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# THE PHENOMENON OF HOLINESS IN THE SYSTEM OF RELIGIOUS-PHILOSOPHICAL VIEWS THE ORTHODOX SLAVONIC VIEW

**Zoja Kuca\***

*University of Lodz, Faculty of Philology, Pomorska 171/173, Łódź, 91-404, Poland*

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## **Abstract**

The article takes a comprehensive look at the category of holiness in a theological, philosophical and anthropological perspective within Orthodox religious thought and modern advances in Western phenomenology. Thanks to the semantic and conceptual analysis, we were able to identify several key semantic fields of the concept of holiness and present the main features each of them. The concept of holiness has several meanings and dimensions in which we can grasp its presence. Specifically, holiness can be described as a quality exclusive to God and those chosen by Him: as *numinosum*, a religious dimension that evokes specific spiritual and psychic experiences in the consciousness of the individual; as sacred, representing another sphere of being, an ontological reality revealed through hierophany (manifestation of the divine); and as perfection, a moral quality attained by individuals through their spiritual growth. All these meanings and dimensions are carefully considered in this article.

*Keywords:* profane, theology, philosophy, anthropology, phenomenology

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## **1. Introduction - the biblical roots**

The phenomenon of holiness as such originally appears in Judeo-Christian writings in the pages of the Bible. Scripture contains over eight hundred passages with the root *holy*, while the expression *holiness* is used 23 times. In the Old Testament, the idea of holiness appears in the context of divine attributes: “Who is like you, Lord, among the gods? Who is like You, majestic *in holiness*, fearful in praises, the Creator of wonders?” (Exodus 15.11). The exclusive property of man: “But you shall be with Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19.6). And also the property of objects that came into direct connection with the divine: “And God said, ‘Come not up here; take off your shoes from your feet, for the ground where you stand is holy’” (Exodus 3.5). As early as in the second chapter of Genesis the background to the phenomenon of holiness is given in the verb sanctify: “And God blessed the seventh day and *sanctified* it, for in it He rested from all His works which God

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\*E-mail: [zoja.kuca@uni.lodz.pl](mailto:zoja.kuca@uni.lodz.pl)

did and created” (Genesis 2.3). As one delves deeper into reading the Bible one encounters new expressions derived from the semantic definition of holiness: shrine, sanctuary, Holy of Holies, consecrate, most holy, sanctify (Exodus 15.13, 15.17, 26.33, 32.29; Numbers 18.10; Mathew 6.9; 1 Peter 3.15). It is important to note that Scripture not only mentions holiness, but also partially reveals the meaning of the expression, especially in the New Testament. Nevertheless, as early as in the Old Testament, the Lord calls man to holiness as a hallmark of his divine nature: “I am the Lord your God: sanctify yourselves and be holy, for I am holy” (Leviticus 11.44).

In ancient Hebrew the word holiness ‘kadosh’ (קדוש) meant primarily something mysterious, foreign to the world, separate, requiring a reverent distance. Holiness was predominantly a property of the transcendent Deity and could not be described in cataphatic terms. In the Old Testament everything that was dedicated to God was called ‘holy’, i.e. it was considered separate, detached: “If it be cattle that are sacrificed to the Lord, then everything that is given to the Lord must be holy” (Leviticus 27.9). The power and manifestation of the biblical concept of holiness lay in the duality of the state of separation and connection. Israel comprehended God as Ruler of the world precisely in His distance from the world, and at the same time in His world-penetrating action: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts! The whole Earth is full of His glory!” (Isaiah 6.3). Hence the need for the Jewish people to live at a distance from other nations and from the world, as a ‘kingdom of priests’, a ‘holy nation’, to ultimately bring the whole world to His will. The Old Testament definition of holiness was its close connection with the holiness of God. All human holiness was a response to and inclusion in this divine holiness.

In the New Testament the term *kadosh* was represented by several Greek equivalents: ‘agiotis’ (ἀγιότης, Hebrew 12.10), ‘osiotis’ (οσιότης, Luke 1.75, Ephesians 4.24), ‘agiosini’ (αγιωσύνη, 1 Thessalonians 3.13) and ‘agiasmos’ (αγιασμός, 1 Thessalonians 4.4). The meaning of this semantic group, centred around the adjective ‘αγιός’, was similar to the Hebrew *kadosh*, but took on an additional colouring. Metropolitan Juvenaly draws particular attention to three aspects associated with the reference to the phenomenon of holiness in the New Testament. First, the term saint in the New Testament is specific to God; second, the word is often attributed to Christ; and third, it refers directly to Christians who are called *saints* (ἅγιοι). In turn, the derivatives of the word *αγιός*, denote respectively: *agiotis*, the quality of holiness, *agiosini*, the state of holiness, and *agiasmos*, the result of *holiness* [1]. By analysing the semantic meaning of the word holiness as represented by the Semitic word קדוש the Ancient Greek *αγιός* and the Latin *sanctitas*, the first conclusions can be drawn about the nature of this phenomenon.

In the biblical understanding, the phenomenon of holiness is part of divine revelation, God reveals Himself to man, revealing His holiness to him: “This is the water of Meribah, by which the children of Israel entered into strife with the Lord, and He revealed His holiness to them” (Numbers 20.13). It is at the same time the manifestation of the transcendence of God, His power to destroy all

unworthy that seek to approach it: “And He smote the inhabitants of Bethshemesh, because they had investigated the ark of the Lord” (1 Samuel 6.19). Yet divine holiness is not identified with either power or transcendence, for it also manifests itself in love and forgiveness: “I will not do my wrath to destroy Ephraim, for I am God, not man; among you is the Holy One” (Hosea 11.9). Holiness is an exclusively divine trait, one that transcends creation - the visible and invisible world.

## **2. Slavonic etymology**

Although the term holiness in its entirety can only be applied to God, it is possible to speak of the holiness of things and of man with whom He comes into contact. The New Testament reveals holiness in Jesus Christ, in His Church and in believing people. Believers participate in holiness through the mediation of the Saviour and the work of the Holy Spirit [2], which is the source of holiness [3]. It is important to note that the biblical understanding of holiness is quite extensive. Holiness in the Bible is not simply a rejection of the mundane, but a response to divine revelation and man’s ascent to God, the source of holiness. The problem of the nature of holiness addressed in Scripture ultimately boils down to the divine mystery and its sacramental revelation.

Semantic and substantive characterization of holiness given by Scripture required additional theological reflection for the final interpretation of this phenomenon. Before considering religious and philosophical interpretations of the phenomenon of holiness, it is appropriate to make an etymological and semantic assessment of this concept in the context of the Russian language.

The Complete Church Slavonic Dictionary, analysing the origin of the word holiness, concentrates on the root ‘saint’, and attributes its origin directly to the Sanskrit verb ‘çvi’ (to shine, shine). At the same time, the adjective ‘çvinta’ or ‘çvênta’ implies saint, literally translated as shining, purifying. According to this dictionary, the Slavic adjective containing the root ‘svyat’ had the same meaning in Rus, and originally, in the pre-Christian era, was identical with the adjective strong, sturdy, tall, and only later acquired an additional meaning - bright, shining, unstained [4, 5].

A somewhat different position is taken by Vladimir Toporov, who sees in the basis of the word ‘svyatost’ the Slavic element ‘svet’, linking the present Russian adjective ‘svyatoy’ with the Indo-European base ‘k’uen-to’ (increase, swelling) [6]. As proof of this point of view, the researcher cites the fact that the Slavs used the epithet saint as a symbol of vegetative fertility (holy tree, grove, reaper), animal fertility (holy bee, cow), as well as sacral marked points of space and time (holy mountain, field, stone). All this gives one the right to assert the deep pre-Christian semantic content and indisputable sacredness of the term back in the pagan era. The researcher conducted a detailed analysis of the functioning of the concept of holiness in Russian spiritual culture and presented his own vision of the problem as follows: “First, we must recall that the very notion of holiness (as well as the corresponding word), so essential in

Christianity, particularly in Orthodoxy and even more so in the Russian Church-religious tradition, is much older than Christianity and the time of the formation of the Russian language. [...], the sacralisation (or even hypersacralisation) of the ancient Russian literary tradition manifests itself mainly in the fact that everything must in principle be sacralised, wrested from under the power of the evil beginning - and - one cannot reconcile with less - returned to its original state of integrity, purity.” [6]

At the same time, modern dictionaries of the Russian language consider the term holiness from a sociological point of view, establishing the meaning of the noun and adjective holy. Thus, the explanatory dictionary of Ushakov considers several semantic groups characterizing this term. In religious concepts, a saint possesses absolute perfection and purity, is righteous, immaculate, corresponding to the religious ideal. In the Christian cult it is “a person who has spent his life defending the interests of the church and religion, and after his death is recognized as the unquestionable model of Christian life and patron of believers”, as well as “endowed with divine grace, who is the source of divine power” [7]. A saint is a person imbued with “something high, sublime, ideal” [7]. The same approach to defining the meaning of ‘saint’ can be found in the explanatory dictionary of Sergei Ozhegov and Natalia Shvedova [8].

Quite a broad interpretation of this term is presented in the Dictionary of Vladimir Dal, who defines a saint as a highly moral person - pure, clean, and perfect. At the same time, the researcher also considers the abstract concept of a saint as an object belonging to the sphere of sacred: “everything that belongs to the Godhead, to the truths of faith, the subject of our highest veneration, worship, spiritual, divine, heavenly” [9]. Dahl’s Dictionary also presents an incomplete typology of the divisions of saints.

In my opinion, the most extensive interpretation of the term holiness is given by *The Dictionary of Modern Russian Literary Language*, which distinguishes eight semantic fields: “1. In religious terms - filled with holiness; divine. [...] 2. Associated with religious worship (usually used as a permanent epithet for objects and places of religious worship). [...] 3. Relating to Easter, occurring at Easter, occurring at Easter. [...] 4. In full form only. In the Christian religion, one who has spent his life in the service of God and is recognized by the church after death as the patron saint of the faithful. [...] 5. *Figuratively*, highly moral; blameless in one's life, conduct, etc. [...] 6. Deeply esteemed, dear, cherished. [...] 7. Unbreakable, immutable. [...] 8. Extremely important, high, honourable.” [10]

So, the author of the dictionary article fully managed to cover the semantic religious field of the term under study. The content characteristic of holiness in this dictionary was presented based on such well-established concepts and phrases in Russian as: *saint/s, communion of the Holy Mysteries, Holy Scripture, Holy Week, Holy of Holies, holy icon, holy book, holy words, holy father, holy corner, holy places* [10].

The modern understanding of the adjective 'saint' and its use in religious and ceremonial practice came much later. According to encyclopaedic data, the word saint (αγιός, sanctus) was not identified with today's canonized saints in the monuments of Christian antiquity, until the middle of the fourth century, and was generally used rather rarely. According to some scholars, the reason why the first Christians avoided the epithets 'sanctus', 'sanctissimus' is identification of the word with the pagan past. Therefore, the name of a person venerated by the Church was often replaced by 'dominus', 'domini', which in turn was associated with today's concept of a *martyr* [11]. This fact is most likely because in the early centuries of Christianity martyrdom was the main way to achieve sainthood.

It is worth noting that the term holiness itself, abstracted from the properties of a particular bearer and made into a noun with an abstract attribute, did not emerge until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century [12]. Prior to that time holiness, defined solely through the prism of Scripture, was associated with a specific medium, God and saints. As a consequence, the phenomenon began to be seen not only from a sociological point of view, i.e. from the perspective of the study of the figure and significance of a particular saint in the life of society, but also as a phenomenological phenomenon, i.e. a particular kind of experience.

### **3. Orthodox theological view**

Undoubtedly, the semantics of the Russian concept of holiness does not reflect the totality of phenomena associated with it. This occurrence is largely related to religious experience and personal experiences of a particular Christian. The apophatic nature of early Theology was caused by the impossibility of communicating mystical revelations with the help of linguistic tools. Hence the need for a non-verbal representation of the transcendent world. In Orthodox Theology, the icon acts not only as a representation of spiritual phenomena, but also as a door or window connecting the two worlds [13].

In the Orthodox theological interpretation, holiness is a fundamental concept and stands in direct connection with the idea of 'theosis' (θέωσις), i.e. the transformation of man under the influence of divine grace. The measure of a particular person's holiness is the measure of his or her deification and vice versa. Apparently, the Church Fathers in their theological treatises did not use the term holiness too often and did not analyse it in detail, as they were guided by the biblical interpretation, concentrating more on the very process of achieving holiness, whose essence was for them a priori. The writings of the Fathers contain a psychological understanding of man and the practical experience of attaining holiness.

Since for the Holy Fathers holiness, following the biblical understanding, was the exclusive prerogative of a transcendent God, it is logical that it can only be attained through communion with God, the human accession to divine grace in the process of purification from passionate nature: "[...] *sanctification* is total stillness and mortification of sensual lust. Being in such a state, we are put away

by the obscene howl of rage, having no more lust to excite it, and to incite it to war over its pleasures. And so lust, thanks to *holiness* consistent with reason, is put to death in us.” [14]

Saint John Cassian, on the other hand, used the Apostle Paul’s description of holiness to describe the real struggle with the passions: “This is the will of God, says Saint Paul - your holiness. And to leave us no doubt and no dark confusion as to what exactly he calls holiness - truth, love, humility or patience, since these are the virtues that achieve holiness; he defines directly what exactly he wanted to call holiness: This is the will of God - your holiness: that you abstain from fornication. That each one of you may know how to keep his vessel in holiness and honour, and not in the passion of lust, like the heathen who do not know God.” [15] At the end of the struggle the Christian is prepared to rest in divine holiness: “And we now feel the urge to do good, after our heart has conceived from Your Spirit the thought of it; before, we who have forsaken You were driven to do evil; You, Lord, the One, the Good, have not ceased to do good. And we have, by Your grace, some good deeds, but they are not eternal. We hope, however, that when we have finished them, we will rest in Your great holiness.” [3, p. 343]

The above-quoted reflections of the Church Fathers once again confirm the a priori nature of holiness as a divine attribute, which they did not deem necessary to describe in theological terms. The cognition of God was carried out by the first Christian ascetics sensually, based on personal spiritual experience, which was the intimate sphere of each ascetic. For the Church Fathers theosis is “not an idea, not a theory, not a dogma, but first and foremost a fact of their inner life” [16]. And yet some theologians shared their religious experience. One of them was Simeon the New Theologian: “I have often seen the light, and sometimes it appeared within me, when my soul had peace and stillness, and other times it appeared outside at a distance, or even completely hidden, and when hidden it caused me excessive sorrow [...] But when I began to cry and to shed tears, and to show all detachment from everything and all obedience and humility, then it appeared again, like the Sun [...] Finally, You are invisible, intangible, and ever-moving, everywhere, always present in all things, fulfilling everything, visible and hiding every hour. [...] You dispelled the darkness that had been within me, dispelled the cloud that covered me, purged the apple of my intellectual eyes, opened my auditory soul, removed the veil of insensibility from my heart, and with that did away with carnal lust and entirely expelled all passion from me.” [17]

Vladimir Lossky sees in this vision of divine light a manifestation of the highest knowledge of grace and evidence of the unity of the human person with God. The researcher of Church mysticism writes: “It is no longer an ecstasy, no longer a transient state that delights, that detaches the human being from his ordinary experience, but a conscious life in light, in unceasing communion with God. [...] The divine light becomes the basis of our consciousness: in it we know God and we know ourselves. It penetrates into the depths of our being, entering

into union with God, it becomes for him God's judgment until the Last Judgment." [18]

In the ascent to holiness, the Christian needs detailed guidance. This is due to the difficulty of self-denying asceticism as well as the many spiritual dangers that lie along the way. The Church Fathers therefore focused on detailing the process of struggle and purification. The main issues in theological treatises were sections on the struggle against gluttony, fornication, covetousness, anger, sorrow, pride, despondency, i.e. spiritual passions (according to the teachings of Saint John Cassian, Nilus of Sinai, Ephrem the Syrian, John the Lestaitimian, Theodore the Studite, Simeon the New Theologian and others). Exceptions are the teachings of some apologists on love, in particular Saint Maximus the Confessor and Venerable Fallasius [15, p. 290-318], the theological treatises on the Divine Names, or the Heavenly and Ecclesiastical Hierarchy of Dionysius the Areopagite [19-21].

However, spiritual struggle and the Christian's own efforts alone are not sufficient for full participation in divine holiness. The central point of ascent and establishment in it is the sacrament of the Eucharist, which unites believers in Christ into one mystical body. The sanctification of human nature in the process of communion with the Holy Mysteries is the main condition of salvation: Unless you eat the Flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood, you do not have life in you (John 6.53). In the Eucharist, the establishment of the Kingdom of God already takes place in our concrete historical being. "The understanding of the Christian community as a community of God's friends, a 'holy people', was expressed most fully in the liturgical life of the ancient Church, since it was the Eucharist that was the centre and basis of this life, the basis of worship and the basis of teaching [...] During communion, the eternity of transfigured being (the Kingdom of Heaven, the baptismal regeneration) is really present in the temporal being, in the earthly life of the Church community." [22]

It is worth noting that in the early centuries of Christianity there were no theological treatises containing a teaching on holiness itself. It is only in the nineteenth century that interest in the phenomenon and its growth in popularity can be observed. This may be due to several reasons. One of them may be a rejection of the contemplative, efficacious theology so successfully practised in the early centuries of Christianity, in favour of scholasticism. On this point, Simeon the New Theologian gives us a very essential thought: repentance and theology are two different processes, the former must precede the latter, which is a mental and sensual process - a 'state of contemplation', not a philosophy. He writes: "Neither to him who theologises goes repentance, nor to him who repents goes Theology. For as far as the east is from the west, so much theology is above repentance. He who is in penitential state and really does penitential deeds, shows himself as a sick man, living day by day amid hardships, or as a poor man, dressed in tatters and begging for charity. And he who theologizes, resembles a man who spends time in the king's chambers, in the king's garb, always being near the king, talking to him, and from him he clearly hears his commands and

all that the king wants (of course, state of contemplation, and not scientific theology).” [15, p. 45]

In support of the claim that Christian thinkers are gradually moving away from effective contemplative theology in favour of scholastic philosophising, the quote from Saint Seraphim of Sarov quoted by Lossky speaks volumes: “We are now [...] to the point where we hardly understand the words of Scripture. Some say: this place is incomprehensible, could the Apostles so obviously feel the Holy Spirit? Is there not error here? But there is no mistake... there was not and there is no mistake... This all happened because, little by little, moving away from the simplicity of Christian belief, under the pretext of education, we went into such darkness of ignorance that it seems to us completely incomprehensible which for the ancient Christians was clear. In the most ordinary conversations, the concept of God appearing among people did not seem strange to any of the interlocutors.” [18, p. 246]

Accordingly, the less one experiences and immerses oneself in divine holiness, the more one needs intellectual, philosophical reflection on it. However, despite the small presence of the term holiness in the writings of early and medieval Christian theologians, we can still speak of a theology of holiness, whose central point, as we have said, is the doctrine of theosis.

#### **4. Philosophical dimension**

In addition to the Orthodox theological interpretation of the idea of holiness, of interest is the understanding of this phenomenon by religious and philosophical thinkers of the West and the East. Among the philosophers dealing with the concept of holiness, Rudolf von Otto, the founder of the phenomenology of religion, a Protestant theologian and religious scholar, comes first. In his book *Das Heilige*, published in 1917, Otto for the first time in the history of Christian philosophy considered the category of holiness as a religious phenomenon with all its consequences [23].

So, at the beginning of his reflections, Otto draws a distinction between the rational and the irrational element in the knowledge of the divine. For the philosopher there is no contradiction in the existence of this antinomy, which is in fact two different ways of knowing the divine reality - i.e. mental (rational, describing everything with concrete definitions) and sensual (knowing the transcendent reality with sensual receptors) [23]. This idea runs through the whole system of views of the Protestant theologian, its central point being that, despite the necessity of the rational element, at the highest level of mystical experience, reason alone becomes insufficient for the cognition of God. Holiness is just such a phenomenon - inaccessible to conceptual comprehension and eluding rational reasoning, it is an indescribable phenomenon - ‘arretton ineffabile’ [23].

Nevertheless, at the level of rational definition, knowledge of holiness is still possible. Rudolf Otto also examines the etymology of the word holiness and mentions its original biblical origin. However, according to the philosopher, the



modern understanding of this word has acquired the wrong semantic orientation, namely association with moral attributes. Otto clearly distances himself from moral reductionism, transferring holiness from the realm of moral perfection to a different plane altogether - that of religious experience [24]. Hence, according to the philosopher, there is a need for a new lexical formulation of the term holiness into a new one - 'numinosum' (Numen, numinous from Latin *numen* - deity) [23, p. 10]. According to Otto, numinosity is the central attribute of spiritual experience, the human person's encounter with the Holy, a super intelligent experience of deity that cannot be identified with any human emotion. One can approach religious reality through a special power, the so-called 'sensus numinis', through external and internal contact with the sacred.

Experiencing or encountering noumena involves other important feelings. Otto introduces several categories of such experiences. The first of these is the feeling of creaturely dependence, which manifests itself in the awareness of a person's nothingness in comparison with his Creator. One of the conditions for its emergence is the reality of contact with a numinous object. The German phenomenologist defines the second experience as 'mysterium tremendum' or the feeling of mystical fear. This category derives both from the inner experience of the soul and from the divine attributes, which are not only positive (goodness, love, generosity) but also negative (anger, rage). And the latter divine attribute is always justified by all-seeing justice. According to Otto, *mysterium tremendum* can be observed already in pagan religions in the form of physiological manifestations, as that bodily stupor, convulsion of the body, which in the higher stages of the development of religion manifests itself in a more refined and exacerbated form - it is no longer the body, and stupor the soul and its mysterious organs [23, p. 15]. The opposite sense of *mysterium tremendum* is 'fascinans', a sense of attraction, fascination, and admiration. Numinosum simultaneously repels and attracts, paralyzes and fascinates, arouses mystical terror and rapture, forming a so-called contrast-harmony. At a certain stage of religious experience *mysterium tremendum* and *fascinans* are already one, inseparable. The philosopher draws attention to the evolutionary nature of the experience of the *numinosum*: at its initial stage, we are dealing with demonic fear and at the end, with divine awe.

By analysing the evolutionary nature of the experiences of the numinous in the Old and New Testament, Otto concludes that there is a process of gradual rationalisation of the numinosum. However, it would be a mistake to assume that this rationalisation excludes or refutes numinosum. This view is supported by the fact of the key gospel sermon, the preaching of the Kingdom of God, which is a purely numinosum object. In the Kingdom of God everything is imbued with mysticism, everything is numinous. In this reality, the term 'saints' is only a noumenal technical term. The master and ruler of this kingdom is God the Father, who is the embodiment of all the above noumenalism with its contrast-harmony. By identifying the Father solely with positive rationalizing attributes, Science loses, according to Otto, the true biblical meaning of both this noun and its definition: "While being the ruler, he is no less holy, numinous, or

mysterious, *kadosh*, *hagios*, *sacer*, and *sanctus* than his kingdom, but even more absolutely, he is the exaltation and the complement of everything that the Old Testament refers to as ‘the sense of dependence of Creation’, the ‘divine reverence’ etc.” [23, p. 102].

It was not necessary in the New Testament to repeat the doctrine of the fear of the Lord and of divine omnipotence, for in the minds of the Israelites this fact was already an axiom. Christ was preaching a new knowledge that needed to be assimilated, namely that this same unapproachable, all-powerful, and awe-inspiring God was both the good and merciful Father in Heaven. This contrast of impregnability and proximity, wrath and mercy, might and goodness, power and meekness is the core Christian sentiment. Ultimately, the process of rationalisation does not lead to the refutation of the noumenal, but rather to its addition. Based on the cited religious studies, Otto concludes about the essence of the phenomenon of holiness. He states: “Holiness in its full meaning is a complex category for us. It comprises of both rational and irrational elements. With both, however, and it needs to be strongly emphasised, it is a pure ‘a priori’ category contrary to any sensualism and evolutionism views.” [23, p. 133]

Thus, understood holiness has the property of both an inner and an outer manifestation. It is no coincidence that the phenomenologist raises this question. Otto considers the ability to properly know and recognise holiness in its manifestations one of the key conditions for adequate contact with the noumenal. He defines that ability as the gift of vision (*divination*). In the language of Sacred Scripture this capacity is called the “inner witness of the Holy Spirit” [23, p. 167]. In considering this feature of the human psyche, Otto is guided by Friedrich Schleimacher’s understanding, but, unlike the latter, he develops his understanding of this faculty in a Christological direction. For Otto it is Christ who is the highest manifestation of *holiness*, its visible embodiment.

The spontaneity of manifestation is related to the spontaneity of the gift of vision, says the religious scholar. Christ’s teaching was not a teaching about himself, but about the Kingdom of God. Consequently, the disciples’ affirmative conclusion, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mathew 16.16), derived from the gift of the vision of holiness, not from the rationalistic conclusions drawn from the Saviour’s sermons. Holiness in this case is that irrational factor which attracts and captivates the hearts of believers. Through this reasoning the mechanism of attraction to the saints, around whom disciples, followers, and worshippers tend to always cluster and concentrate, is revealed. Holiness is the true centre of attraction, and the measure of communion with it is the measure of spiritual growth and development.

The final formulation of the manifestation of holiness in Christ took place at the Cross. The Cross of the Saviour combines elements of the rational and the irrational, what can be comprehended and what cannot be comprehended. The Cross is not just a reflection of the Eternal Father, not just a reflection of the highest rational element of holiness, but holiness as such.

Otto's analysis of the religious phenomenon is met with some criticism by the Polish researcher in the field Zofia Zdybicka, who does not find in the work of the German religious scholar an answer to the main question about the very existence of the noumenal and, thus, about the possibility to attribute it to the metaphysical sense [24, p. 242]. However, is there a need for a phenomenological justification of the existence of the divine origin, and does the German religious scholar himself set such a goal for himself? In the case of this book, it is safe to say that there is not. Otto repeatedly refers to the primordial nature of religious experience, which he considers 'a priori' as we have shown above. The scholar himself defines the audience of his work at the beginning of his book. (Such an audience must include someone with at least minimal religious experience [23, p. 13].)

The philosophical and religious studies of the phenomenon of holiness by Otto have been continued in the works of subsequent generations of religious and phenomenological scholars. One of the most important works in this field is that of the Romanian scholar Mircea Eliade. In light of our focus on the phenomenon of holiness, *The Sacred and the Profane* (1956) [25] and *Treatise on the History of Religions* (1948) [26] will be of most interest, as they present the main results of phenomenological and historical studies on the facts of religious experience.

For Eliade, the basic element in understanding the phenomenon of holiness is the distinction between the realm of *sacred* and *profane*. He builds his teaching based on this distinction, where the first key definition of holiness and the sacred is its opposition to the sphere of secularity [25]. The second important definition is that of 'hierophany' (ιερός - sacred and φανός - light), which Eliade understood as the embodiment or manifestation of holiness in the world: "One could claim the history of religion is composed of a large amount of hierophany, that is manifestations of holiness. There exists a continuum, from the most basic type of hierophany (for example embodiment of the sacred in an object - a stone or a tree) to the most sublime (such as God's incarnation in Jesus Christ is for a Christian). We are forever faced with the same mysterious process: 'entirely different', or outwardliness are features in objects which are integral to our 'natural' or 'lay' world." [25]

The manifestation of sacredness in things, objects and phenomena belongs to the sphere of inner, spiritual perception. A new dimension of holiness, revealed in a particular object, becomes available only in religious experience. To a greater or lesser extent, man strives for a religious worldview, the highest stage of which is universal sacredness, where the Cosmos appears as an all-encompassing 'hierophantēs'. According to the researcher, the quest for religiosity, and thus the sacralisation of the surrounding reality, is observed to the greatest extent in archaic society. This is primarily due to the identification of holiness with power and, as a result, with reality itself: "Man living in an ancient society aspires to live among the sacred or in proximity to sacred objects. The aspiration is understandable, since all ancient societies and primeval men considered sacredness to equal power and, ultimately, reality. [...] Sacred

power meant reality, eternity and force all in one. The contrast between sacred and secular often represents the contrast between real and unreal or pseudo-real.” [25]

From this postulate, the scholar concludes that there are two forms of ‘being’ in the world - religious and secular. Modern society, characterised by a secular worldview, stays in a desecralised reality. Unlike religious man, who seeks to abide in a ‘holy universe’, the desecralized secular man reduces his entire existence to organic, physiological functioning, denying the transcendent and endorsing the ‘relativity’ of reality. What is characteristic of this understanding of sacredness and desecralization is that religious functioning does not refute physiology, but only sees in it another, ‘additional’ dimension. *Homo religiosus*, according to Eliade, is an ontological property of the human person, derived from certain unexamined fundamental facts [24, p. 243].

The tendency towards religiosity is conditioned, according to the religious scholar, not only by internal factors, but also by external ones. Already in creation itself, the order of the Universe, reflecting by its arrangement some manifestations of the sacred, predisposed the human mind to religiosity. “The Universe has been created in such a way that the religious man, observing it, discovers multiple manifestations of *sacred*, which equals existence. Above all: the world exists and is structured, it is not chaos but Cosmos. [...] That divine creation always manifests transparency and spontaneously uncovers the various aspects of sacredness. The sky directly and naturally manifests infinite space and divine transcendence. [...] Cosmos is a whole simultaneously real, alive and sacred: it manifests the modality of existence and sacred.” [25, p. 95]

The sacralisation of the cosmic structure has given rise to many forms of religious worship in practically all ethnic groups. Eliade classifies the varieties of religious services and deities according to the object of the cosmic order. The heavens, the Earth and the elements such as water and fire have given rise to a large number of cults aimed at their worship [25, p. 95-131]. From this, the researcher concludes that there is a fundamental commonality of all beliefs and religions, which represent essentially the same divine reality.

Based on an analysis of Eliade’s writings, the main conclusions can be drawn about his vision of the phenomenon of holiness. The difference in approach to this problem with R. Otto comes to the fore. While the German phenomenologist focused his attention primarily on the irrational nature of the saint, who is “absolutely and completely different: neither human nor cosmic” [23, p. 133], Eliade has a different approach to the experience of the saint. ‘Mysterium tremendum’ and ‘mysterium fascinans’ give way to another noumenal experience - a sense of the fullness of divine being. In the encounter with the noumena, man is not so much horrified as he finds for himself the ‘centre of orientation’, the ‘navel of the Earth’, ‘the imago mundi’ [25, p. 34; 26]. In the religious experience, man discovers a sign that has religious significance, bringing peace to his life and extracting him from ‘relativity and confusion’. The idea of a ‘fearful God’ is alien to Eliade - a sense of fear arises only in the uninitiated.

Eliade attributes the phenomenon of holiness to an ontologically objective, absolute reality. "Holiness is reality, it is power and a vital force, a source of life and fertility. The religious man's aspiration to live a sacred life means a desire to live in objective reality, [...], desire to live in a real and causative world, not an illusory world. This longing is strongly manifested in the religious man's need to live in a sacred world, or a sacred space." [25, p. 22]

The sacred, as has been shown above, manifests itself in the world in a form sensually accessible to man - hierophant. Man's nature, in turn, is based on an intuitive longing for holiness. *Homo religiosus* constitutes one of the main characteristics of his personality. Hierophant is therefore nothing less than an answer to the questions of the human soul, a welcome encounter between transcendent reality and the individual. Man himself aspires to become as 'other' as the hierophant he discovers. The object in which hierophant has manifested itself becomes sacred, but it does not cease to be itself because it continues to exist in cosmic space.

The American philosopher and psychologist William James, one of the founders of pragmatism and functionalism, considered this phenomenon in practical terms or analysis of the manifestation of the fruits of holiness. In his book *The Varieties of Religious Experience. A Study in Human Nature*, the researcher made an attempt to not only define the state of holiness, but also to distinguish the main features and mental states of people who have reached one or another level of holiness [27]. James defines the state of holiness as an imposition from above, a rebirth of the soul, manifested in a certain psycho-spiritual state of man characterized by love and humility, boundless trust in God, severity to self, indulgence towards others.

The value of the American philosopher's study from this perspective is to systematise the states of holiness and to characterise the distinctive characteristics of the enlightened person. According to James, a person's actions depend to a greater or lesser extent on his emotional susceptibility, the essence of which the researcher sees in the dualism of forbidding and affirming attitudes of the psyche. A state of grace removes all restraining psychological factors from the human psyche and brings the individual to a new level of perception of reality [27].

As the researcher correctly observed, the saints are characterised by a continuous state of exaltation and piousness, whereas a person who has not reached a high level of religious and mystical experience may experience these feelings only occasionally, and sometimes only once in a lifetime.

According to James, holiness can be described as the ripe fruit of a religious state. In a slightly different way, a holy man can be described as one who is guided in his activities by a religious feeling. On this basis the philosopher tried to form a common type of saint for all religions with its characteristic features. Thus, according to the scholar, a saint is distinguished by:

- 1) A feeling of being in a wider life than that of this world's selfish little interests. For Christian saints the personification of this Power is always God.
- 2) A sense of the friendly continuity of the ideal power with our own life, and a

willing self-surrender to its control. 3) An immense elation and freedom, as the outlines of the confining selfhood melt down. 4) A shifting of the emotional centre towards loving and harmonious affections, towards ‘yes, yes,’ and away from ‘no’, where the claims of the non-ego are concerned [27, p. 186-187]. In addition to the main features of a typical saint, the philosopher identifies four main properties of such a person’s state of mind: asceticism, strength of soul, purity of soul, mercy.

The downside of James’ research is the profound subjectivism of the experiences described, in which spiritual impulses refer to the inner self rather than to the action of grace. Thus, asceticism becomes a way of measuring the degree of devotion to a higher power. This approach seems quite correct only to a certain extent, particularly in relation to Eastern religions. In Christianity the notion of asceticism is based on different principles that give priority to the taming of the flesh in the struggle with passions and preparing the body for the contact with the divine. Hence the need for purity of spirit, which is reached through asceticism, is not primary, but secondary, arising directly from the desire for ‘eternal communion’ with God.

When examining the category of holiness in the philosophical and religious studies of Western thinkers, it is impossible to pass by contemporary researchers. A notable example in this field is Louis Dupre, Professor of Philosophy of Religion at Yale University, known for his work on the philosophy of religion, *The Other Dimension: A Search for the Meaning of Religious Attitudes*. Drawing on the key works in the field, the treatises on holiness by Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade, Dupre has developed his own approach to the phenomenon of holiness, considering the achievements of contemporary philosophical thought that seeks “points of convergence between religion, morality and reason” and focuses on “the intellectual dimension of religion” [28].

Considering the key points of L. Dupré’s philosophical reflections on holiness, it is worth paying attention to the first aspect, which for this philosopher is the assertion of the subjectivity of religious experience and the *sacred* perception associated with it [29]. Although the scholar does not deny the existence of a transcendent source - the object of religious experience and, to use Eliade’s terminology, acknowledges the existence of a ‘deeper reality’ or ‘ultimate reality’ [29], he questions the sacredness of things themselves. For Dupre, the sacredness of this or that object is relative because it is limited to the subjectivity of the perception of the individual. Sacredness belongs only to one absolute, or rather to something transcendent-supernatural, which projects it depending on the object, thing or phenomenon. “We therefore may add to our initial statement that every object is potentially religious, the negative counterpart that no object is sacred in itself. What singles out the sacred is the absolute appearing through the finite object.” [29, p. 14-15]

Such an impersonal source of holiness is the beginning, the real reality, ‘mana’, reflected as in a mirror in a particular consciousness, or not reflected at all [29, p. 18]. Louis Dupré uses the term in the sense given by Eliade, who,

following the Melanesians, understood ‘mana’ as a mysterious and active force which is the source of all religious phenomena [26].

Another important element in L. Dupré’s discourse on holiness is the opposition of ‘sacred reality’ to ‘profane reality’. The philosopher argues that the religious position is dialectical because it is in relation (in opposition) to the transcendent term. The dialectical opposition of sacred and *profane* leads ultimately to the ‘suppression’ of the profane. The “ultimate reality tends to absorb the relative one and to transform man’s entire activity into a religious ritual” [26, p. 17]. Characteristically, profane is not an alternative being, but “a hostile power of destruction - an active nothingness” [26, p. 17]. The sacred thus understood, according to Dupre, is meant to play a consolidating role, eliminating contradictions, and integrating society.

Regarding the postulated opposition of sacred to profane, it is worth noting that, according to Orthodox ontology, any dialectical opposition in the doctrine of being is impossible. God creates the universe not out of chaos, but out of nothingness, i.e. something that does not exist, and evil is not the opposite of good, but its absence. Julia Duplinska draws attention to the fact that: “There is no world of antipodes in relation to God as the sole source of all things. God is the source of being and goodness alone; nothing else exists. Evil, the ugly and even demons in Christian ontology do not arise where there is something, but where something is absent, when our gaze, instead of expecting being, meets its absence [...]. Evil is not the opposite of good, just as darkness is not the opposite of light: there is only light, and darkness is not the opposite, but the absence of light - this is the essence of the famous discourse on evil by Aurelius Augustine.” [30]

This was also pointed out by Vladimir Lossky, according to whom evil has no nature, since it is only a state of Nature [18, p. 178]. The self-affirming factor of *sacred* is its divine origin, not its opposition to *profane*. The task of the sacred is not to ‘absorb’ the mundane, but to sanctify being, to unite it to the divine - i.e. to realize the goal of salvation. The global potentiality of holiness derives not from the global capacity of the sacred to ‘absorb’ and position itself towards the profane, but from the global ‘divine presence’. “Man becomes accustomed to living in the God’s world, in its depths, deciphering its heavenly destiny; the world evolves into a cosmic liturgy, into a temple of the glory of God. This makes us understand that *everything* is potentially sacred, that there is nothing secular and nothing neutral, as everything refers to God.” [31]

If profane is not an opposition to sacred, then what is it? Pavel Evdokimov believes that this opposition is demonic reality - a distortion of the divine reality [31].

In considering the phenomenon of holiness in the system of religious-philosophical views, it is impossible not to touch upon the thought of the famous Russian philosopher of religion, Nikolai Berdyaev. His main idea, permeating his entire conceptual worldview, was freedom of the spirit, viewed in the categories of existential-personalistic philosophy. The essence of his understanding of freedom was expressed in the following statement: “The

peculiarity of my philosophical type is above all that I have put freedom, not being, at the foundation of Philosophy. No other philosopher seems to have done this in such a radical form. In freedom lies the mystery of the world. God wanted freedom and hence the tragedy of the world. Freedom at the beginning and freedom at the end. I have the basic conviction that God is present only in freedom and acts only through freedom. Only freedom must be reduced, all the false sacralisations that fill history must be desacralized.” [32]

The fundamental issue for Berdyaev was the wholeness of man as an individual phenomenon, which he characterised by the two concepts of the individual and the personality. Unlike the individual, the personality is not born of parents, but is created by God and self-created - this is the idea of the human being.

Berdyaev comprehended the idea of holiness based on the above-mentioned phenomenon of man and the category of freedom. The Russian thinker insisted on revising the concept of holiness according to the modern cosmic era. Isaac Siren's holiness was early Christian holiness, the attainment of which was not possible by man in modern conditions. The two-thousand-year-old Christianity is not obsolete, outdated and hardened understanding of reality and the world order. Berdyaev compares the modern understanding of holiness with the holiness of the Pharisees. The philosopher harshly criticises, in particular, Saint Theophanes the Recluse (Russian Feofan Zatvornik) for the social conservatism and divine dictates outlined by the bishop in his book *Outlines of Christian Morals*: “So it is a whole system of subjugation and fear. There is no place in it for freedom and love. Bishop Theophanes is de facto a Monophysite: he rejects man, the Godhead and the divinity.” [33] The modern organism of the Church, which has entered its two-thousandth year, is in crisis due to a critical period in world history: “Not only is the individual perfection powerless in battling sin, but even individual holiness is helpless in the face of the crisis of the world, before entering a new cosmic era, a new stage of revelation. [...] There was more holiness in the past. Nowadays, holiness is dying out in the world, as if humanity was depriving itself the gift of holiness. [...] Christian holiness is connected to the youth of Christianity. Christian holiness contains eternal, inextinguishable truth, but an incomplete truth in which not everything is revealed. [...] We are facing a new awareness of the relationship between holiness and genius, redemption and creativity.” [33, p. 143-144]

In this way, we come closer to Berdyaev's renewed understanding of holiness. Along with the traditional, canonical interpretation of holiness, the philosopher defended the view of the existence of another holiness - holiness in Creation. Genius was this type of holiness for Berdyaev. Genius and holiness are not opposite and not mutually exclusive phenomena, but complementary ways of salvation. The difference in these paths lies in the way of religious practice. If the way to canonical holiness is through withdrawal from the world and spiritual self-improvement, then the way of genius is in withdrawal from the world through creativity - a genius continues to live in the world, being a stranger to it. And just as a saint exhausts his body in an asceticism, so a genius sacrifices himself



in a 'creative frenzy'. The philosopher asks: "In the sacrifice of the genius, in his creative frenzy, is there no other holiness before God, no other religious work worthy of canonical holiness?" and gives the answer: "I firmly believe that the genius of Pushkin, from the human point of view seemingly losing his own soul, before God is equal to the holiness of Seraphim, saving his soul. Genius is another religious path, equal in value and dignity to the way of the saint. The work of a genius is not a 'secular' work, but a 'spiritual' one. [...] The creative path of genius requires a sacrifice no less than the sacrifice of holiness. On the path of creative genius it is necessary to renounce the 'world', to overcome the 'world'. [...] He who has embarked on the path of creativity, the path of genius, should make a sacrifice from the quiet haven of life, should give up his happiness and the safe arrangement of his life. Only someone who knows creative ecstasy, who in this ecstasy transcends the boundaries of the 'world' is capable of such a sacrifice." [33, p. 145-146]

Berdyaev's assertion that not everyone is capable of being a saint, just as not everyone can be a genius, which requires an appropriate gift, seems to be true only in the latter case. As has been shown above, the vocation to sainthood, and its potential, is inherent in every human being.

Asked what would be better for Russia - to have two great saints, or to have the saint Seraphim and the genius Pushkin, the philosopher concludes that the gift of genius is as important as the gift of holiness. The common task of both genius and saint is the acquisition of a whole person in existential wholeness. The philosopher concludes with the postulate that the cult of sanctity should be supplemented by the cult of genius.

Summing up the analysis of the idea of holiness in the religious-philosophical understanding, several key conclusions need to be made. First of all, holiness (*ἁγιότης*, *sanctitas*), as a phenomenon of religious life, is a "fundamental concept of Christianity" [34], but its comprehension and definition is a complex process consisting in the consideration of different religious, phenomenological, philosophical, sociological and linguistic components. Four fields of meaning can be distinguished in considering this phenomenon: theological, phenomenological, philosophical and socio-ethical.

Orthodox theology reveals the meaning of holiness based on Scripture, the writings of the Church Fathers, the Church mystics and reduces it to the communion of man with God, the achievement of theosis by each individual, the transfiguration and transformation of human nature through divine grace, thanks to the deity and divine Incarnation of Christ. "By following Christ and aligning one's will with the natural logos, one becomes a partaker of the Godhead. The final point of this movement is deification." [22]

Saint Anthony the Great defined the ultimate goal of the Christian as "life in God" and called it "the supreme perfection" [15, p. 138]. In this interpretation of holiness, a special place belongs to apophatic theology and its terminological tools. *Apophatic* theology, unlike *cataphatic*, describes God by negation, i.e. seeking to know God not in what He is, but in what He is not. Apophaticism consists of the negation of all that God is not [18].

The phenomenological view of holiness focuses primarily on the description of the inner psychological experience of the individual who encounters the deity. The originator of this approach is R. Otto, who uses the term *numinosum* instead of the noun holiness. The characteristic conviction of this philosopher of religion was the rational and irrational a priori of holiness, and its highest manifestation Christ. Otto reveals not only the mental processes occurring in the mind of *homo religiosus*, but also the mechanisms of his 'attraction' to the sacred. M. Eliade continued these studies and focused not so much on the inner world, as on the external manifestations of sacred in a sensually accessible form to man - hierophany. Sacred becomes the absolute ontologically primary reality, the fullness of being, the cause of all that exists.

James defines a person's state of holiness as an imposition from above and a rebirth of the soul, manifesting itself in a certain psycho-spiritual state. The American philosopher identifies the main characteristics of a saint's state of mind: asceticism, strength of soul, purity of soul, mercy.

The Russian philosopher of religion N. Berdyaev views holiness in the categories of a gift from above and a vocation, by realizing which man approaches freedom and acquires the wholeness of personality. The scholar introduces a new understanding of holiness - holiness in the creative sacrifice of genius.

Louis Dupre sees sacred as a subjective category and understands it based on its opposition to the profane. He also recognises the existence of an ontological reality which seeks to absorb the relative profane reality. Because of this, sacred plays a constructive consolidating role in society, which, however, if completely free, can lead to the usurpation of power and, ultimately, the rejection of religion as such.

The socio-ethical approach focuses on the moral and spiritual perfection of the individual and the tangible results of his or her holiness, which have a significant impact on the environment. This approach is characteristic of the Old Testament as well as most encyclopaedic and explanatory dictionaries, which treat holiness as a property belonging to a particular person - its bearer. Characteristically, it was the Old Bible concept of holiness that was identified with moral perfection. A holy person is always endowed with high morality, mental purity and perfection. The semantics of the root 'svyat' goes back to the pre-Slavonic roots and has a deep pre-Christian sacred content.

## **5. Conclusion**

Thus, the phenomenon of holiness as a phenomenon can be considered in several semantic planes: 1) *holiness as holiness*, i.e. a property exclusive to God and His chosen ones, the attainment of which is possible in the process of deification; 2) *holiness as numinosum* i.e. a special religious dimension that evokes certain spiritual-psychic experiences in the encounter with the individual's consciousness; 3) *holiness as sacred*, i.e. a different sphere of being, an ontological reality, a primordial reality which reveals itself in hierophany;

and finally; 4) *holiness as perfection*, i.e. a moral quality attained by the individual in the process of spiritual growth.

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