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THE COMMUNICATIVE CONSTRUCTION OF SACRED PLACES: AUREL CODOBAN'S ONTOPHANY AND ORTHODOX RELIGIOUS TOURISM

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Abstract: This article re-examines the relationship between Aurel Codoban's philosophy of religious manifestation and his account of communication through a bounded interpretation of Orthodox pilgrimage to Tinos, Greece. Its primary textual basis is Codoban's Sacru și ontofanie (1998), supplemented by his 2006 essay on communicative influence and relevant passages from Imperiul comunicării (2011). A documented, undated electronic version of Introducere în filosofie is used only as a comparative witness. Close readings distinguish ontophany, the disclosure of a religious world as real, from hierophany, kratophany, doctrinal affirmation, and the believer's attribution of presence. The argument then tests Codoban's distinction between message content and communicative relationship against published ethnographic findings on television images, devotional objects, vows, and visions at Tinos. A four-register framework separates philosophical interpretation, confessional assertion, communicative mediation, and situated reception. The framework identifies how religious authority may be conveyed through visual enactment without claiming that images produce the sacred. It also specifies cases in which communicative explanation is inadequate, particularly material encounters and unsuccessful vows. The contribution is a source-grounded conceptual clarification, not a new empirical study or a demonstration of metaphysical presence.

Keywords: Aurel Codoban; ontophany; hierophany; Orthodox pilgrimage; Tinos; sacred place; religious communication; visual media; materiality

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1. Introduction

A sacred place may be geographically identifiable and institutionally recognized while remaining open to divergent accounts of what makes it sacred. The same shrine may be encountered through prayer, a personal vow, customary pilgrimage, or an interest in architecture and local heritage. Its public image may precede physical arrival; a participant's eventual experience may nevertheless frustrate the expectation suggested by that image. Studies of pilgrimage have traced such plurality through the language of performance, contestation, and authenticity (Eade and Sallnow 1991; Coleman 2002; Collins-Kreiner 2010). Less clearly resolved is the philosophical difference between describing how sacred meanings circulate and specifying what it means, within religious experience, for reality itself to be disclosed.

Aurel Codoban offers a precise entry into this problem. In *Sacru și ontofanie: Pentru o nouă filosofie a religiilor* (1998), he distinguishes hierophany, kratophany, and ontophany by the ways religious manifestation is understood, and connects ontophany with the emergence of an intelligible religious world (Codoban 1998, 113–15). His writings on communication examine the growing prominence of relationships, visual presentation, and the distinctive work performed by images (Codoban 2006, 152, 157; 2011b, 10, 22–24, 67–72). The texts address related yet distinct questions. Their relevance to pilgrimage can be established only by identifying the specific claim made in each work and testing its interpretive value against published empirical findings.

This article asks what Codoban's distinction between the manifestation of the real and the communicative presentation of a claim enables us to understand about Orthodox pilgrimage. Tinos provides a controlled illustration. Published studies report the influence of television coverage on images of the destination, variations in embodied pilgrimage, the role of vows and visions, and the agency attributed to devotional objects (Terzidou, Scarles, and Saunders 2017, 2018; Terzidou, Stylidis, and Terzidis 2018; Terzidou 2020). The specific contribution is to explain why public recognition, confessional authorization, and an individual sense of presence may intersect without being identical. It is also to identify what this comparison adds to existing tourism research and where it reaches its limits.

2. Ontophany in Codoban's Primary Text: Manifestation, World, and Religious Form

In "Ontofanie și experiență religioasă," Codoban credits Mircea Eliade with introducing ontophany into the philosophy of religions. Hierophany emphasizes the sacred manifesting as form; kratophany emphasizes the manifestation of sacred power. Ontophany concerns the manifestation of the sacred as reality, or the appearance of what religious experience takes to be truly existent (Codoban 1998, 113). Codoban is distinguishing analytical emphases within religious manifestation rather than classifying three unrelated phenomena. Ontophany gives the manifest world a certain coherence in relation to the Absolute: sacred and profane are distinguishable, and the world is dependent upon the sacred without being identical with it (Codoban 1998, 113–14).

The next move is decisive. For Codoban, hierophany and kratophany belong to the register of religious manifestation; myth and ritual are elaborated ways of giving those manifestations intelligible expression. Religious symbol mediates between hierophany and myth, while magical thought occupies an analogous position between kratophany and ritual (Codoban 1998, 113–14). Myth narrates paradigmatic events and orders their significance, whereas ritual performs and reactivates patterned relations. He resists allowing one to replace the other: ontophany involves a comparatively determined configuration in which myth and ritual enter into more precise relations and the two aspects of manifestation constrain one another (Codoban 1998, 114). His proposed development from relatively polyvalent manifestation to greater coherence is an interpretive reconstruction of religious experience, not an empirical chronology that every religion must follow.

Codoban's discussion of archaic ontology clarifies what is at stake in this movement. The existence of a world, its differentiation into meaningful domains, and the distribution of degrees of reality are central to the analysis (Codoban 1998, 114–20). He subsequently distinguishes a philosophical ontology from the religious configurations out of which it can emerge (Codoban 1998, 121–28). The claim is stronger than the observation that a community has named a mountain, icon, or church holy. Institutional recognition can stabilize an attribution, but ontophany concerns the intelligibility of reality under the horizon of the sacred. A scholar can reconstruct this horizon without confirming its metaphysical validity. Equally, a theological claim about divine agency cannot be inferred from an investigator's finding that visitors recognize a site as sacred.

His earlier treatment of religious experience adds an important qualification. Codoban distinguishes the sacred as a condition of coherent religious significance from the Absolute to which such experience refers, warning against treating sacred, divine, transcendent, and Absolute as interchangeable expressions (Codoban 1998, 61–71, 109–13). This methodological distinction prevents two shortcuts. First, reported belief is evidence that an attribution is made, not itself the philosophical structure of manifestation. Second, the confessional assertion that the Mother of God is encountered through a revered icon carries theological content that the general term ontophany cannot supply. The latter remains a second-order category for analysing religious worlds; it does not translate automatically into Orthodox dogmatics.

The relation between myth and ritual is relevant to Tinos only with caution. The public history of an icon and the retelling of its significance can be examined as forms of religious narration. Prayer, processions, and bodily acts belong to patterned ritual practice. Yet the word myth, as used in the philosophy and history of religions, cannot be applied indiscriminately to Orthodox historical or dogmatic affirmations as if they were thereby declared fictional. Codoban's analytical sequence makes it possible to ask how narrative and ritual order a religious world, while the confessional interpretation of a specific Orthodox event remains a separate object of inquiry (Codoban 1998, 98–114; John of Damascus 2003).

The comparison developed in the following pages of Codoban's monograph further sharpens the philosophical issue. He contrasts an archaic configuration in which degrees of reality are scarcely differentiated with later religious ontologies that distribute reality asymmetrically between the sacred and the world (Codoban 1998, 115–21). His examples are historically situated reconstructions, not descriptions of modern pilgrims. Their analytical consequence is nevertheless clear. To describe the repeated designation of a place as holy is to explain the transmission of a judgement; to ask an ontophanic question is to investigate the structure of reality that makes the judgement religiously intelligible. The two explanations have different objects and require different evidence.

3. Communication from the 2006 Essay to Imperiul comunicării

Codoban's 2006 article distinguishes changes in modes of communicative influence. In his account, classical persuasion addresses conscious judgment through argument, whereas manipulation activates dispositions that the addressee may not critically examine. Seduction and

the prominence of display signal a further reorientation (Codoban 2006, 151–57). The historical typology is critical, not a general rule under which religious images must be classified as manipulative. It is useful here because religious publicity can convey claims through the visible arrangement of people, objects, and gestures as well as through explicit statements. Determining whether a particular communication manipulates an audience would still require evidence about its production, intentions, and reception.

Codoban's argument on page 152 provides the link between communication theory and the pilgrimage literature. Citing Paul Watzlawick, he differentiates the content of communication from the relationship through which that content is addressed to another person. Because the relational aspect also qualifies the content, it functions as metacommunication. Codoban then connects verbal or digital signs chiefly with propositional content and analogical or bodily expression with the communication of relations (Codoban 2006, 152; Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson 1967). His examples of a king, a chieftain, a holy man, and a wise man make authority part of the situation of address: who communicates, and in what position, can change how the same utterance is received. This supplies a defined mechanism to examine in religious visual media, without treating every religious image as an attempt at manipulation.

A different, more critical assertion occurs near the essay's end. Codoban describes a shift from text towards image and from a culture organized around knowledge towards spectacle; he labels the demonstrative logic of such communication ostensive (Codoban 2006, 157). The argument concerns the visibility of relations and the performative force of showing. It also contains a warning about the possibility of influence. In a religious setting, therefore, ostension should be treated as a question about how an audience is invited to see collective participation as significant, rather than as a synonym for visual proof of transcendence. The same image may act as information, invitation, reassurance, or a point of disagreement.

Imperiul comunicării provides a substantive extension of the argument beyond the 2006 article. Codoban identifies bodily expression with the analogical and relational side of communication (Codoban 2011b, 10–13). In the discussion of images, he differentiates conventional symbols, signs connected to their referents by physical contiguity, and iconic signs based on analogy (Codoban 2011b, 22–24). The distinction becomes important when television depicts an Orthodox gathering. A recording can establish that certain people, objects, and actions appeared before the camera. What the viewer infers from the scene depends on conventions of

interpretation; the picture cannot serve as independent verification of the sacred presence to which worshippers may refer. Codoban develops the related problem of an apparently indexical visual sign in his 2011 journal article (Codoban 2011a, 4–19).

The book also treats communication as the formation and negotiation of relationships. Codoban follows the shift from persuasive argument to other forms of influence and from the transmission of information to interaction and enunciation (Codoban 2011b, 58–60, 67–72). In his author's note he explains that the book grew out of initially independent writings and retains some thematic overlap (Codoban 2011b, 2). The relationship between the 2006 essay and the 2011 volume is therefore one of conceptual development across related texts. The later formulation is useful because it places bodies, images, and audience relations within a more extensive account of communication, while leaving open how a particular audience actually responds.

Codoban's later discussion of image interpretation distinguishes the identification of an image from its understanding through analogy (Codoban 2020, 174–82). His reflections on artificial intelligence belong to the philosophical context of that essay; the present inquiry draws on its semiotic question rather than adopting it as a technical assessment of contemporary systems. Recognition of a represented icon does not, by itself, explain the icon's significance for a worshipper. The devotional relationship also involves liturgical use and the Orthodox understanding of an image's relation to its prototype (John of Damascus 2003; Pentcheva 2010).

The proposed synthesis must also be distinguished from existing commentary on Codoban. Frunză (2011, 180–93) already examines whether communication constructs reality, relating Codoban's philosophy to postmodern religiosity and the dialectic of the sacred and profane. The present article does not claim originality for that connection. It narrows the question by placing a page-specific reading of Codoban alongside a documented pilgrimage finding, separating an empirically investigated media effect from a philosophical interpretation of manifestation. This difference in evidentiary level is especially important because the word construction otherwise risks passing without qualification from social recognizability to an assertion about being itself.

4. Materials, Method, and Documentary Provenance

The study combines close reading of primary philosophical texts with a focused comparison of published research. Its Codoban corpus comprises a digital facsimile of the printed 1998 monograph, the original 2006 journal article, and the internally paginated electronic text of *Imperiul comunicării* (Codoban 2011b). Two articles on images (Codoban 2011a; Codoban 2020) are used to check the continuity of his semiotic argument. The Tinos literature consists of four publications selected for their analyses of television, embodied religious practices, vows and visions, and devotional objects (Terzidou, Scarles, and Saunders 2017, 2018; Terzidou, Stylidis, and Terzidis 2018; Terzidou 2020). The corpus is purposively defined. Because the publications share aspects of their research setting, their findings are interpreted thematically rather than counted as independent replications.

The comparative procedure proceeds from a page-specific proposition in Codoban to a reported observation in the pilgrimage literature. The proposition is reconstructed in its original philosophical or communicative context, the empirical finding is attributed to the researchers who collected it, and the additional explanatory distinction is then made explicit. Confessional statements about the icon are treated as theological claims, and accounts of vows or visions as participants' reported experiences. The article does not introduce new interviews, field observations, or broadcast coding. The object of analysis is the explanatory relationship between the texts, rather than the empirical confirmation of supernatural events.

The electronic *Introducere în filosofie* is documented separately from the printed monograph. The Academy of Music, Theatre and Fine Arts (AMTAP) hosts a PDF at https://amtap.md/assets/pdf/Codoban%20A.%20Introducere%20in%20filosofie.pdf, accessed on 8 November 2026. Its title page identifies the text, without Romanian diacritics, as a third, revised and enlarged, unpublished edition. The stable internal locator is part III, "Dincolo de orizontul Lumii," section A, "Sacrul și Profanul," subsection 1, "Ontofanie și experiență religioasă" (Codoban n.d., pt. III, sec. A.1). Romanian diacritics have been restored in the section headings for consistent citation. Parallel formulations are present in Codoban's 1998 discussion, which is cited directly wherever the argument depends on the published book.

The publication record distinguishes the relevant editions. *Introducere în filosofie* appeared with Argonaut in 1995 and in a corrected second edition in 1996, according to the institutional bibliography of Babeș-Bolyai University (n.d., 1). The AMTAP document is an undated electronic text

bearing an unpublished third-edition designation. *Sacru și ontofanie* is a separate Polirom monograph published in 1998, with citations here following the printed page numbers visible in the facsimile. References to *Imperiul comunicării* (Codoban 2011b) follow the numbered pages 1–79 of the electronic text examined. Its publication details are verified against the 2011 Idea Design & Print edition, ISBN 978-606-8265-04-9. These locators identify the source used for each close reading and avoid confusing the electronic philosophy textbook with the published monograph.

5. Sacred-Place Recognition and the Published Tinos Findings

The anthropology of pilgrimage provides an essential safeguard against an overly unified account of sacred place. Turner and Turner emphasized symbolic travel and the potential for communitas, while Eade and Sallnow emphasized disagreement and competing interpretations; Coleman shows why these are not exhaustive alternatives (Turner and Turner 1978; Eade and Sallnow 1991; Coleman 2002). Religious recognition can coexist with divergent expectations. Smith's analysis of ritual and place also suggests that pathways, thresholds, calendars, and spatial ordering participate in making a site intelligible (Smith 1987). These approaches account for different aspects of pilgrimage without resolving the philosophical question of reality to which ontophany directs attention.

Tourism research has already explained much of the connection between representation and encounter. The tourist gaze links mediated expectations to ways of seeing (Urry and Larsen 2011), and authenticity scholarship analyses the authorization and personal negotiation of destinations (Belhassen, Caton, and Stewart 2008; Cohen and Cohen 2012). In Orthodox settings, however, a visit may be experienced through prayer, thanksgiving, requests for help, or the fulfillment of a vow. The institutional validity of a shrine and the intimate significance of an event may diverge. A fivefold phenomenology of Mount Athos, for instance, includes spiritual, cultural, environmental, secular, and educational dimensions, though that site is institutionally distinct from Tinos (Andriotis 2009).

Terzidou, Stylidis, and Terzidis (2018, 306–19) investigated the role of television coverage through ethnographic research involving 31 participant observations and 38 in-depth interviews during two organized coach trips to Tinos. They report that images of the holy icon, political leaders, and assembled worshippers influenced visitors' representations of the island and visiting patterns. Visual presentations of votive offerings also bore upon experiences on site. These are findings about visual mediation and

visitors' interpretation, not evidence that a broadcast image produces religious conviction in every viewer or that its visual form establishes divine presence.

The related research on performances distinguishes institutional from unconventional expressions of religiousness, emphasizing embodied encounters over a purely textual explanation of tourism (Terzidou, Scarles, and Saunders 2017, 116–29). A subsequent examination of motives portrays vows and visions as dynamic influences that may alter the significance of travel and even lead a believer to question a particular site following an unfulfilled expectation (Terzidou, Scarles, and Saunders 2018, 54–65). Finally, the materiality study shows that objects are experienced through their handling, placement, and interaction with bodies, sometimes in ways that exceed their assigned representational value (Terzidou 2020). The four publications together make Tinos a demanding case for an account that begins with communication: they document mediation, but also circumstances in which mediation cannot explain the entire encounter.

6. A Close Reading: From Content and Relationship to a Televised Pilgrimage

The first step in the comparison is a close reading of Codoban's 2006 argument. On page 152, he invokes Watzlawick's distinction between the informational content of an utterance and the relationship in which it is delivered. The relationship embraces the message and so operates at a metacommunicative level. Codoban specifies a related contrast between the propositional "utterance" and the act of "enunciation," placing ethos and pathos on the side of the speaker's relational authority and logos on the side of argumentative content. His reference to a "holy man" among figures who address an audience makes the relation of authority explicit (Codoban 2006, 152). These are claims about the force of address, not assertions that the addressee necessarily accepts the speaker's worldview. The distinction suggests that mediated images can convey information about a religious event while also presenting a relationship between participants, institutions, and spectators.

A second step draws on Codoban's discussion of ostension on page 157. The displacement of text by images, he argues, can move communication from discursive explanation toward showing and spectacle (Codoban 2006, 157). The point is not that images cease to signify; their form of address can make participation and authority visible without articulating a full argument. In *Imperiul comunicării*, the analysis of television as an

analogical medium provides a further basis for examining how a broadcast combines depiction with relational orientation (Codoban 2011b, 67–70). The relevant question becomes what is presented as publicly recognizable and with whom the viewer is invited to identify.

The third step turns to an identified empirical finding rather than an imagined broadcast. Terzidou, Stylidis, and Terzidis (2018, 306–19) report that television images of the revered icon, prominent political figures, and the worshipping crowd help shape viewers' destination images and visiting patterns. Their account also relates depictions of votive offerings to visitors' later experiences. The images have descriptive content: they identify a shrine, a celebration, and visible devotional activities. Their composition can also position the shrine as the focus of collective devotion and public attention. Interpreting this latter feature as a relational address is the specific use made here of Codoban's argument. It follows from the categories he defines and the elements reported in the study, without introducing a broadcast sequence or participant response absent from the published evidence.

This comparison yields a conceptual explanation that supplements the tourism findings. Research on destination image demonstrates that television coverage can influence expectations, decisions, and experience. Codoban helps specify why the social arrangement represented in the image matters alongside its informational content. An announcement naming a religious celebration communicates an event; a view of the icon amid assembled worshippers and visible public representatives may additionally present participation and recognition as a relationship into which the spectator can imagine entering. The contrast separates the message about a destination from the address enacted by its representation (Codoban 2006, 152, 157). It is an analytical comparison derived from the published descriptions, rather than a claim that the researchers experimentally compared two broadcasts. Its contribution is to identify relational authority and imagined affiliation as questions within mediated shrine recognition, rather than leaving the process entirely within the vocabulary of destination-image formation.

The distinction becomes more exact when the image's evidentiary status is considered. In his discussion of iconic and apparently indexical signs, Codoban explains how resemblance and recorded traces can acquire a misleading appearance of self-evident reality (Codoban 2011b, 22–24; 2011a, 4–19). Television can document acts of veneration; it cannot determine the Orthodox theological claim concerning the icon and its prototype. That claim must be read within the theology of images and

within devotional practice (John of Damascus 2003; Pentcheva 2010). A visible scene, an assertion of sacred presence, and a viewer's personal religious response thus remain distinct even when they concern the same pilgrimage site.

Votive offerings sharpen the same issue. The Tinos media study reports that televisual representations of offerings can influence visitors' on-site experience (Terzidou, Stylidis, and Terzidis 2018, 306–19). Information about an offering is one part of this influence. Codoban's relational model suggests a second question: when an object is shown as part of a collective act, does the viewer approach it as a devotional participant rather than merely as an observer? This question specifies the mechanism that a further study could examine through a comparison of broadcasts and audience accounts. The article's present conclusion is narrower: the visual representation of devotional action invites analysis of relationship as well as content, whereas the published empirical results concern destination image, visiting patterns, and experience.

The separation also resembles a concern in the study of religious mediation. Meyer (2011, 23–39) argues that the apparent immediacy of religious experience can itself be shaped by authorized forms of mediation. That insight cautions against treating pre-mediated religious presence as a neutral empirical baseline. The current argument uses this observation as a methodological challenge, while retaining the separate issue raised by ontophany: what kind of reality is disclosed within the religious account. Neither author's framework turns the scholar's description of a medium into proof of a transcendent referent.

7. Four Registers of Ontophany, Claim, Mediation, and Reception

The phrase "ontological affirmation" can obscure a fundamental distinction: an analyst's account of how religious reality is disclosed is different from a believer's assertion that something is present. The framework developed here therefore separates four registers. The first is philosophical and second-order. It concerns the conditions under which a religious world is experienced as ordered and real in relation to the sacred (Codoban 1998, 113–15). This is the role of ontophany in the analysis. It neither supplies the content of a specific Orthodox doctrine nor records the belief of an individual visitor. Codoban's discussion of the Absolute is reconstructed as a philosophical position, rather than assumed as a finding of the empirical pilgrimage literature.

The second register is confessional and institutional. A religious tradition may affirm that a holy person is encountered in a particular place, that an icon is worthy of veneration, or that historical events establish a site's devotional significance. Such affirmations belong to doctrinal discourse, liturgical practice, and historically specific forms of authorization (John of Damascus 2003; Pentcheva 2010). They may be analysed as claims within a religious world without being equated with Codoban's ontophany. Institutional recognition is one possible means of stabilizing and transmitting those claims. It is neither necessary evidence of an individual experience of presence nor a sufficient explanation of the philosophical category.

The third register concerns communicative mediation. Sermons, images, broadcasts, festivals, visitor information, and ordinary conversation render religious claims available to different audiences. Codoban's distinctions between content and relation, analogical signs and verbal statements, or enunciation and utterance allow the researcher to examine how each medium addresses its viewers (Codoban 2006, 152, 157; 2011b, 67–72). Mediation can confer familiarity and influence the felt credibility of a place. It can also invite disagreement. Neither public circulation nor institutional validation determines whether the sacred is metaphysically present.

The fourth register is the participant's first-person attribution of presence. Someone may describe prayer as answered, connect a visit with a vision, or report a powerful encounter with a devotional object. Those attributions are empirical evidence about experience and its interpretation. They may draw upon doctrine, earlier images, or embodied action, but they cannot be predicted from any one of them (Terzidou, Scarles, and Saunders 2018; Terzidou 2020). This register is not interchangeable with either the philosophical structure of ontophany or the institutional claim. It can be investigated through interviews and ethnography, while the truth of the metaphysical claim remains outside the competence of this particular method.

The registers are related without forming a necessary temporal sequence. A pilgrim may encounter doctrine through family practice long before any media representation; another may interpret a television event through an earlier personal vow. A participant's account may circulate subsequently and become part of the shrine's public narrative. Ontophany has a distinctive function in this model: it prevents the analyst from treating a religious assertion as merely a label attached to a location by asking what understanding of reality such an assertion entails. At the same time, that philosophical question cannot replace inquiry into whether an

individual accepts a doctrine, experiences presence, or contests an institutional portrayal. The model thereby establishes the difference between ontophany, belief, and public recognition rather than using three labels for the same event.

8. A Negative Case and the Limits of Communication

The unsuccessful vow is the clearest negative case. Terzidou, Scarles, and Saunders (2018, 54–65) identify how an unfulfilled vow can unsettle the certainty attached to a sacred destination. An account limited to the successful circulation of institutional images would expect recognition to reinforce the site's authority. The reported possibility of disappointment demonstrates why that prediction would be unreliable. A pilgrim may have received the expected message and recognized the public significance of the shrine, yet interpret a personal religious outcome in a way that complicates or redirects the journey. The communication model may explain the expectations available beforehand and the language later used to describe disappointment. It cannot explain away the event as a failure of marketing or establish what occurred in the relation the pilgrim considers sacred.

Material encounters provide another limit. Terzidou (2020) shows that offerings and devotional objects matter through their physical affordances, circulation, and affective entanglement with participants. Their practical significance is not exhausted by being viewed as signs. A purely ostensive interpretation would miss what happens through touch, movement, weight, placement, or sustained bodily attention; in that setting, the object is involved in the performance rather than functioning simply as a message. This is also why the distinction between film footage and an Orthodox icon is substantive. An image may mediate a religious relation, but the traditions of veneration and embodied practice through which that relation is understood require separate analysis (Morgan 2012; Pentcheva 2010).

Codoban's genealogy of visual communication also needs to be situated historically. The contemporary prominence of television does not explain the origins of older Orthodox devotional practices, and the sight of a procession cannot on its own establish that viewers have been seduced or manipulated. The communication account is applicable where the medium, the relation of address, and a documented response can be distinguished. Its role here is to interpret the public visibility of pilgrimage, while the theology of icons and the materially enacted character of ritual require

other analytical resources. Applied beyond these boundaries, the vocabulary of ostension would obscure rather than explain the case.

An explanation based exclusively on the communicative staging of religious authority would also risk treating disagreement as a transmission defect. The reported instability of vows suggests another possibility: visitors may understand the shared religious story perfectly and still experience the event as personally unresolved. Such variation matters for the study of religious communication because the receiver's attribution cannot be established solely from a message's institutional origin or visual grammar. The model must allow for interpretations that are not harmonious with collective expectations and for devotional practices whose significance unfolds beyond the gaze of cameras. These observations do not refute Codoban's analysis of contemporary communication; they identify the boundary of its explanatory application. The same boundary applies in the opposite direction. A theologian's confident assertion of presence cannot substitute for evidence that particular visitors perceived or accepted that presence during their journey.

9. Conclusion

The direct reading of *Sacru și ontofanie* establishes that Codoban treats ontophany as the disclosure of a religious world through the sacred. Hierophany and kratophany designate different emphases of manifestation; myth and ritual give religious experience distinct modes of articulation, and ontophany raises the question of the world's ontological coherence (Codoban 1998, 98–115). In the writings on communication, attention shifts to the relations that organize an address, the role of analogical expression, and the growing prominence of images and ostension (Codoban 2006, 152, 157; 2011b, 10, 22–24, 67–72). Their conjunction identifies a difference between the intelligibility of sacred reality and the circulation of representations of it.

The Tinos studies provide a concrete application. Television representations influence destination image and visiting practices; pilgrims also negotiate meaning through vows, embodied performances, and material offerings. The analytical gain from Codoban is a clearer account of how a representation can convey an explicit message and stage relations of recognition or authority at the same time. A four-register distinction keeps ontophanic interpretation separate from Orthodox confessional affirmation, communicative mediation, and a pilgrim's first-person attribution of presence. Unfulfilled vows and material encounters show

why the communicative account must be integrated with the existing ethnography rather than substituted for it. The result is a conceptual contribution to the study of sacred places: it locates the communicative dimension of religious recognition while respecting the different kinds of claim made about the reality of the sacred.

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