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Evening services in the Orthodox Church - appearance and historical development

Summary

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The topicality and importance of the topic. Evening services are some of the most important services in the Orthodox Church, having their origin in the very words that appear at the beginning of the Book of Genesis: "And there was evening and there was morning: the first day" (Gen. 1: 5). These words also have a liturgical relevance, as they demonstrate that human existence takes place not only on an exclusively mundane level. In other words, the daily life of man must be framed liturgically, although for contemporary man this aspect is less and less obvious.

However, the choice of this research topic also comes from the fact that there is not an exhaustive treatment of it in the Romanian Orthodox theology. It is true, the three services are described and analyzed in the textbooks, the books and the studies of the most important liturgists of the twentieth century: Petre Vintilescu, Ene Braniște, Nicolae Necula, Robert Taft and so on. However, there is not a monograph that reveals the importance of Vespers, Compline and Midnight office in the life and mission of the Church from a historical, theological, liturgical, dogmatic point of view. The only work that addresses some of these topics is represented by Nikolai Uspensky's work, *The Evening Service in the Orthodox Church*, which was translated and published into Romanian by Cezar Loghin in 2008. Our work will focus on the analysis of the history, the ritual, the content and the symbolic-missionary relevance of the liturgical texts from the three evening services in the Orthodox Church: Vespers, Compline and Midnight office.

Research stage. From the perspective of the stage of theological research, the current historical and liturgical arguments are not fully systematized. The literature from the Russian and Greek theological traditions are secondary sources of documentation in our work, focused mainly on documentation from the Romanian liturgical sources. A plethora of exceptional Romanian theologians contributed to the decantation and definition of a Romanian theology regarding the services of the evening Praises. The first specialized works in Romanian (typical, musical, catechetical, theological and symbolic), dedicated to evening services, appeared in the 18th century. Thus, Iacob Putneanul, the Metropolitan of Moldavia, composed in 1751 the work *Synopsis, that is, the gathering of the seven praises of the holy Church and canons from the holy Rule that are necessary for the mystery of spirituality*; Isaac ("monk and teacher") composed in 1816, at the Neamț monastery, *Hymns of canons for the Compline*; Mihail Berezovschi composed in 1927, in Chisinau the *Hymns of Vespers and Matins* (for mixed choir, male and for 3 homophones voices). In the 20th century there are special academic studies,

dedicated to evening Praises: Fr. prof. dr. Ene Braniște, *History and explanation of the Vespers service* (in the journal "B.O.R.", year LXXXIV, 1966, no. 5-6), Fr. Prof. Dumitru Megheșan emphasized the cosmic character of Vespers in the volume *Vespers - the nostalgia of the heavenly garden* (Oradea, 1997); pr. Prof. Stanciu Vasile compiles the *Songs of Vespers - Church Music Course* (Cluj-Napoca, 1995); Professor Nicolae Necula wrote the comparative liturgical study *The Order of Church Praises in the Coptic Church in Comparison with the Order of the Byzantine Rite* (in the journal "Glasul Bisericii", year XLI, 1982, no. 4-6); conductor Fr. prof. Nicolae Belean rediscovered the *Cult song in the light of the old musical manuscripts* (in the journal "Altarul Banatului", XV, 2005, no. 1-3); pr. Prof. Marin Ionescu emphasized the catechetical value of the Evening Praises in the volume *Gladsome Light. God, You have the words of eternal life. Homiletical and catechetical material* (Bucharest, 1938); Prof. Adrian Marinescu wrote the liturgical-symbolic study of light *The teaching about light and its liturgical function in the world at St. Basil the Great. From Holy Scripture to St. Gregory Palamas and Father Dumitru Staniloae* (in the volume "Cappadocian Fathers", Iasi, 2009) and so on.

The following books and studies should be noted in the specialized literature abroad, with special relevance on our research topic: M. Black (editor), *A Christian Palestinian Syriac Horologion*, Cambridge, 1954; O. Strunck, *The Byzantine Office at Hagia Sophia*, in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, no. 9-10 / 1955-1956; S. Janeras, *La partie vespérale de la liturgie byzantine des présanctifiés*, in „*Orientalia Christiana Periodica*” journal, no. 30 (1964); A. Raes, *La communion au calice dans l'office byzantin des Présanctifiés*, in the magazine “*Orientalia Christiana Periodica*”, no. 20 (1954), and especially Gabriela WINKLER, *Der geschichtliche Hintergrund des Präsanctifikantenvesper*, in the journal “*Oriens Christianus*”, no. 56 (1972), respectively *L'aspect pénitentiel dans les offices du soir en Orient et en Occiden* in the volume „*Liturgie et rémission des péchés*” (Conférences St. Serge, XX^e semaine d'études liturgiques, 1974), Roma, 1975.

Methodology. Our approach will be interdisciplinary, to the interference of several theological disciplines: historical, liturgical, dogmatic and spiritual. Our research involves the synthesis of several methods of research, selection and evaluation of information, which lead to the integration of historical, liturgical and symbolic sources into a unitary and coherent whole. The main research method is the synthetic one, necessary in structuring and summarizing liturgical and typical ideas. The comparative method will be used to observe how each service developed in the most important Orthodox liturgical traditions (Greek, Russian, Romanian) with its specific order. Thus, emphasis will be placed on common elements as well as on specific differences, in order to illustrate the principle that governs Orthodoxy - that of "unity in diversity" - a perfect definition of the attribute of ecclesial catholicity.

We also used the historical-critical method of researching historical sources (the history of church, of

worship and the evolution of typical textbooks during the historical development of Orthodox worship). The historical method will also be used to identify the process of appearance and development of evening services in the Church, from the earliest times to the present day. Based on older testimonies, it will be possible to distinguish their role in church life at a certain historical time (see for example the testimony of the 4th century, of the Egerian pilgrim). The analytical method prevailed along the way, especially in the symbolic-theological comments from part III. With the help of the comparative method we structured the typical of the different weekly variants of Vespers, Compline and Midnightoffice. The analogies, as forms of parallel development of the religious services, highlighted common features and semi-significant differences between the Slavic, Greek and Romanian Orthodox traditions. The method of content analysis will be necessary to understand the doctrinal significance of evening services. Their texts are the main source for a better understanding of their role in the lives of believers, which is why their analysis cannot be neglected. *The structure of the work* follows a logical division in the approach of the Evening Praises: a historical research on the biblical origin, the historical development in Christianity (until the period of crystallization of the cult from the Byzantine era); then the comparative exposition of each order (Vespers, Compline and Midnightoffice), composed also in the form of a table (to highlight the variants or later liturgical additions), and in the last part I synthesized, from the richness of biblical, historical, moral - spiritual, dogmatic and liturgical-symbolic meanings those that can positively influence the liturgical mission of the Church (in the subchapter on mission we have not omitted the historical aspects of the religious mission through worship, up to the current stage). Of course, our work is only the beginning of a series of detailed research, which would provide alternatives answers to questions such as: What is specific to each Orthodox liturgical tradition (Romanian, Russian, Greek)? Can we speak of a liturgical and ecclesial revival of Vespers, Compline and Midnightoffice? How can a synthesis be made between the monastic and the parish specific, so that they are relevant to the life of the whole Church?

As the research objectives are more thematic, we tried not to leave out the mention (without monographic claims) of the main personalities who played a role in the elaboration and development of the evening services throughout the history of the Orthodox Church; highlighting the influence that these services have had and have on the lives of believers; identification of the common elements, but also of the specific differences, that the three services have in each orthodox liturgical tradition separately (Romanian, Russian, Greek); the presentation of solutions so that in the current life of the Church the believers become more aware of the nature and the role of these services in their spiritual edification (with the highlighting of the rich dogmatic content that Vespers, Compline and Midnightoffice contain).

The first part of our paper focused on the historical analysis of the evening services (Vespers,

Compline and Midnightoffice). These, in their current form, are the result of the evolution of the "Byzantine Rite" (Robert Taft) in the three great liturgical traditions: Greek, Slavic and Romanian. From the already established periodicals, referring to the development of the worship, we took over those specific moments related to the appearance and the development of the evening services: the liturgical roots from the Old and New Testament eras, the crystallization period during the early Church (until the 4th century), the development from the "golden age" of the IV-VI centuries, the adjustments and completions from the iconoclastic period, to the Fourth Crusade (1204 AD), the period of the post-Byzantine synthesis, after the 13th century (of St. Simeon of Thessalonica - † 1429 AD) and the moment of the liturgical reform of Patriarch Nikon of Moscow (17th century), as a relatively recent example of historical evolution of the liturgical forms. In the end, I made a short review of the typical and worship books in Romanian, including evening services (from the 19th-20th centuries).

The next chapter was dedicated to the parallel analysis of the typical ordinances, the group of Evening Praises (Vespers, Compline and Midnightoffice) forms a successive liturgical unit, starting from the symbol of lighting the light at the Holy Sepulcher (at Vespers) and culminating with the expectation of "light" of the eschatological kingdom (Midnight office). All three contain the idea of a spirituality of prayer, which suggests that the evening prayer may extend to all-night vigil and may illustrate the unceasing prayer of angels. The symbolism of the Evening Praises was approached in the third part of our research both from a general perspective ("tying together" two realities), because the services of the Church preserve at the same time the unity and distinction between human and divine, and from a special perspective regarding the methods of symbolism (type-antitype, sign-significance-meaning), to the liturgical content (liturgical time, liturgical space, liturgical gestures, the symbolism of the Psalms of Evening Praises, prayers, songs, and so on) and to the symbolic value (dogmatic, liturgical, spiritual or soteriological).

From the point of view of the theology of the evening services, the main ideas concerning each of the three services are the following:

1) **Vespers** symbolizes, from the perspective of historical development, the beginning of the liturgical time, as the time of creation: (Gen. 1, 5) "and it was evening and it was morning, the first day", as well as a number of biblical events that had place in the evening. The Mosaic worship at the Temple included the daily service of the "evening sacrifice" (I Ezra 9: 4), in which the ordinance of lighting the holy light took place. The evening service is remembered by King David as a liturgical moment: "Let my prayer be set forth as incense before thee; lifting up my hands in the evening sacrifice" (Ps. 140: 2). In the New Testament the central event that marked the history of salvation is the Last Supper. It is the center of Christian worship, as attested by the Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 26; Mark 14; Luke

22), but also the main argument of the Eucharistic relationship between preparation (fasting) and participation (Communion) at the Lord's Supper.

In the apostolic age there was a mixed Judeo-Christian cult. The primary worship was, therefore, inspired by the Jewish synagogue, with the early Christians having about the same moments of prayer as the Jews. The pattern of Saturday night gatherings, extended all night and united with the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, was gradually lost after 70 AD (the moment of final separation from the synagogue ritual and the shift of emphasis on the Antiochian tradition), moving definitively to Sunday and diurnal celebration of the Eucharist.

The location of the Last Supper in the evening makes the relationship between the Eucharist and Vespers special, although it is not explicitly mentioned apart from the order of the Liturgy of the previously Sanctified Gifts. However, the liturgical development of the previously consecrated Liturgy of the Gifts had a special history, being related to the "term of the eve" and to the custom of keeping the Gifts for communion outside the service during the Lent. The tradition of celebrating the Liturgy during the Vespers was generalized much later, during the reign of Emperor Justinian († 565 AD).

The original historical and symbolic point of Vespers is the identification between Jesus Christ and the eternal spiritual "Light". The first generations of Christians took over from the Jews the rite of lighting and placing the candlestick with lights "before the Lord" (Exodus 30: 6-8), giving it a new meaning. The church enters its institutional phase after 313 AD, during which time the Christian liturgical cult develops and shines. The cult crystallizes around the great urban episcopal centers, generating "liturgical rites-sources" and new forms appear, respectively the First Hour, the Compline and the Midnight office. Information about the evening and night services is abundant during this period. The historical development of the evening services relates to three liturgical sources: the monastic environment, the cathedral environment and the urban monastic environment. The most important descriptions of the evening services from the fourth is kept in the travel diary of the Spanish pilgrim Egeria to Jerusalem and the Holy Land. In her diary was kept valuable information about the order of lighting the candles at the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem, as well as the oldest name of Vespers (Licinion). In the monograph dedicated to the evening services, Nikolai Uspensky identifies in the structure of the evening service Jerusalem features, found later in the service of the Vespers in the Universal Church: bringing the "Light" from the Holy Sepulcher, the "entrance of the bishop" and "the procession made at the end of the service", which gave birth to the practice of committing Lithia.

In the second half of the 4th century, an evening service was already set, in the cathedral version. Contemporaneous with the last Ecumenical Synod (Nicaea, 787 AD) we can speak of the crystallization of the essential forms of the worship of the Orthodox Church. During the glory period

of the Byzantine liturgical tradition (843 - 1204 AD), in Constantinople there is a more complex and varied liturgical life than in Jerusalem. The cathedral order of the Great Church of Constantinople consisted of shorter services (without Midnight office), but lavish (asthmaticon akolouthia was practiced, or the antiphonic "singing order" at Vespers).

The most detailed description and explanation of the Vespers from the late Middle Ages is preserved from Saint Simeon of Thessalonica, in his liturgical-dogmatic *Treatise*. The order of the Great and Small Vespers was identical with that of today, differences existing at the Vespers "with songs", united with Litia.

The liturgical and typical structure of the Evening Praises preserves the synthesis of the two great liturgical influences: Byzantine (*pannychis*) and Jerusalemite (*agrypnia*), crystallized in the cathedral liturgical piety, respectively in the monastic one. We opted for the parallel exposition, in the table, of the main moments and variants of the Vespers (with entrance, without entrance and united with the Divine Liturgy), of the Compline (Great and Small) and of the Midnight office). The highlighting of similarities and differences was complemented by the numerous footnotes, extracted from various liturgical sources.

We tried to follow schematically the typical order of the Evening Praises in the three great historical traditions that influenced and intersected in the current liturgical synthesis space: Romanian, Greek and Slavic. From a theological and liturgical perspective, the Romanian liturgical synthesis took over the use of all historical liturgical languages, keeping the order closest to the Jerusalem original. From a geo-political perspective, the Romanian historical territories remained until the 12th century under the cultural and religious influence of Byzantium. The policy of cultural, linguistic and ethnic tolerance managed to preserve in the Romanian Orthodoxy a balanced and paradoxical liturgical synthesis, with Jerusalemite origins, transferred through the Greek-Byzantine tradition, expressed in Latin but with strong influences of Slavic religious vocabulary.

The Vespers service is the second "great service" of the liturgical day, reminiscent of the "evening sacrifice" (Ps. 140: 2) of the Old Testament. The core of the Vespers celebration is Psalm 140, which expresses the spiritual fulfillment (in the New Law) of the bloody sacrifices (of the Old Law). The terms "small" or "great" Vespers are assigned to distinguish between the ordinary service of Vespers, related to the Ninth Hour, and the service of Vespers in the vigil of feasts and of great saints.

A special situation, complex from a liturgical point of view (Communion in the Vespers ritual), we meet in Lent (liturgical period), when the Eucharist is celebrated only on Saturdays and Sundays. The Divine liturgy harmonizes with the sad character of Lent (as opposed to feast days), being related to the first service of the liturgical day, Vespers, and to the only meal of the day of Lent, the evening meal. Until the 10th century, the Typikon of Constantinople left to the choice of the greatest the officiating of the Divine Liturgy, for Wednesdays and Fridays over the year. Patriarch Nichifor of

Constantinople attests that this Liturgy was celebrated during Lent three times a week, and in the rest of the year, on Wednesdays and Fridays. Bible readings from the Old Testament were read at all Masses, as a symbol of the passage from the Old to the New Testament, a passage sealed by the Communion. In particular, the Liturgy of the previously sanctified Gifts is read only from the Old Testament because scriptural catechesis was part of the vast cycle of preparing Lent for the feast of the Resurrection. The prayer of the righteous Simeon at the end of Vespers represents the end of the Old Testament, put here in eschatological light. We notice that this is a true prayer of release, which offers God's forgiveness in anticipation of the end of life.

The service of Lity, which is an addition to Vespers, is not in itself independent, not being part of the seven official Praises of the Orthodox cult. It has neither a formula of blessing, nor a formula of conclusion (otrust), being framed either in the service of Vespers or (less rarely) in that of Matins. Prof. Ene Braniște divides the order of the Lity into two parts, according to the origin and significance of the symbols. The first part includes: the litany "Save, O God, Thy people" and the prayer "Merciful Lord, Lord Jesus Christ". The original meaning of litany (repeated and earnest prayer) was preserved in the order of the exit of the clergy and the people in procession (to the narthex or, in exceptional cases, outside the church). The second part of the Lity consists of the censing of the bread, wine, and oil during the troparion and the prayer "Lord Jesus Christ, our God." This part has monastic origins, being framed in Denia or the Night Vigil. There are no notable differences between the liturgical traditions of the Romanian, Russian and Greek Churches regarding the order of the Lity. Differences appear in the newer practice of parish churches. The main typical variants of Lity are: the one performed in monasteries and the one in the parish churches. T

he praises of the Church are part of the general worship that makes Jesus Christ, the Risen One, present in the midst of the community of believers. The liturgy is the primordial Mystery, the narration of the liturgy of God, and the liturgical symbols are indicators towards a "beyond", towards the Kingdom. Objects, people, signs acquire the function of symbol in that they become the face (icon, theophany) of a fundamental reality and participate in the power of the reality they represent. The liturgical symbol is a theological reality materialized in different matters of worship (water, wine, incense), gestures (blessing, worship, kneeling), words (verbal formulas such as exhortations, prayers) or forms of liturgical art. The symbolism of the Praises of Vespers, Compline and Midnight office is built in relation to the two human dimensions: outer (material) and inner (spiritual). In our research we have emphasized the thematic symbolism in the content of the Evening Praises, the symbolism of the liturgical time, of the liturgical matters and gestures.

The evening praise (Vespers) is the first moment of daily liturgical time, whose anamnesis includes: the creation of the world, the fall of man into sin (Psalm 103, a doxological summary of creation), the prophecy of redemption and the economy of salvation until the coming of the Messiah. The

anthropology of the evening services is distinguished by emphasizing the human being and qualities only in communion with God. Psalms 140 and 141 contain the dramatic destiny of the praying man. Cosmology and anthropology find their point of convergence in the liturgical and doxological dimension of man. There is a direct link between the symbolism of the liturgical space and Christian anthropology. The hymn "Gladsome Light" and the vase with the censer include a symbolism in which the light and Resurrection of the Lord remain the common points and the purpose of all the Praises. The symbolism of the first part of the Lity (lity with the intercessory prayer) is obviously penitential. The character of the prayer reminds of the humble attitude of the publican (Lk. 18, 13), reason for which the place of the service is usually in the narthex of the church, the place reserved in antiquity for catechumens and penitents. The second part of the Lity (the fall and the blessing prayer of the gifts) is reminiscent of the tradition of bringing bread gifts for the Eucharist and for the fraternal agapes that followed, from the early days of the Church, when the Mass was celebrated at night, on the eve of the great feasts.

The symbolism of gestures, materials and liturgical objects (light being considered matter, along with bread, wine, oil, candles, incense, and so on.) includes a direct symbolism (Easter meaning) and an indirect one. The first is a material and proper one, the second is spiritual and figurative. The symbolic connection between the material and spiritual meanings of the Evening Praises must be made from the light of the Lord's Tomb. The evening light comes from inside the cave of the Holy Sepulcher, justifying the original symbolism: Christ - "The light of the world".

The symbolism of light is taken over in the Orthodox worship from Jewish sources. The fire of the Word brings light and transmits the Holy Spirit: "He will send His word and melt them; his Spirit will blow, and the waters will flow" (Ps. 147: 7), which is why the symbolism of the flame of light is ambivalent: it gives energy and it can destroy. The secondary symbolism refers to the objects of worship and the biblical types related to light: the candle and the torch. The holy candlestick (in Hebrew *menorah*) is one of the emblems of Israel, whose complex shape and significance (Exodus 25: 31-37), of the "light-bearing tree," was taken up in Christianity.

The entrance in the Vespers service also has a pascal meaning. The symbolic relationship between the Lord's Resurrection and the deliverance of the Jews from captivity is expressed by the parallelism contained in the phrase "the kingdom of God": for the Jews Canaan, for the Christians the endless light of the eschaton. The sanctification of the loaves in the Lity, at the Night's Vigil, is symbolized by the standard meaning of the manna consumed by Israel in the wilderness and by the antitype meaning of the Eucharistic Communion. The oil symbolizes "mercy" (*eleon*), on the one hand, the outpouring of God's love, and, on the other hand, the baptismal fragrance of the Holy Spirit. The outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is also signified in the incense ritual ("spiritual sacrifice").

The contents of Psalm 103 recapitulate the history of creation (the macrocosm), but also the participation of man (as a microcosm) in it. The praise of Vespers represents the daily remembrance of Creation, the beginning of each day becoming the beginning of a new life. Almost every word of Psalm 103 has a symbolic-liturgical charge, being present in the biblical commentaries of Saint Basil the Great.

Another important aspect of our work refers to the hermeneutic value of the Orthodox cult, in the sense of authentic interpretation of biblical texts in the liturgical framework. The liturgical symbolism, included in the poetic formulations of the Praises, simultaneously fulfills the role of interpretive criterion of the Scriptures. The reading of the Psalms in the services of the Church serves the true symbolic interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. The correct symbolism leads the Christian to true doxology, to Orthodoxy. The relationship between the work, the message, the author and the reader becomes obvious along the spiritual path permanently traversed by the simple reader, the critic (exeget) and God (the author's intention).

The interpretation of liturgical texts uses the same methods of interpretation as the exegetical interpretation of the text of the Holy Scripture. On the one hand, they apply to the text itself, and on the other, it refers to the finality of this hermeneutics, which, in our opinion, defines the specificity of the "method" of the orthodox interpretation. The figurative meaning means the "hidden" and prophetic meaning, which can be found under the guise of literal and historical meaning only with the instrument of love. Its symbolization or interpretation (both meanings: encryption and decipherment) forms a single approach, in order to acquire the Holy Spirit.

The theo-poetics of Orthodox services transmits symbols that become one with the listener, changing him to the extent that he becomes as inspired as the author of the liturgical text, that is, to the extent that they are both in the Holy Spirit. The mystical meaning of the words of Hebrew poetry can be revealed only by utterance, with the help of the voice. The words of the Psalms acquire meaning and power only through their utterance, but not a mechanical, magical one, but framed in the environment of the Holy Spirit, that is, in the Church (in the "communion of saints"). The Holy Fathers read and meditated on the texts of the Psalms "in a context of prayer," and their interpretation was not intended to be definitive, but a permanent starting point for spiritual growth. The main ways of understanding sacred texts correspond to the four traditional meanings of interpretation: literal, moral, dogmatic and mystical. The specificity of the orthodox method of interpreting the Psalms must be sought in the final intention: the deification of man. Starting from here, it can be said that the mission of the Christian who prays is to become a symbolizing factor of the liturgical texts, an interpreter of them and, depending on his personal effort and charisma, creator of worship.

2) The Compline. The all-night vigil by prayer was practiced by the Savior and required of the Holy Apostles ("Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: for the spirit is perfect, but the body is weak" - Mk 14:38). Night and darkness are presented in the Holy Scripture as intervals of creation (Gen. 1, 5), of Revelation, of apophatic contemplation and of major changes, but also as moments of trying to be vigilant, of checking perseverance in prayer, an occasion of disciplining the passions and a foreshadowing of the end of the world. Following the custom of the Savior, the Holy Apostles fixed the night prayers in the early Tradition of the Church. Numerous liturgical, moral and spiritual characteristics of the service of Pentecost are revealed in the psalms: the penitential character, the character of unceasing doxology, the feeling of forsaking God and anxiety, as well as the method of prayer with raised hands ("sleeved"). The Savior practiced the forms of Jewish worship, but reformed the spirituality of the Jewish worship by establishing a new worship, containing love, and being grounded in the principle of worship "in spirit and in truth" (John 4: 23-24). The new worship practiced by the Savior contains both unique forms and liturgical forms inherited from the Jewish cult.

The context and the development of evening services in the Egyptian monastic environment of the 4th century, with reference to the vigil on Saturday night, appears recorded in the account of two monks, John and Sophronius, about Avva Nil. The reading of the Vigil was done in the cells of the monks, not in the Church, nor in the presence of the priest. In the Egyptian liturgical tradition, the monastic dinner was framed between the liturgical time of Lity and the beginning of the Compline. The canon after dinner was none other than the canon of the compline, and the reading of the Midnight office was often followed by a typical and liturgical-symbolic discussion of the meanings of the various elements of worship. In the 4th century, the liturgical tradition of the Church was crystallized at two distinct levels: that of monastic service and its cathedral variant. Canonical discipline was in use in all the points of influence of the Christian world: Jerusalem, Mount Sinai and later in Constantinople. The Holy Fathers were most concerned with preserving the liturgical meaning of the Tradition, as a guarantee for the preservation of Orthodoxy.

The service of Compline is a development of the prayer of thanksgiving brought by Christians to God at dusk, before bed, and a request for the peaceful passage of the following night. The ordinance has a penitential character, being called "praise of repentance" (Fr. Prof. Ion Bria). In 360 AD it is found that the Compline had already entered the common worship of the monks of Pontus, organized by the *Rules* of St. Basil the Great. The generalization of its commission in the East took place starting with the 5th century and in the West a century later, under the name known to this day of the *Completorium*. The differentiation of the current variants (small and great Compline) took place starting with the 13th century, when the Great Compline began to be performed mainly during Lent.

The movement of the Vespers before the evening meal made it necessary to introduce a liturgical service (of monastic origin) to end the liturgical day with prayer: the Compline. The Great Compline consists of three distinct but symmetrical services, united by the repetition of the "invitation refrain": "Come and worship". The first part includes: The opening prayers, "Come and worship," the hexapsalm (Psalms 4, 6, 12, 24, 30, 90), the song "God is with us", three tropes, the trinity hymn of the Cherubim... "). The Creed, the invocations of the saints, the opening prayers, the tropars of the days (for Monday and Wednesday or for Tuesday and Thursday) and a set of final prayers (" God have mercy ", 40 times and the Prayer of Saint Basil the Great). The second part is shorter and includes: "Come and Worship," Psalms 50 and 101, King Manasseh's Prayer, Beginning Prayers, Troops of Humility, and the Final Prayer Set, "God Have Mercy," 40 times and Saint Mardarie prayer). The third part consists of: "Come and worship", Psalms 69 and 142, Small Doxology, the canon (of the Mother of God or of Menaion). The Beginning Prayers, the song "Lord of powers", Psalm 150, the extended set of final prayers, "Lord have mercy," 40 times; "He who is everlasting", "The prayer of St. Ephrem the Syrian with verses and methanes; beginning prayers; "Immaculate, undefiled...", "And give us, Lord...", "Glorified, everlasting Virgin", "My hope is the Father" and "All our hope"), oppose the taking of forgiveness, Our Fathers... "and the litany prayer" Weaken, let go, forgive... ".

From the perspective of the liturgical and typical structure, the Small Compline would correspond to the first part of the Great Compline, being an abbreviation of it (without the Creed and Psalm 50). Changes in the celebration of Compline appear in the first week of the Lent (the Grand Canon of St. Andrew the Cretan, divided into four fragments, Monday-Thursday, read immediately after Psalm 69) and on Fridays in the Lent (reading the akathist divided into four states, introduced by the hymn "Defender of the Lord"). The final part of the Small Compline is identical to that of the Great Compline.

At the Compline (Small or Great), being a monastic service, the small blessing can be replaced with "For prayers ...", if the service is read in private, in the cell. The litany "Let us pray for world peace", which appears at the end of both the Compline and the Midnight office, completes the lack of great litany at the beginning of the service. Being of monastic inspiration, the two variants of the Praise were committed mainly in the cells, individually. The indications from Horologion, "with a priest" or "without a priest", were inserted later (in the studied tradition), when their commission was partially moved to the church, within the public service.

The intercessory prayers, addressed in hierarchical order to the Mother of God and to the saints and sung antiphonically (twice, the first of three times) are accompanied by prostrations. The refrain "pray for us sinners" is the thematic leitmotif of Lent, referring to the publican's prayer (Luke 18:13). The frequency of methane at the service of the Great Compline is quite high. The Prayer of St. Basil the

Great is to be read by the priest, and the Prayer of King Manasseh is one of the highlights of repentance. During Lent, important changes occur in the celebration of the Great Compline. It takes place from Monday to Thursday and in the first three days of the Passion Week. The Small Compline remains to be officiated on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, as in the rest of the liturgical year.

The symbolism of the Compline is specific to the themes of repentance and preparation for death. One of the most important themes in the service of the Compline is repentance as a law of spiritual fasting. The whole spiritual life takes place under the sign of repentance (*metanoia*). The celebration of the Great Compline during Lent, apart from the week of the Passion, metaphorically illustrates the parallelism with the two stages of the spiritual life: the weeping during the return home and the eagerness of God to receive us. The ordinance of the Compline is a reminiscent of the Savior's Descent into Hell and the deliverance of man from the dominion of death.

The symbolism of the liturgical time is par excellence Eucharistic. The Eucharistic liturgical act paradoxically includes the distinction and identity between "then" and "now", arguing the temporality of the Christian symbol in three stages: the promise, the presence and the expectation. Within the Evening Praises, two antinomic dimensions of the perception of time can be distinguished: the state of waiting and preparation in order to meet the end and the recapitulation of history. The time of history is the night of sin, and the positive darkness of asceticism foreshadows the endless day of the "Sun of Righteousness."

An important role in our work was played by the delimitation of the theological, liturgical and spiritual meanings of the Psalms from the ordinances of the Evening Praises, using the liturgical exegesis from the writings of Saint Basil the Great. If the Holy Scriptures, in their entirety, contain words from God for men, the Book of Psalms contains especially words addressed to God, about God, and from God. Here one can find theological ideas expressed poetically: about God, economics, about human dramas, about the world and its end, and so on. Liturgical academic theology has the mission to distinguish between the Psalms, as a text of theological commentary, and the Psalms as doxology. Academic theology, when it wants to be efficient and alive, can only be the transposition of the poetry of the Psalms into the doxology of the Church. The psalms are a form of poetic expression taken from the Jewish cult to the Christian cult.). The psalmody, as part of the common doxology, heavenly and earthly, will remain the liturgical link between the Heavenly Jerusalem and the Earthly Jerusalem.

In the 4th century the Byzantine liturgical synthesis takes place, which generated a cult "monasticized cathedral". The monastic office assimilated as obligatory the moments of private prayer (Hours III, VI, IX) and introduced a new liturgical service, the Compline, which continued the Praise of the Vespers with Vigil, uniting it with the morning syntax of the monastic rite. In parallel with the seven Praises, the Egyptian monastic influence was exercised by keeping the continuous reading of the

psalms of the Psalter. In the Evening Praises (especially at Compline and Midnight office) the Psalms are not only quoted ad litteram, but become the main source of inspiration for the hymnographic creation (tropes, verses, canons, prayers). The daily cycle of Church Praises creates a hermeneutical bridge, as it lies between the Bible and the Church. The "theoretical" method of which the first Saint Diodorus of Antioch speaks, was considered authentic and efficient because "he sees in a past event the present presence of an eschatological reality." This idea appears throughout Psalm 103 of the Vespers. The reading of the Psalms at the Great Compline is done in three groups of three psalms: 69, 4, 6 - 12, 24, 30 - 90, 101, 142. The approach of night, as a symbolic approach to the end of life, prepares the soul for the passage into eternal life, through the words expressed in the prophetic future and through the illustration of eschatological change. The penitential symbolism of the Compline is emphasized throughout it, her service being a personal and ascetic anamnesia. The Compline foreshadows the brightness of the light of the Sun-Christ, although the sunset of the physical sunlight is the time of its accomplishment. Similar to the central presence of the light on the night of the Resurrection, in the service of the Compline is the presence of the light of the knowledge of the New Law.

Theological symbolism was developed more complexly in the Church of the East. St. Maximus the Confessor states that the distinction between the interpretation of philosophy and theology is similar to that between the letter and its meaning. In the West, the way of symbolization has its origins in the interpretation of Blessed Augustine, who starts from the possible relationships in the triangle sign, meaning and thing. The old ideas about symbolism of Origen, Blessed Augustine, of the Eastern Fathers are repeated, emptied of the sacred, in modern literary symbolism. The Bible reading is just a necessary step in a more complex work, ultimately focused on sharing the faithful with the Spirit of God.

The reading of the Psalms is the main content of the Evening Praises. If the Holy Scriptures, in their entirety, contain words from God to men, the Book of Psalms contains especially words addressed to God, about God, and from God. Unceasing personal prayer is verbally inspired by the Psalms, without excluding common reading, in public worship. The repetition of the word in the Psalms symbolically resembles an underground current in the river of words.

The ascetic purpose of the liturgical meditation in the Evening Praises (which includes the themes of repentance, the thought of death and the renewal of life) is the proclamation in light of what is being done in the dark, the sincere discourse about vices, sins and all that is hidden in people's attitudes, desires and speeches. The state of sin, recalled in the service of the Compline, and the imminent approach of death, mentioned in the Midnight office, changed the attitude of the whole creation

towards man. Missionaries must not be afraid to confess the truth hidden in sin, not to be afraid of people or public opinion. The word of Christ, hidden in every song or liturgical reading, makes the promise of omnipotent care from God. Within the parish, the participation of the faithful in the evening praises is usually limited to the Vespers on the eve of Sundays and holidays. The monastic character of the Compline and the Midnight office must first be explained, then presented in the context of an exceptional vocational way of life, the monastic one and, last but not least, made accessible to lay believers by participating in pilgrimages to monasteries or philanthropic aid within the monasteries. The liturgical mission of the Orthodox Church means nothing more than the communion of the Holy Spirit, and the parish is the punctual, divine-human replica of the permanent and heavenly worship of angels. Although in the evening Praises the emphasis is on personal service, the co-service and co-responsibility of the monks spread in the cells is not excluded. All the works of the Church (Sacraments, Praises and hierarchies) confer sanctifying and healing grace. The church is through its mission and through its liturgical life an environment of healing. The worship of the Church can mean preaching, that is mission through word and prayer under three main aspects: as a dialogue with ourselves (manifested in the Church in the form of contemplation, repentance), as a dialogue with others (the communion of prayer is built at the highest level, based on the full and common communication of the reality of the liturgical event) and as a human dialogue with God (*lex credendi* takes on the liturgical form, turns into songs of praise and, thus invoked, God descends).

3) **Midnight office** has Jewish origins. It symbolically expresses the eschatological expectation of the early Church and it is illustrated by an unceasing foresight, by the penitential theme that refers to the remembrance of one's own death and the intercessions for the dead (requests for the sleeping ones). The first mention of Midnight office was preserved in the Epistle of the proconsul Pliny the Younger (ca. 111-113 AD) to Emperor Trajan. In the 4th century, the nun Egeria recalls the nocturnal worship at the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem, with extended prayers until dawn.

The tradition of the Church knew how to keep the liturgical elements crystallized in the primary epoch according to the "rule of worship", fixed later in the typical books. The domination of the typical ordinances by the monastic standard lasted until the 18th century, when, within the "liturgical renewal movement", a clearer distinction was desired between the typical monastic and the parish,

against the background of secularization and weakening of the hesychastic influence in worship (the liturgical reform of Patriarch Nikon in Russia).

Midnight office has a two-part structure united by the "Holy God" (Beginning Prayers). The first part has a clock-like structure and includes Psalms 50 and 118, the Creed, the troparion, a set of four prayers, and Psalms 120 and 133 (with 3 prostrations at each time, and in some places with prostrations throughout Psalm 118). The second part contains the tropars for the dead, a set of four prayers, the tropes of humility, final prayers, the service of forgiveness, and the litany of "Let us pray for world peace." The musical mode of the tropes is not mandatory, but only the recitative mode can be used, as the outdoor atmosphere is devoid of pomp.

The liturgical time of the performance of the Midnight office is around midnight, but in practice it can be performed before Matins. In monasteries and cathedrals Midnight office is performed in the narthex, and in the parish churches in the nave. The plan of the daily, Saturday and Sunday Midnight office ordinances is similar, varying only the prayers, tropes, and readings. For Lent, the ordinance of the Midnight office is recommended to be performed as a private prayer in monasteries. In the rest of the church year, it is said in common, either in the narthex of the church (the doors of the nave are closed), or in the porch of the church (in the days with methane). In practice, the reading of Midnight office is pushed towards the time of Matins, although it should be separated from it by a rest interval. The Midnight office on Sundays presents some differences from its other ordinances: in the first part, after Psalm 50 (instead of Catism and Creed) the Canon of the Holy Trinity is read, in the ordinary voice, from Octoechos. The 12 trinity tropes (Triadicals) follow: "It is truly fitting to praise the Trinity above the deity ...". The tropars after the prayers "Our Father" and "That which at all times and in all hours ..." are suppressed, saying only the tropar of the Resurrection or the troparion of the feast (if it is a royal holiday). The final prayer is addressed to the Holy Trinity ("Totally powerful and life-giving, Most Holy Trinity ..."), being read by the priest to the east, before the royal doors. The prayer for the dead is suppressed, because Sunday is the day of remembrance of the Resurrection.

Referring explicitly to the nocturnal psalmody, St. Basil the Great teaches that "the time of prayer should be for a lifetime, but especially because it is necessary that the tension during the psalmody and kneeling rest at certain times." In other words, the psalmody becomes a way of life of the monk, punctuated by privileged liturgical moments. The psalmody includes both the permanent liturgical state and the method of accomplishment, consisting of the hourly intervals of the seven Praises, alternating with the personal canon of prayer. Starting with the 4th century, the biblical recitation was alternated with the prayer, and in the monastic private environment the common order of prayer (synaxis) alternated with the psalmody and the personal prayer. The psalmody, the work with the hands and the meditation formed the pillars of the daily life of the monks.

We find in the practice of private and common prayer two ways of quoting from the Psalms (a phrase or a single word; *antirrhetikos* - replies and *monologues* - word). Unceasing personal prayer is verbally inspired by the Psalms, without excluding common reading, in public worship. The repetition of the word in the Psalms symbolically resembles an underground current in the river of words.

The daily cycle of Church Praises creates a hermeneutical bridge within the Church's Body, as it lies between "the testimony of Scripture and the present life of the Church" (Fr. John Breck). The symbolic and real framework of the services of Praise is a synergistic one, of prayer and meditation in order to the practical fulfillment of the virtues. Every work carries a message between an author and a reader, constantly following the path: simple reader - critic - exeget. The symbolism is the common thread that unites the author (not only the terrestrial one, but first of all God who inspires him), with the text and with the reader, in a single spiritual approach.

Currently, the reading of spiritual and biblical texts oscillates between the main key, theological-liturgical, of the Holy Spirit, and the strictly academic key, in the spirit of contextuality, marked by secondary keys: historical, aesthetic, cultural and literal, and so on. Readers and listeners of these texts are unfairly faced with an unconstructive choice. Authentic interpretation of Scripture can only be done in worship. The reading of the Psalms produces the translator's encounter with God through the mediation of words on several levels of interpretation, transforming man in all his spiritual aspects: intellectual, moral, community and spiritual. By participating in the worship of the Church, the Christian becomes the main factor in the mission of the Church, which has its roots in worship. Every Christian who prays becomes a symbolizing factor of liturgical texts, an interpreter of them, and, depending on personal effort and charisma, becomes a creator of worship, a hymnographer of the Church.

The symbolic and liturgical character of the Evening Praises is revealed from the content of the Psalms, chosen to emphasize the main themes (repentance, the temporality of life, the expectation of death, the end of the world, eternal life and so on.). Liturgical symbolism and biblical symbolism ensure doxological continuity, common to all Praises. Theological symbolism, expressed liturgically through psalmody, is revealed by the differences between the meanings of the words of the Psalms. Saint Basil the Great identifies in the "pharmacy (pharmakon)" of the Psalms the medicine according to this liturgical time, because the approach of night is synonymous with the need for rest, but also with decreased attention, which is why the tired body and mind periodically need help and defense. The choice of biblical texts for the Evening Praises was originally made according to soteriological criteria.

In the Midnight office order, the symbolic character is underlined by the anamnesis of the liturgical time of the night, which makes the symbolic connection with the continuous vigil of the monk. This is nothing but a preparation for the foretaste of the unceasing doxology of the Kingdom, through the

symbolic attitudes of waiting for death and eschatological revelation. The desideratum of the permanent prayer must be realized by the monks, to the maximum extent, by two ascetic and liturgical rules: the repetition and the variation of the daily prayers. There are three series of three Psalms in the over-the-week versions of the Midnight office, but on Sunday there are no readings of the Psalms, given the anastatic nature of the day. At St. Basil the Great we find a parallel symbolism: material-spiritual, illustrated in detail through quotations from the Psalms. For example, the words "I have opened my mouth, and have known, that I have desired thy commandments" (Ps. 118: 131) signify not only the liturgical gesture of uttering the psalm, but "the spiritual mouth of man within whom he feeds, sharing in the Word of life" (Saint Basil the Great).

The mention of the place of worship in the place of the church ("the court") does not exclude the recommendation that the Praise of the Midnight office be performed both in common and in private, in cells. In the commentaries on the Psalms, St. Basil builds a metaphorical bridge between worship and the "chosen people." True worship (doxology) brought to God becomes the criterion of choice for dwelling in the "courts" of the Lord (Ps. 64: 4). Psalm 50 is read at the beginning of Midnight office, in all its variants, and St. Basil the Great speaks of a "restoration" of the old man, which takes place through personal sacrifice, not a renunciation of personal possessions, but in the voluntary offering of "spiritual worship."

At the end of our research we focused on the mission of the Church through worship and on the missionary content of the evening Praises in the vision of the Holy Fathers and in modern theology. The religious mission based on religious worship starts from the "rabbinic principle of the apostolate", a fundamental biblical missionary idea, which is found in two variants in the New Testament: of the Holy Apostle Paul, who looked at prayer in connection with his apostolic and missionary activity and the Holy Evangelist John, who looks at the deeds of Jesus Christ and His words in a meditative way, showing that meditation leads to the mystery of communion and how the state of prayer can develop from it.

In the early days of the Church, liturgical missionary work played a key role in preaching (for example, the *Didache*, in which liturgical quotations come from the living liturgical tradition). In St. Clement of Alexandria we find the association between the sacrificial state of night prayer and Praise. St. Cyprian of Carthage, in his work *De catholicae ecclesiae unitate*, resumes the problem of the time of prayer, seeing in the evening and morning prayers symbols of the return to Christ, the true Light. St. Gregory of Nyssa, in his work *On the Titles of the Psalms*, makes useful remarks on the reading of the psalms in the Evening Praises. As a model of prayer, suitable for any state of mind, the Psalms become a textbook for learning happiness.

Academic liturgical theology can become a prayer from a certain point, when it represents not only the teaching about God, but also His contemplation. The Evangelical saying that "he who prays is

theologian, and theologian is he who prays," that is, love and knowledge practiced simultaneously, acquires a full meaning in Orthodoxy. The worship of the Church tends to be first of all a state of continuous prayer (the diachronic aspect of the liturgical tradition), then a specific liturgical act, subject to historical evolution and adapted to the missionary needs of the Church (the synchronic aspect of the liturgical tradition).

In the Orthodox Church, the mission is primarily a liturgical one, rooted and structured on the Holy Liturgy, the Holy Sacraments and the uninterrupted daily cycle of the seven Praises. Participating to the maximum extent of his temporal, spatial and conscious possibilities in the general worship of the Church, each believer becomes an apostle (Fr. Prof. Ion Bria). Currently, the most urgent missionary need is to restore the liturgical integrity of the parish, geographically dispersed, complex and culturally, demographically and economically disparate, without a fully formed consciousness of belonging to the Person of Jesus Christ. Rhythmic participation in liturgical life must be associated with the application of extra liturgical missionary methods, in order to change life on a personal and social level (by explaining the meaning, content and purpose of participation in services). In the Christian space only the Orthodox Church has preserved an integral liturgical vision of creation and the world, the ecclesial liturgy being the sacramental and localized expression of the cosmic liturgy. The liturgical dimension of the Church reveals the sacramental potential of matter and the priestly vocation of man who, in his capacity as priest of Creation, offers to God his elements (Fr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae).

Our work is only intended to be the beginning of a series of future, more in-depth research, which will address the specifics of each Orthodox liturgical tradition (Romanian, Russian, Greek). From a missionary perspective, our research opens the way for a revival in the liturgical and ecclesial research of Vespers, Compline and Midnight office, especially in the current church context, when there is a need for a new synthesis between the typical monastic and parochial specifics. Interdisciplinary and interdisciplinary-theological approaches (historical, liturgical, dogmatic and spiritual) involve the use of several methods of research and evaluation of information and involve the integration of theological sources: historical, liturgical and symbolic. We consider that the work has reached its goal, both from a theoretical point of view (regarding the critical, historical and liturgical approaches) and a practical aspect (by identifying the missionary valences, especially pedagogical- ascetic in the Evening Praises).

