Two stages of patristic understanding of grace on the horizon of apophatic theology

Theologia Apophatica, a traceable element in classical Greek thinking, progressively evolves into one of the structural constituents of Neoplatonic thought. Conversely, in Christian theology the theological notion of “grace” (cháris), is commonly understood as a primary expression of God’s project of salvation (oikonomia) and thereby assigned to the cataphatic realm of knowledge concerning God.

In the light of an earlier and later “stage” of Eastern Christian thought (Cappadocians and Maximus the Confessor) – each of them to be considered seminal for the theological development of the doctrine of grace - this paper intends to present the complexity of the patristic understanding regarding grace. Thus it will be shown that the notion is taken up to provide a coupling link between Theologia Cataphatica and Theologia Apophatica, in this manner “undermining” the Greek separation of the two without renouncing the legitimacy of the distinction:

- the Cappadocians through the development of a pneumatology that insists on two equally valid realities, the true divinity of the Holy Spirit and the spiritual gift of “communion” by which we become participants in the divine life.
- Maximus the Confessor, by elaborating a theological epistemology in which the multi-layered meaning of “apophasis” serves as pointer to the mystery of the Incarnation of the Divine Logos, replacing the ontological perspective with a theo-anthropological approach the centre of which is constituted by the finality of dynamic grace.

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I would be interested in the farewell dinner on Thursday, March 24th and the trip on Friday, 25th to Ceasarea.