slava and the Dyothelite Christ: The Third Council of Constantinople and Christiform Perichōrēsis

The Sixth Ecumenical Council (Third Council of Constantinople, 680–681) developed Chalcedon in a more *dynamic* key, by affirming in Christ two natural wills and two natural operations – divine and human – united in the one Hypostasis of the Son. Against *monoenergism* and *monothelitism*, which threatened to absorb the human will into the divine, the Council confessed that Christ’s human will truly *cooperates*, in obedience, with the divine will. The scene of Gethsemane (“not what I will, but what Thou wilt”³⁶) thus becomes a privileged locus for contemplating synergy: the human will, naturally shrinking before death, freely consents to the salvific will of the Father³⁷.

In this context, the concept of *περιχώρησις* (*perichōrēsis*)³⁸ receives a Christological application: the two natures, with their properties, interpenetrate without confusion in the one person. Scriptural expressions such as “they

³⁴ Benedict XVI (b. 1927): St Gregory Nazianzen, General Audience, (08.11.2007 and 22.11.2007), <https://enlargingtheheart.wordpress.com/2013/01/02/benedict-xvi-gregory-nazianzen-what-has-not-been-assumed-has-not-been-healed/>

³⁵ Cfr. Teofan, *Divino-umanitatea lui Hristos și îndumnezeirea omului* 52.

³⁶ Cfr. Teofan, *Divino-umanitatea lui Hristos și îndumnezeirea omului* 213.

³⁷ Cfr. Teofan, *Divino-umanitatea lui Hristos și îndumnezeirea omului* 213.

³⁸ See *περιχώρησις* in: G.W.H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Oxford 1961, 1066.

crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Cor 2,8)³⁹ presuppose this communication of idioms⁴⁰. One may say that in the Paschal Mystery there is a *Christiform perichōrēsis of wills and operations*: the human will of Jesus adheres universally and concretely to the divine will, and in this adherence the true human drama is not effaced but fulfilled⁴¹.

This dyothelite Christology provides the deepest basis for a theology of *freedom in Slava*. In the glorified Christ, human freedom has reached its definitive form as filial obedience. The saints, conformed to Christ by grace, are drawn into this same pattern: their freedom is not absorption into the divine, but *participation* in the Son’s own liberty before the Father, in the Holy Spirit⁴². In this sense, the conciliar Christological definitions are not merely “background” to a doctrine of grace; they are its *structural condition of possibility*⁴³.

5. Palamite Theology and Deifying Grace: Essence, Energies, and Synergeia

5.1. The Palamite Theology of Deifying Grace

In the Byzantine tradition, the mystery of grace is formulated above all in terms of *light* and *deification*. St Gregory Palamas provides the conceptual precision needed to articulate this experience without collapsing the distinction between Creator and creature⁴⁴. He speaks first of *nature* – φύσις (*physis*) – as that which characterises all beings that are created and thus essentially distinct from the Creator⁴⁵. God, strictly speaking, is not “a nature” among others; He transcends the entire order of created natures.

³⁹ Cfr. Teofan, *Divino-umanitatea lui Hristos și îndumnezeirea omului* 162.

⁴⁰ Cfr. Teofan, *Divino-umanitatea lui Hristos și îndumnezeirea omului* 214.

⁴¹ Cfr. Teofan, *Divino-umanitatea lui Hristos și îndumnezeirea omului* 215.

⁴² St. Maximus the Confessor, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 59, in: D. Stăniloae, ed., trans., *Filocalia sau Culegere din scrierile Sfinților Părinți, care arată cum se poate omul curăți, lumina și desăvârși*, Vol. 3: *Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul*, 12 vols., București 2017, 257.

⁴³ Cfr. St. Maximus the Confessor, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 59, in: Stăniloae, *Filocalia* 257.

⁴⁴ Cfr. J. Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, trans George Lawrence, London 1964, 162.

⁴⁵ Cfr. Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas* 164.

At the same time, Palamas does not hesitate to apply the term *χάρις* (*charis*, grace) both to realities created and to realities uncreated. This is possible because the word designates, in the first instance, what is *freely given*: all that “flows from the Spirit” to those who have been baptised and rendered spiritual “comes from the Source and remains in it” (ἐξ αὐτῆς τε ἐστὶ καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ)⁴⁶. The multiplicity of graces does not undermine the unity of the divine Giver; rather, it manifests the *energies* of the one God who, while remaining inaccessible in His *ousia* (*ousia*, essence), communicates Himself truly through His operations.

In Palamite doctrine, the *uncreated energies* of God, flowing eternally from the *super-essence* (ὑπερουσία, *hyperousia*), are communicated in the Spirit so as to make us participants in the life of the Holy Trinity – what the Gospel calls the Kingdom of God⁴⁷. The *Kingdom* is thus not merely a future state, but the uncreated reality into which the Church is introduced sacramentally, especially in the Divine Liturgy, which begins by blessing “the Kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages”⁴⁸.

5.2. Created and Uncreated Grace in St Gregory Palamas

Palamas’ reading of Scripture shows a nuanced distinction between a *created* renewal of man and the *uncreated* Gift Himself. Commenting on Ezekiel’s promise “–A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you” (Ez 36,26), and “I will put my Spirit within you” (Ez 37,5) – he notes the difference: the “new heart” and “new spirit” are *created realities*, what the Apostle calls a “new creation” (καὶνὴ κτίσις, 2 Cor 5,17; Gal 6,15), while the “Spirit of God” given to that heart is none other than the *Holy Spirit* Himself.

In this sense one may speak of a *created grace* – the renewed state of the human being – and of another grace that is *uncreated* – the personal Gift of the Spirit and the uncreated energies of God. Palamas can therefore say:

⁴⁶ Cfr. Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas* 164.

⁴⁷ Cfr. Aidan Nichols, O.P., *Mystical Theologian: The Work of Vladimir Lossky*, Leominster 2017, 36.

⁴⁸ Cfr. V. Suci, *Liturghier: Dumnezeuestile și Sfintele Liturghii ale celor dintru sfinți părinților noștri Ioan Gura-de-Aur, Vasile cel Mare și Grigorie Dialogul*, Blaj 1931, 52.

“There is a created grace and another grace uncreated; but since the gift which the saints receive, and by which they are deified, is none other than God Himself, how can one say that this also is a created grace?”⁴⁹. The distinction is clear: created grace denotes the *effect* in us; uncreated grace denotes the *divine presence* itself. It is the latter that truly deifies.

Thus, while all that is given comes “by grace”, not all that is given is of the same ontological order. The triune God reveals Himself under many forms – mercy, glory, light – according to His *ad extra* operations. Yet He remains inaccessible in His essence, “distinguishing Himself while remaining simple, becoming manifold without leaving His unity; in Him the unions prevail over the distinctions”⁵⁰.

5.3. *Synergeia and the Divine Hexis*⁵¹: *Human Freedom in the Light of the Energies*

If the whole path from the fallen state to union with the Trinity is traversed under the radiance of deifying grace, it is not traversed *without* human cooperation. For Palamas, the *synergy* (συνεργία, *synergeia*) of deifying grace and human effort is an obvious axiom. Grace restores the inner powers of soul and body to their proper order, but its final purpose is to make the human person *surpass himself*, to contemplate the divine life of *Slava* already here below, in the mystery of the blessed Kingdom⁵².

⁴⁹ Cfr. *Against Akindynos*, III, § 8, in: St. Grigorie Palama, *Opere Complete*, Vol. II, Trad. C. Chivu, București 2019, 299.

⁵⁰ Cfr. V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, Cambridge 1957, 72.

⁵¹ On ἕξις (*hexis*) as a stable quality or disposition, see Aristotle, *Categoriae* 8, 9b22-10a10; *The Nicomachean Ethics* II, 5, 1105b25-1106a13. Translated by David Ross. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009. Thomas Aquinas receives this notion in his account of habitus as a quality disposing the subject to act connaturally in a certain way: Cfr. *ST I-II*, qq. 49-54, esp. q. 49, art. 1 and q. 50, art. 1. In a Palamite key, the expression ἕξις θεϊα (“divine state”) denotes the graced condition of the human person who, through the energies of God and the practice of the commandments, comes to possess God within himself; see Gregory Palamas, *Triads*, III, 1, ed. J. Meyendorff, *Gregorios Palamas: Défense des saints hésychastes*, SC 153-159, and the synthesis in Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas* 202-210.

⁵² Cfr. Meyendorff, *A study of Gregory Palamas* 164.

Palamas takes up the Platonic intuition concerning the *mind* – νοῦς (*nous*) – as the element in man naturally oriented to what lies beyond him, but insists that this natural capacity is insufficient to attain what is beyond the created order. The change that occurs in the *nous* is wrought by uncreated light. Against Barlaam of Calabria, who reduced mystical vision to the mind's self-contemplation, Palamas affirms that when the mind "sees itself, it sees itself other": it perceives on its own image the *Slava* impressed by the grace of God, which strengthens it to surpass itself and to be united to the Good beyond understanding⁵³.

It is not the *nous* alone that receives grace, but the *whole human being*, soul and body. Man is raised to what Palamas calls a ἕξις θεῖα (*hexis theia*), a "divine state," which is the fruit of the synergy between divine energies and human will, manifested in the "practice of the commandments"⁵⁴. "It is when thou hast in thy soul the divine state," he writes, "that thou truly possessest God within thyself; and the true divine state is love towards God, which is preserved only by the practice of the commandments"⁵⁵.

This *divine state* is not static: it implies perpetual progress, because it presupposes cooperation here and now. Hence the insistence on "works" is not Pelagian. Palamas carefully avoids both Messalianism and Pelagianism. Union with God, he says, is not the result of a technique or of intellectual causality, but of a *disentanglement* that itself remains grace: if union depended simply on our own disentanglement, "that would be the doctrine of the Messalians"⁵⁶.

At the same time, one cannot speak honestly of faith and adherence to Christ apart from the *power and collaboration* which He grants; nor can Christ speak openly in our favour in the age to come if He finds no correspondence in our conduct, "for God has created us free"⁵⁷. In this light, the sinless Adam in Eden already prefigures true synergy: he was truly free insofar as he

⁵³ Cfr. Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas* 165.

⁵⁴ Cfr. Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas* 165.

⁵⁵ Cfr. Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas* 165.

⁵⁶ Cfr. Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas* 166.

⁵⁷ Cfr. Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas* 166.

participated in the divine life of the Trinity, in the *Slava* of the Kingdom. The Fall broke this communion; Christ, the New Adam, restores and surpasses it.

Thus, in Palamite theology, divine grace and human freedom do not stand in opposition but mutually presuppose one another. True human freedom subsists ultimately in the *blessed Kingdom*, in the very *κοινωνία* (*koinōnia*) with the Trinity, in the light of the divine *Slava* – Christ the God-Man, who is both the radiant content of that light and the living *Principle of the theo-anthropological axis*.

6. The *Lex Orandi* as Liturgical Axis of Deification

6.1. The Paschal Mystery and the Liturgical Axis of the Kingdom

The Second Vatican Council describes the liturgy as “an action of Christ the Priest and of His Body which is the Church,” in which the work of redemption is made present above all through the Paschal Mystery of Christ’s Passion, Resurrection and Ascension⁵⁸. From this centre, the whole liturgical life appears as the *historical actualisation of the Kingdom*: the Lord, seated at the right hand of the Father, continues to act in His Body through the sacramental signs and the ecclesial prayer.

From a Byzantine viewpoint, this Paschal centre is contemplated in a strikingly dramatic perspective: the descent of Christ into Hades and His victory over death. The Church sings, on Holy and Great Saturday, of the immortal Life who descends into death and “slays Hades with the lightning of His divinity”.⁵⁹ The prophecy of Isaiah “ –The people walking in darkness have seen a great light” (Is 9,2) – is thus received in a literal, christological sense: the “region and shadow of death” is illumined from within by the uncreated light of the crucified and risen Lord.

The liturgy, in this horizon, is not a mere commemoration of past events, but the *place where the descent and rising of Christ touch the Church*

⁵⁸ Cfr. Ratzinger, *The Theology of the Liturgy* 541.

⁵⁹ *Τροπάρια* from *Sanctum et Magnum Sabbatum*, § 3131, in: E. Lodi, *Enchiridion Euchologicum Fontium Liturgicorum*, Roma 1979, 1502.

today. The *lex orandi* becomes the axis along which the creature is drawn from darkness into the light of the Kingdom, from slavery to the freedom of the children of God.

6.2. “Come, Receive the Light”: Paschal Illumination and the Joyful Light of Slava

The Paschal Vigil in the Byzantine rite begins with the solemn invitation: “Come, receive the Light!”. The faithful receive the flame that proceeds from the altar and pass it from one to another, signifying that the light of the Resurrection is not merely contemplated but *shared* and *transmitted*.⁶⁰ To understand the theological density of this gesture, the tradition places it against the backdrop of the *cosmic* and *eschatological* imagery of the Psalms and the Vespers.

Psalm 103(104), the “psalm of creation” sung at Vespers, proclaims: “He appointed the moon for seasons; the sun knows its setting” (Ps 103,19 LXX)⁶¹. In the light of Pascha, the “setting” of the sun becomes a figure of the *descent* of the true Sun of righteousness into death; the “evening” becomes the hour in which another Light appears. The ancient hymn Φῶς Ἰλαρόν (*Phōs Hilaron*) gives voice to this perception:

Φῶς Ἰλαρόν ἁγίας δόξης
ἀθανάτου Πατρός,
οὐρανίου, ἁγίου, μακάρος,
Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ...

O Joyful Light of the holy *Doxa*
of the immortal Father,
heavenly, holy, blessed,
O Jesus Christ...”.⁶²

As the Church comes “to the setting of the sun” and beholds the “evening light”, she confesses Christ as the *Joyful Light* of the Father’s *Slava*, and glorifies the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, God. The created sun and

⁶⁰ *Τροπάρια* from *Sanctum et Magnum Sabbatum*, § 3131, in: Lodi, *Enchiridion Euchologicum* 1502.

⁶¹ See the Office of the Vespers, in: *Orologhion* 172.

⁶² *Hymnus lucernarius*, § 300, in: Lodi, *Enchiridion Euchologicum* 168.

the rhythm of day and night become a *cosmic icon* of the Paschal Mystery: the visible twilight opens onto the invisible radiance of the risen Christ.

Within this illuminating centre, the faithful are clothed anew. In the Vespers prayer to the One “who alone hast immortality and dwellest in unapproachable light”, the Church implores that God would “clothe us with the armour of light”, so that, enlightened by the practice of the commandments, we might rise “in joyfulness of soul” to glorify His goodness⁶³. Here the *ethos of Christian life* is explicitly related to light: grace gives not only insight, but a way of being, a participation in the ζῶῃ (zōē) conferred by the Son.

6.3. *Nunc dimittis: Freedom in the Light of Slava*

Following the hymn Φῶς Ἰλαρόν in the Sunday Vespers, Psalm 92(93) is evoked with its proclamation: “The Lord reigns; He is clothed with majesty” (Ps 93,1). The Lord’s royal “garment” allows a threefold theological reading.

First, from a Christological viewpoint, “He has clothed Himself with power and has girded Himself” (Ps 93,1b) can be received as an allusion to the *Incarnation*, in which the Son clothes Himself with our humanity and, through it, gathers the whole created cosmos under the radiance of His divine attributes. The Proskomide prayer echoes this intuition: “Thy virtue hath covered the heavens, O Christ, and the earth is full of Thy praise”⁶⁴. The divine power is experienced as *light that sanctifies* – as deifying grace covering the creature in the garment of *Slava*⁶⁵.

Secondly, “He has established the world, which shall not be moved” (Ps 93,1c) hints, in a typological key, at the unshakeable character of *the Kingdom that subsists in Christ*. The stability of the created order, willed and governed by God, appears as a sign of the definitive βασιλεία (*basileia*), toward which history is ordered and from which grace already comes. The Church lives

⁶³ Cfr. Seventh Prayer from the Vesper, in: *Orologhion* 176-177.

⁶⁴ Cfr. The Divine Liturgy, Proskomede, or order of preparation of the gifts, in: Suciu, *Liturghier* 58.

⁶⁵ Cfr. The Divine Liturgy, Proskomede, in: Suciu, *Liturghier* 58.

between promise and fulfilment, yet in the liturgical today she “tastes” the firmness of the Kingdom.

Thirdly, “Holiness befits Thy house, O Lord, unto length of days” (Ps 93,5) opens an ecclesiological and mariological perspective. Holiness belongs to God in an eminent way, but this holiness is communicated *ad extra* by Christ and the Spirit to the Church and, in a singular manner, to the Θεοτόκος (*Theotokos*). A Lenten troparion prays: “Standing in the Church of Thy *Slava*, we seem to stand in Heaven. O Theotokos, Gate of Heaven, open unto us the Door of Thy mercy.”⁶⁶

The analogy between the *Church of Slava* and the Theotokos underscores a profound unity along the *theo-anthropological axis*. Neither the Church nor Mary possesses *Slava* from themselves; they receive it by grace, through their cooperation with the illuminating Logos and the descent of the Spirit. In them, the faithful discern what it means for a created person to become truly *transparent* to the light of the Kingdom.

In the Western tradition, Vespers often culminate in the canticle of Simeon, the *Nunc dimittis*: “Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, O Lord, according to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation...” (Lk 2,29-30). Here, *freedom in the light of Slava* receives a profoundly personal voice. Simeon’s “now” marks the moment when the eyes that have long awaited the fulfilment of the promise finally behold the Light; seeing, he is free to depart “in peace”. This is not a flight from the world, but a passage into the definitive communion for which man has been created.

Thus, in East and West alike, the *lex orandi* shows that divine grace and human freedom converge in a *liturgical experience of light*: Christ, the Light of the Father’s *Slava*, shines in the darkness of death, gathers the Church into His Paschal victory, and grants to the faithful a foretaste of that Kingdom in which freedom will be fully realised as filial participation in the life of the Trinity⁶⁷.

⁶⁶ Cfr. The *Marian troparia* form the Order of Utrenya during Lenten Service, in *Orologhion* 106.

⁶⁷ Cfr. The Divine Liturgy, the after communion hymns, in: Suci, *Liturghier* 106.

**General Conclusion: “Be Illumined, O New Jerusalem” – Deifying
Grace, Christiform Synergy, and the Triune Light**

The point of departure of this study has been the conviction that grace, in its full Christian sense, cannot be separated from the *Trinitarian* and *Christological* form of the divine economy, nor from its liturgical manifestation in the *lex orandi*. The biblical and patristic witness, received and articulated in both Thomistic scholasticism and Palamite theology, converges on this central affirmation: grace is the free self-communication of the triune God, given *in Christ* and *through the Spirit*, in order to lead the human creature into participation in the divine life.

From the Thomistic side, we have seen that grace possesses a *twofold aspect*. As to its *object and cause*, the blessedness to which man is ordered is *uncreated*: God Himself, the infinite Good, is our beatitude. As to the *subject who is brought to this end*, there is a *created participation* infused into the soul, a habitual form which makes the human being *capax Dei* and disposes him to acts of faith, hope and charity. This created grace, understood as *entitative habitus*, does not rival the uncreated Gift but presupposes it; it is the interior configuration by which the Spirit’s invisible mission can dwell in us as in a temple. Grace thus appears as the mode in which the *Paschal charity of Christ* and the *interior gift of the Spirit* are made operative in the believer.

At the Palamite level, the same mystery is expressed in the language of *essence and energies*. God remains inaccessible in His *ousia*, yet communicates Himself truly through His *uncreated energies*, by which He makes us participants in the life of the Trinity, that is, in the *Kingdom*. In this framework, it is possible to distinguish between a “created grace,” namely the renewed state of the human being, and an “uncreated grace,” namely the Holy Spirit and the deifying energies themselves. The former denotes the *effect* in us; the latter denotes the *divine presence* by which we are truly deified. The distinction safeguards at once the *transcendence of God* and the *reality of participation*: the creature does not become God by essence, yet is truly taken up into the radiance of the divine *Slava*.

Both perspectives converge in a common concern: to articulate a genuine synergy between divine grace and human freedom. For Aquinas, God is the first cause who moves free acts as free; His motion neither constrains nor replaces the creature, but elicits and sustains its own causality. For Palamas, the ἐξῆς θεΐα, the “divine state,” is the fruit of a cooperation in which the believer, empowered by the uncreated energies, responds in love and in the “practice of the commandments”. In neither case is union with God the product of a merely human technique; nor is it a passive absorption which would render freedom illusory. Rather, freedom itself is fulfilled precisely in being drawn into the filial obedience of the Son, in the Spirit.

The Christological decisions of the Councils are decisive for this entire construction. At Chalcedon, the Church confesses the one person of Christ in two natures, “without confusion or change, without division or separation”. This definition excludes both any fusion of divine and human and any separation that would undermine the reality of redemption. Analogically, it provides the grammar for a theology of grace that neither dissolves nature into grace nor reduces grace to an external adjunct. Grace must be understood as a *union without confusion*, a perfection of nature which leaves its created reality intact, while orienting it beyond itself.

At Constantinople III, the confession of two wills and two operations in Christ specifies this unity in a dynamic key: the human will of Jesus, in Gethsemane and throughout His earthly life, truly adheres to the divine will in a free and obedient consent. Here the deepest model of synergeia is given: in Christ, human freedom reaches its perfection not by withdrawal from God, but by absolute openness to the Father’s salvific will. The saints, conformed to Christ by grace, are drawn into this same pattern: their liberty becomes a participation in the Son’s own freedom before the Father.

Within this Christological and Trinitarian framework, the *liturgical life* of the Church appears as the concrete axis along which the drama of grace and freedom unfolds. The Divine Liturgy and the Byzantine offices, with their rich symbolism of light and *Slava*, do not merely illustrate doctrinal truths; they enact the passage from darkness to light, from death to life, from isolation to κοινωνία. The exclamation “Come, receive the Light!” at the Paschal Vigil, the hymn Φῶς Ἰλαρόν at Vespers, the proclamation “Blessed is the Kingdom

of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” at the beginning of the Liturgy – all these liturgical forms translate into gesture, word and song the same reality that theology seeks to express conceptually: *the triune Light descends into the darkness of death and gathers the Church into its radiance*.

In this sense, the *lex orandi* and the *lex credendi* are mutually implicative. The eucharistic celebration, in which the Church offers back to the Father “Thine own of Thine own”, makes visible the movement of *exitus-reditus*: all comes from God and all is ordered to return to Him in Christ and through the Spirit. The believer, incorporated into the Mystical Body, lives his freedom as a *Eucharistic “Amen”* to the divine initiative. The practice of the virtues, the ascetical struggle, the observance of the commandments are not external conditions, but the concrete form taken by this liturgical consent in daily life.

The *ecclesial* and *mariological* dimensions belong intrinsically to this axis. The Church is the *nova Ierusalem* in which the light of the Risen One already shines; the Θεοτόκος, as “Gate of Heaven” and “full of grace,” manifests in a unique way what it means for a creature to be wholly transparent to the divine light. In her fiat, as in the Church’s Eucharistic Amen, the human yes and the divine gift meet without rivalry: grace is entirely prior, yet freedom is fully engaged.

We can therefore say that the *deifying grace* we have considered is at once *Christiform* and *Trinitarian*. It is Christiform, because all participation in God is rooted in the Incarnation and Paschal Mystery of the Son; it is Trinitarian, because it comes from the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit, and leads back to the Father in the same Spirit through the same Son. The theological lines we have followed – Thomistic, Palamite, liturgical – are not rival paths but complementary articulations of this one mystery.

The Greek verse that crowns our reflection, Φωτίζου, φωτίζου ἡ νέα Ἱερουσαλήμ, ἡ γὰρ Δόξα Κυρίου σὲ ἀνέτειλε, “Be illumined, be illumined, O new Jerusalem, for the *Slava* of the Lord has shine upon thee,”⁶⁸ expresses, in liturgical form, what doctrine seeks to articulate. The Church, as new Jerusalem, is called to shine with a light that does not come from herself but from the *risen*

⁶⁸ Ὡς δὲ θ’. Ὁ εἰρμός, § 3139, in: Lodi, *Enchiridion Euchologicum*, 1506.

Christ, whose *Slava* has risen upon her. Insofar as she lives from the *Eucharist*, ruminates her own liturgical language, and allows the Spirit to conform her children to the Son, she becomes truly luminous: a people in whom human freedom and divine grace meet in a *real, transformative communion*.

In this way, the theo-anthropological axis that we have traced – from Thomistic habitus to Palamite energies, from Chalcedon and Constantinople III to the Byzantine *lex orandi* – can be seen as a single, continuous line: the path by which the human creature, created in the *image* of God, is led, through grace, into *likeness*, and thus into the freedom of the children of the Kingdom, where God will be “all in all”⁶⁹.

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⁶⁹ Cfr. Thomas Aquinas, *In Epistolam I ad Corinthios lectura*, c. 15, lect. 7 (no. 998), on bearing “the image of the heavenly man” (1 Cor 15,49); see the synthetic account in D. Legge, *The Trinitarian Christology of St Thomas Aquinas*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017, 90-95, esp. 92-94, where conformity to Christ as the perfect Image grounds both the restoration of the *imago Dei* and the dynamic orientation towards deification as participation in the Trinitarian life; cf. also Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology* 209-217.

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