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The Unification Mystery of Christ in Church The Orthodox View on the Preparation for Receiving of the Holy Eucharist

The groundwork for the spiritual existence of the responsible human being in the communitarian dimension of the Church, the Holy and Divine Eucharist, is “the Mystery which crowns the Baptism and the Holy Unction not only as fulfillment of the power and of the new life, virtually started through the Baptism and having in it the virtual power, developed through the Unction. The Eucharist implies in it the power of full death to the separated existence of God, started through the Baptism and developed in the Unction”¹.

In the Orthodox Tradition, the Holy Eucharist is at the same time a starting point and link, unification and thanksgiving, remembrance and also a foretaste of the eternal life, sacrifice and also medicine of immortality. Therefore, it resents the “vivifying” reality of the Church, in which Jesus Christ, our Saviour, is present towards the end of the centuries. The Holy Eucharist is a way through which God, in His eternal goodness, “feeds, reinforces and gives driving force to the Eschaton. Therefore, the ecclesiastical body becomes something alive, always unifying and open to the future. The nourishment and the vivification of the Mystery is the one which transforms and renews the Body of the Church, becoming also work and movement to goodness”².

¹ D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, București 2003³, p. 84.

² N. MATSOUKAS, *Teologie Dogmatică și Simbolică*, v. I. *Expunerea credinței ortodoxe în conformitate cu creștinismul occidental*, București 2006, p. 360–361.

Through the Mystery of the Eucharist, Jesus Christ penetrates the most hidden places of the human being, eliminating from there all kinds of passion and weakness. Therefore, the Eucharist implies the real and personal presence of our Lord inside a person who desires to receive it. We can say that it is “the Mystery in which, under the face of bread and wine, the believers receive the real Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of sins and for eternal life”³. We cannot doubt in this reality because it was the Son of God himself to say during the Last Super: “this is my Body (...) this is my Blood”. Regarding those divine words Saint Cyril of Jerusalem says that “under the face of bread you receive the Body and under the face of wine you receive the Blood in order to reach through this partaking with the Body and Blood of Christ united in a single Body and Blood with Him. Therefore, we get to be *christophoros*, because His Body and Blood are shared inside our limbs. Therefore, according to the words of Saint Peter the Apostle, we are partakers of the divine nature”⁴.

That is why any attempt to describe in human words this Holy Mystery is very hard and almost impossible. If in the other of the Sacraments the presence of Christ is usually unseen and mystical, in the Eucharist we receive Him in a visible way. The Lord offers Himself as replay and blessing, medicine and nourishment, until the end of the world. This beautiful Mystical Unity starts through a dinner invitation. The first divine calling is received by the “lost sheep of the house of Israel”⁵. In their history the Chosen Nation received many signs and miracles and still they were unable to listen to the calling and were shocked by the Lord’s words: “If you will not eat my Body and don’t drink my Blood you will not have life in yourself” (2 Pt. 1, 4). Therefore, they remained outside and are still waiting at the door, because “they didn’t understand in a spiritual way the meaning of these words, they have moved away from Him, thinking that He had urged them to eat His flesh”⁶.

In this Holy Mystery, a baptized person has been called to the permanent renewal, to abandon the old customs of the Law. From the moment of the eucharistic communion with Christ, the believer becomes free from any captivity and finds his place among the Sons of the Heavenly Father. In this way, “dying for the world and living for God, we will have a fragrance and will enter at the Father through the Son”, because “Christ is our eternal Archiereus, who communicates us His sacrifi-

³ D. POPESCU, *Iisus Hristos Pantocrator*, București 2005, p. 324.

⁴ CHIRIL AL IERUSALIMULUI, *Catehezele Baptismale*, IV, 3, trad. D. Fecioru, București 2005.

⁵ The first sending of the 12 Apostles was done after a well-defined trajectory. In this meaning Christ urges: “Do not go among the Gentiles, or into any town of Samaria, But go to the wandering sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt. 10, 5-6).

⁶ CHIRIL, IV, 4.

cial estate through the Holy Sacraments and through the Eucharist in particular, to present us as spiritual sacrifices before His Father”⁷.

As the real Body and the Blood of the Lord, the Holy Eucharist enters in the constitution of the baptized person and, exceeding the dead’s boundaries, brings it to the perspective of the communion with Christ, the One who was crucified and resurrected. His position in the soteriological plan can be understood in the light of a complementary integration, being in the centre of the other Sacraments. In this concern, Nicholas Cabasilas speaks about his inexhaustible and eternal character:

Christ is the Unction and the Baptism and our Nourishment”, says the Holy Father. He is “present in the one who takes part in the celebration of the Holy Sacraments, sharing them something from His gifts, but in each Sacrament, He is present in another way. The baptized one is cleaned by the misery of the sin and receive in them the face of Christ. In the one who receives the Holy Unction, Christ does activate the powers of the Holy Spirit, as a treasure in the act of unction. When He brings the believer before the Altar and gives him to eat indeed His Body, our Saviour changes everything inside him, borrowing him His personality (...) Therefore, the Holy Eucharist is the biggest Mystery, because beyond him we cannot go, neither we can put something else. For, usually, after one step comes the second one and after that the third one and so on till the last one. After the Holy Eucharist, you cannot find a place to step on and for that you must stop here and think who you can keep till the end of this beautiful treasure, which you receive⁸.

1. The Mystery of our gathering in Christ and in the Church

In the first centuries of the Christian era, the understanding of the Holy Eucharist has been seen in the close relationship to the liturgical term of “gathering”. In his Epistle to Corinthians, St. Paul the Apostle speaks about the “gathering” of Christians in the Church (1 Cor. 11, 18). From here we can find out that the meaning of this “gathering” can be defined through the capacity of believers “to discover and achieve the Church”. In this context, Alexander Schmemmann speaks about the primordial connection between gathering, Eucharist and Church. Although from the scholastic perspective this connection was neglected and eventually forgotten, the eucharistic meaning of “gathering in the Church” represents an

⁷ D. POPESCU, *Iisus Hristos Pantocrator*, p. 332.

⁸ N. CABASILAS, *Despre viața în Hristos*, trad. T. Bodogae, București 2009, p. 113–114.

old and genuine reality in the liturgical practice which should not be overlooked. In order to understand this phenomenon, we have to consider the distance between the dogmatic argumentation of the liturgical aspect of the eucharistic Mystery and the process of isolation of this practice from/by the “collective piety”. Alexander Schmemmann states:

the basic problem of the scholastic theology is that, in his sacramental approach, he doesn't start from the living experience of the Church, from the liturgical practical tradition, as it is in the Church, but he is based on *apriorical* and *abstract* categories and definitions, incompatible with the living reality of the Church. From the very beginning, the Church strongly confessed that the *lex credenti* and *lex orandi* are unseparated and one serves as a basis for the other one, according to Saint Irenaeus of Lyon: «our teaching is in concordance with the Eucharist and the Eucharist confirms our teaching» (*Adversus Haeresis*). But the theology built after the occidental style isn't preoccupied with the liturgical aspect and by the practice of the liturgical service in the Church, by his personal logic and by his arrangement. Starting from some abstract allowed, theology *apriorically* feeds what is principal and what is secondary, and the secondary – which isn't of interest for theology – appears at last as the divine service in all his complexity and variety, meaning that it becomes the divine service from which our Church in fact lives⁹.

In the act of creation, the Holy Trinity “decided to make the people part of the divine sharing of life through our Saviour Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit. When the first people fall into sin, God didn't leave them but give them more help to salvation. On the last days, Father sent His Only Begotten in the world, «who is the icon of the unseen God, first born then all the creation» (Col. 1, 15) to become our Redeemer from the slavery of death and devil”¹⁰.

In the process of preparation of the baptized person to the eternal life, the Mystery of the Eucharist identifies itself with a “sacred and heavenly background”, which is permanently upgraded on the “model of Christ”. From here one can understand the most important practice of the Church and his identification with the saving events fulfilled by the coming of Jesus Christ into the world.

Church is an ascendant movement of the Incarnation of the Son of God, but his basis is eternal, having his start in God's plan, beyond the time. This means that if the issuna-

⁹ A. SCHMEMMANN, *Euharistia. Taina împărăției*, trad. B. Rădulescu, București, 2010, p. 21–22.

¹⁰ IRINEU, *Biserica în actualitate sau actualitatea Bisericii*, București 2018, p. 92.

nance of the Church is in the same time with the day of the Naissance of our Saviour and then his updating on Golgotha, and the baptism in the day of Pentecost, his roots are even from eternity. Undoubtedly, by virtue of this, the Church can be followed after the creating act of the Holy Trinity, in all the historical period till the end of the centuries, as the eternal and Mystical Body of our Lord¹¹.

On the other hand, the Orthodox teaching of faith shows very clear that, through her eucharistic essence, “the Church is simultaneously above the history, but also in the history”. In the virtue of this act, we can confess a beautiful convergence between time and eternity starting from this life, and also a transposition of the Church through divine holiness which is above the time. Time and history have therefore a Christological value and an eschatological perspective. The link between temporality and timelessness, between history and eternity, “can be simplified, having as basis the harmony between unity and diversity or between unity and multiplicity. Therefore, the Church is the primordial and permanent act of the communion between man and the Holy Trinity, as divine and human organism”¹². From this point of view, the Church is an “objective reality” in her attribute of “divine and human existence”¹³. “The Church is, therefore, therefore the heart of the universe, the centre in which is shaping and is preparing the eternal life for all those who believe and confess the Saviour as Lord and God. Therefore, all the human beings from all over the world are called to enter in it, because only in the Church is the full existence of people, after the icon of the Holy Trinity”¹⁴.

The essential character of the “gathering” is based on the concept of “unity manifested in love”, according to the commandment of love (cf. Jn. 13, 34-35). Even if this perfect love can be fully achieved only in in the Kingdom of Heaven, “it exists in the world and in history, and has the purpose to transform the world in Church and to guide her to eschatology. So, because the Father built the Church, the Son enforces it and the Holy Spirit consecrates it, the Church cannot be conquered neither by the hell’s gates (cf. Mt. 16, 18) [...] That is the reason why this unity of the visible Church is indispensable”¹⁵. We can also say that, because of this testament of divine love, the liturgical sacrifice from the Altar is,

¹¹ IRINEU ION POPA, *Așteptând pe Cel ce este și Cel ce vine Atotțiitorul*, Craiova 2017, p. 104–106.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 110.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 112–113.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

¹⁵ *Așteptând pe Cel ce este și Cel ce vine Atotțiitorul*, p. 166, 171.

first of all, first of all, a discovery “of the truth which we have inside our natural being and in our soul”¹⁶.

2. The Cosmological Dimension of the Mystery of the Eucharist

The Mystery of the Eucharist contains also a cosmological dimension. This aspect is underlined by Maximus the Confessor, who sees the Church as an “icon of the entire cosmos, with all its seen and unseen beings, having the same unity and distinction like it”¹⁷. The analogy refers to the unit attribute of the ecclesial life, which offers the mystical capacity to incorporate the entire cosmological communion of the sensible and understandable things. In this relationship, Maximus sees the Holy Altar as a foreshadowing of the understandable realities, far away from the material things. On the other hand, in contrast to the Altar, the *naós* of the church is the complete foreshadowing of the material and sensitive realities, which we can find in the material world¹⁸. Unmistakable by nature – Church, man and cosmos – are acting together, being “objectively united with God”, so we can say “that the creation is another type of Church, that he is undeveloped, not updated, having the Church in it as a ferment which can help it develop till the level of updated Church, but in a proper meaning”¹⁹. Starting from this idea Dumitru Stăniloae realizes the “analogue transfer” of the liturgical background in which “the Mystery of Assembly” takes place. Therefore the author shows, that “in the ecclesial sanctuary of the liturgical community, God is in the highest place, which is the Holy Table of the Altar, as the Body and Blood of Christ; on the top of the cosmic creation He is as The One who incorporates all the things, who sustains all and in his human nature, as basis and endless horizon, God becomes possible and felt in connection with our heart”²⁰.

In this symphony “Church-man-cosmos” Jesus Christ is the One who is able to gather and unite. He offers the centre which gravitates “the heaven, the earth, and the entire creation, generating a blessed unity, indestructible and holy”. In this regard, the holy fathers show how the “eucharistic Church, heavenly and earthly, in

¹⁶ C. GALERIU, *Jertdă și răscumpărare*, București 1989, p. 19.

¹⁷ MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Mistagogia. Cosmosul și sufletul, chipuri ale Bisericii*, trad. D. Stăniloae, București 2000, Cap. II, p. 16.

¹⁸ MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Mistagogia*, Cap. II, p. 16.

¹⁹ D. STĂNILOAE, *Spiritualitate și comuniune în Liturgia Ortodoxă*, București 2004, p. 23.

²⁰ D. STĂNILOAE, *Spiritualitate și comuniune în Liturgia Ortodoxă*, p. 25.

a blessing gathering brings the Sacrifice of thanksgiving and prayer of our Eternal and Unique God, the Master of all". In this "Mystery of Gathering", the Christian recapitulates all at once the entire history of salvation. It is in a mystical way between the Mother of God, Saints, and Angels, praising the eucharistic Christ. The communion of the Sacrament is fulfilled by the memories of those who "sacrificed themselves for the true belief, our parents and brothers", who "complete together with us the eucharistic gathering and the commune liturgical service"²¹.

The one who offers a complete perspective regarding the cosmological dimension of the Holy Eucharist is Maximus the Confessor²². In his work entitled *Mistagogia*, he offers four interpretations or liturgical steps regarding the ritual of Synaxis or Gathering from the Holy Liturgy.

On the first step of the mistagogical interpretation (cap. 8-22), the believers are in connection with "the most important moments of salvation from a double perspective of Christs' acts and their effects. The entrance of the bishop into the church signifies the first coming of Christ to the world as its Saviour, from Incarnation to His Ascension; the return of people is His return to belief and virtue". From here also Maximus offers some explanations regarding the biblical lectures, the chants and the existence of the catechumens (which is equivalent with the Last Judgement), the chant "Holy God", the prayer "Our Father", the chant "One Holy/Unus Sanctus" and the communion from the end of the Liturgy²³.

On the second step (cap. 23) Maximus shows the way how the soul is transposed "through the eucharistic Liturgy, with its exit from the material things and with his entrance in the mystical knowledge of the rationality of salvation, with a basis in the theology of Holy Trinity"²⁴.

The third step (cap. 24) contains the invitation to *Synaxis*, where work of the Holy Spirit is done, "which starts with the removal of unbelief, ignorance, and sinfulness", right from the entrance in the church. On this liturgical moment, the role of the Holy Spirit is essential because He is the One who shares the "graces of belief in sensitive symbols" and contributes to being received in the Heavenly Kingdom "through the gift of sight even in their mystical archetypes"²⁵.

²¹ H. STAVROPULOS, *Dumnezeiasca Euharistie – Taina tainelor*, trad. C. Băjău, Atena s.a., p. 39–40.

²² IOAN I. ICĂ JR., *De la Dionisie Areopagitul la Simeon al Tesalonicului – integrala comentariilor liturgice*, Sibiu 2011, p. 197–198.

²³ MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR, *Mistagogia*, Cap. XXI, p. 35.

²⁴ MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR, *Mistagogia*, Cap. XXIII, p. 39.

²⁵ MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR, *Mistagogia*, Cap. XXIV, p. 40.

The fourth step of interpretation (the final part of cap. 24) has a summarizing character, related to the meanings of church architectural form and the rite of the *Gathering* (Synaxes). Each time, Maximus shows a general meaning (*genikos*) of the subjective salvation, expressed in the personal process of each soul on the axis of his eucharistic becoming. Saint Maximus the Confessor shows that the Holy Church is, on the one hand, “type and icon of God” and also, on the other hand, “type of the cosmos (...) having as a symbol the Altar and the *naos*”. These two architectural elements are found in the connection between soul and body. From here, the author explains in a mystagogical way the most important moments from the Holy Liturgy: first exists with the Holy Gospel representing “in general first coming of our Lord and, in particular, the coming back of the one who are led by Him, from unbelief to faith and from sin to virtue”; the biblical lectures – “announce in general the wishes and divine advice (...) and, in particular, the teaching and the entrance in belief of those who have fallen”; the Holy Gospel “is in general the symbol of the end of this world and, in particular, indicates the complete abolition of the old mistake of those who have fallen”; “the descending of the bishop from the throne and the exit of catechumens outside means, in general, the second coming from heaven of our great Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (...) and, in particular, means the full certification in faith of the unbelievers”; “closing the gates, the exist with the holy gifts, the divine kissing and the pronouncing of the Symbol of Faith indicates, in general, the passing of the sensitive things and the discovery of the spiritual one (...) and, in particular, the moving of the contemplatives from the natural contemplation to the simple understanding of the spiritual things (...) and the union of the spiritual power with the soul, as well as the simplicity which contains in an unitary way with the mind the rationality of Providence”; “the speaking of the words «One Holy» and the following, and the communion with the holy Sacraments indicate the future filiation and unity, the link, divine resemblance and deification, of which we will benefit in part from all the others, because of God goodness”²⁶.

The work of Maximus, *Mistagogia*, is influenced by the symbolism of Dionysius the Areopagit, from whom the former had borrowed his symbolic and mystical character. Moreover, the holy father speaks in his work about man’s *methamorphosis* (spiritual changing) in the eucharistic Christ. Therefore, he shows that the divine grace is received integrally by the believers, “because the divine and incarnated Word is really present in the Eucharist”. However, as in the case of the Holy Sacrament of Baptism, “this grace doesn’t show his fruits in the one who had received

²⁶ MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR, *Mistagogia*, Cap. XXIV, p. 41–43, 46.

provided this one is worthy of it, has a strong faith, won the catharsis, and also if he is living in virtue and has risen to contemplation and knowledge”²⁷.

3. “The Arc” of Salvation on the way to Eschaton

Alexander Schmemmann shows that, according to his authentic meaning, the liturgical place defines “the place of gathering of the believers and of the eucharistic breaking of the bread” (*domus ecclesiae*). This is, in fact, the essential content and meaning of the Christian space for worship. “No matter how complex is its development, says father Schmemmann, the factor which unites and guides is exactly the idea of gathering in the Eucharist”²⁸. This mystagogic reality is relevant in his form and composition. “Here we have the Prestol (Holy Table) and the Altar, on one side, and the arc of the Church, on the other side, meaning the pace of gathering. The arc is directed through the Prestol and it contains its meaning and fulfilment. But also the Prestol is connected with the arc, being in relation with it. But, in the virtue of the liturgical piety, the Altar is presented in a personal consecration, accessible only for the consecrated one, as a space entirely sacred, which underlines that the believers are beyond, in a profane space”²⁹.

This supposition contradicts the cosmologic reality and necessity of the Church. The Orthodox mistagogy shows therefore that the life and the purpose of the Church are related to the Kingdom of Heaven. This aspect is very important in the process of understanding the unitary character of the Eucharist. Therefore, in her shape of arc, the church as a place of worship represents the seen reality of the Universal Church. In such a way we can state that “the fighter Church (of the living one) is the arc, with Jesus Christ as helmsman, which guides us through the history to the future Kingdom of Heaven, meaning the eternal one, church-place of worthy has his seen form in the shape of an arc directed to sunrise, meaning to Eschaton, to the «peaceful shore» of our becoming in Christ”³⁰.

The architecture of the holy place is defined in the Orthodox Tradition as the “prolonged rectangle orientates to Sunrise”. The arc, which we have mentioned above, “floats in the eschatological dimension and is directed towards Sunrise”.

²⁷ J.-C. LARCHET, *Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul. O introducere*, trad. M. Bojin, Iași 2013, p. 228.

²⁸ A. SCHMEMMANN, *Euharistia – Taina Împărăției*, p. 28.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

³⁰ V. ANANIA, *Cartea deschisă a Împărăției. O însoțire liturgică pentru preoți și mireni. De la Betleemul Nașterii la Ierusalimul Învierii, Scrisori pastorale*, București 2011, p. 55.

This orientation, in its symbolic and mystical interpretation, can be understood as a liturgical dimension, containing, therefore, a eucharistic necessity. That is why, according to its tripartite division (pronaos, naos, and altar), the church becomes a eucharistic oven, overwhelmed by the fire of the Holy Liturgy. Regarding this aspect Nicholas Cabasilas says that, inside the holy place of the church, “the entire liturgical service is like an icon which portrays a single body of the Christ’s work into the world, making to take place before our eyes all his components, from the beginning till the end, according to their natural order”³¹.

The liturgical dynamic on which man is trained has obviously a eucharistic centrality. The heart which beats in the Church, contained in the Holy Liturgy, is just the Holy Eucharist, “the Mystery of transformation of bread and wine in the Body and Blood of the Lord”. Under this argument, the Orthodox teaching of faith confirms the holy character of the gathering of believers in the Church, within the Holy Liturgy³². From here, throughout all his existence, the eucharistic man is constantly sharing “the victory of Christ on the death, receiving the immortality in God’s Kingdom”. The eschatological estate of his spiritual existence is fully confirmed after the Universal Judgement, when “all those in the tombs will hear His voice and will come out those who did good things in the resurrection of the life and those who did bad things in the resurrection of death” (cf. Jn. 5, 29). Having as example the funeral service, we clearly see that “the tears are in the hope of the general resurrection. Although, the funeral service tries to present, through his dialogical hymns and prayers, the history of salvation in diverse forms and also the potential vision of the Kingdom of Heaven as a house and as a place of rest”³³.

On the other hand, in the Holy Liturgy are reiterated the symbolic and mystical events of the Resurrection and Ascension to heaven of our Lord. The hymnologists managed to exemplify this aspect having in mind the forty days between these two liturgical fasts. Therefore, it has been shown that in this period our Lord Jesus Christ gave to His Apostles many signs and did many miracles in connection with the Kingdom of Heaven, which we can find in the Holy Scripture³⁴. The Lord receives also the confession of the Apostles regarding His “Godhead, the Resurrection from the dead and about the new life in which are included through the faith in Him and through the worship on which they owe it to bring it”³⁵.

³¹ N. CABASILAS, *Tâlcuirea dumnezeieștii liturghii*, trad. E. Braniște, București 1997, p. 9.

³² D. STĂNILAOAE, *Spiritualitate și comuniune*, p. 46.

³³ IRINEU ION POPA, *Așteptând pe Cel ce este și Cel ce vine Atotțiitorul*, Craiova 2017, p. 983–984.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1559.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1562.

In the present reality of the church seen as a place of worship, the most appropriate mirror of the Kingdom of Heaven is the Holy Altar. Placed always to the Sunrise, it is waiting for the second coming of Christ in His glory. On the other side – this of the Sunset – we can find the Church doors. In this area, the Final Judgement is usually depicted, which “symbolizes the unreached earth as well as the Hell, a place from which God is excluded, a certain aspect of the modern world”. The Russian theologian, Paul Evdokimov shows, that at the “Easter night service (Utrenia), in the silence of the Saturday, the priest and the people are preparing the church. The procession stops outside the church, before the closed doors. For a short moment, these doors symbolize God’s own tomb, His death, and even the Hell. The priest makes over the door sign of the Cross and, by its power, the door is open and all the people can enter the lighted church, singing: «Christ has risen from the dead, trampling over death by death and upon those in the tombs bestowing life!». The door of Hell has been turned into the door of the church. The gathering goes forward and sings with great joy in front of the Royal Doors, which stay open during the liturgical service. It is open towards the great hope which is growing up in the silence of prayer, towards the last mystery of the Divine Philanthropist. The symbolism of the early Pascal service (Utrenia) intends to suggest that it represents Hell and, at the same time, the Kingdom of Heaven. Because Christ descended in hell to destroy all the doors and to let inside of it just a single one: the Door which leads to the expectation of His Father”³⁶.

Returning to the Communitarian dimension of the Holy Eucharist, as a Mystery of Gathering, we must realize that it is in close connection with the liturgical reality from inside of the arc of the church. In this concern, Dumitru Stăniloae explains that “the gathering of human beings in the church has the purpose to help, through the Holy Liturgy, as liturgical service, and fulfill the liturgy of believers in a general meaning, from the cosmic naos”³⁷.

4. A guide for Priests and Deacons on their acting during Divine Liturgy

In the Orthodox liturgical tradition, the “guidelines for priests and deacons” are always at the end of each Liturgical Book³⁸. The original text to which we

³⁶ P. EVDOKIMOV, *Rugul aprins*, trad. T.V. Damșa, Timișoara 1994, p. 83–84.

³⁷ D. STĂNILOAE, *Spiritualitate și comuniune în Liturghia Ortodoxă*, p. 34.

³⁸ See: “Guidance and teachings. On the way in which church ministry should be carried out, on the preparation of the spiritual ministers for the ministry and on the manner in which certain mistakes

will refer was anonymous, but one of the oldest works used during the Orthodox liturgical practice is known as “*A guide for Priests and Deacons on their acting during Divine Liturgy*”³⁹. This text was incorporated into the Romanian language with Cyrillic characters. During Saint Callinicus of Cernica, this little and at the same time important liturgical work has been published in Ramnicu Valcea (1856). In the introduction, Callinicus gives some important details of the text origin. From his description, we know that the work was translated from “Serbian into Greek by a spiritual Father and thoroughly examined by the Patriarch of all the World and Archbishop of Tsarigrad, D.D. Kallinikos”. The translation into the Romanian language was based on the Greek text edition, originally published in Vienna. In our country, the first Cyrillic edition was that one from Sibiu, followed by another one from Buzau. Saint Callinicus’ edition, to which we refer, is, therefore, the fourth edition of this work, published by the Printing House in Ramnic:

in our care and at our expense, and at a very low price that is to cover only the expenses for paper and ink. I do recommend it to all of our lovers in Christ our brethren, and I truly believe that they will all receive it with love, and often reading it mindfully, they will get great value of it, at the same time asking those who are to read it to remember us, the sinners in the holy prayers they say to the Merciful God, blessed by us, also⁴⁰.

Saint Callinicus highlights also a very interesting argument on the mystagogic character of the sacramental service in the Orthodox Church. He thus illustrates the fact that the service of the Holy Altar should be carried out, “by worthy priests who are characterized by piety and the fear of God, to carry out the Divine Liturgy spiritually, due to its value, it is worthy to be carried out by righteous and wise servers, and by deeds that are more divine than the Angels. Since to those that the angels do not dare to look into but, the priests not only look into and proceed with, but they also confess, preach and share the King himself, who reigns, our Lord Jesus Christ, The One Who truly is the work in the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist”⁴¹.

and situations that might come up should be dealt with”, in: *The Liturgical Book*, Bucharest 2012, p. 483.

³⁹ *A guide for Priests and Deacons meaning how they should act during the Divine Liturgy*, Kallinicus 1865.

⁴⁰ Signed by *Callinicus, by the grace of God the Bishop of Ramnic, Noul Severin*. This work is therefore a particularly important one for the time when this Father of the Romanian Neo-Hesychasm shepherded; there are not too many notes of his time, except for some chancellery documents.

⁴¹ *A guide for Priests and Deacons*, p. 2.

In the following part of our paper we will try to illustrate the priest's main duties on the bloodless sacrifice, as illustrated by this well-known piece of work.

The first chapter of the work refers to "the preparation of the priest and deacon for the service of the Divine Liturgy". Being reminded of all the seven Holy Mysteries of the Church, the server must be watchful to the place they are to be carried out. Therefore, if Baptism, Holy Unction, Confession, Marriage, and Chrismation by necessity can be celebrated carried in other places, the Ordination and Eucharist are to be carried out only within the holy place of the church building. Ministry worthiness is achieved through the spiritual bond between the server and his priest. In other words, for the achievement of the holy ones, priests should "not be under a curse, or anathema, or in denial, or under the disgrace of the bishop, or to have and know death sin and somehow a curse one, or by disgrace he is bound or denied never to dare to carry out the Liturgy until the moment he has had his bishop's blessing who has forgiven him for himself and to rehabilitate himself, and after then serve". In addition, it is also mentioned and required the purification of the soul from all kinds of oppression, anger or abomination. Further clarifications are made on the "Eucharistic fast" or the eve before celebrating the Divine Liturgy. As completion of all these prescriptions, it also undoubtedly adds the realization of the "Canon for the Holy Communion"⁴².

In the second chapter we are reminded of "The Time of the Divine Liturgy", which "according to the old custom, is the third hour of the day, it is still possible sooner or later to start and to be carried out all that's necessary, before midnight or in the afternoon, not because any of us will begin or do in this way, one is wrong, except for the days of the Church, in which the Liturgy is to be held in the afternoon. Even better when the Liturgy is to be carried out when it gets dark that is, that «Just-Hollowed» in the Great Lent, on the Holy Saturday, and on the Eve of the Nativity of Christ and His Baptism, and on the Pentecost Thursday according to the old custom".

Chapters III to VIII concern different liturgical and theological topics that are not essential in our study, as for example preparation before the Liturgy and thanksgiving after the celebration, the holy vessels, the matter of the Eucharist, *etc.*

For our analysis, the ninth chapter seems to have important content. It deals with certain events "during the Holy Gifts after they are blessed and carried out". The text makes a clear reference to the transubstantiation of the Holy Gifts into the Body and Blood of Christ the Saviour:

⁴² The first part of the Canon (consisting of the nine songs, the Psalms and the pre-sleep prayers) is celebrated in the evening after the Vespers. The second part based on the 11 patristic prayers are written is carried out early in the morning, before going to church for service (see "The ruling of the Holy Communion", in: *The Liturgical Book*, p. 333–366).

And if there are more servers, to know that the words of the Lord, “Take, eat” and “drink” and the other, and: “Yours of Yours”, and also “make this bread”, and what is in this cup “changing them by Your Holy Spirit”. They all say this in a low inner voice, and not each of them differently. And if the priest who carries out the Liturgy will forget to say the Lord’s words above the bread and the wine, or the prayers “Lord, what Your Holy Spirit...”, and also the prayers of the change: “And that is, make this bread...” and that “what is in this cup, changing them with Your Holy Spirit...” and he is doubtful about carrying out the Mystery, let him not be confused, but with a relaxed mind to realize this, namely, if these holy gifts were not blessed, the bread and the wine, now they are to be blessed, and say upon them the words of the Lord, beginning with this: “On the night He was delivered up”, taking the bread and all the words which he is doubtful or not about having said them, and after the prayers to continue carrying out till the end⁴³.

In the tenth chapter, the author describes some extraordinary occurrences which can take place during the celebration of the Liturgy. Among them, we find, for example, the case of an exceptional situation when a priest dies during the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. In this case, the service has to be interrupted, if there is no other priest. If there is another server at the Altar, then he can carry on the service with the last words of the deceased priest. On the other hand, it is emphasized that if a priest somehow carries out the Divine Liturgy without participating in the Holy Mysteries, then he sins “badly and commits death sin”.

In the following chapter the priest is guided on the way in which he has to prepare the Holy Communion for the whole year, taking out and preparing the Holy Lamb for the Holy and Divine Liturgy on the Maundy Thursday. In the **twelfth chapter**, the priest is taught how to devote himself, how to self-protect and what kind of piety to show towards the Holy Sacraments:

All the holy servers are to serve in the Church with piety, and to offer to the Holy Sacraments the great worthy prayers, taking care often to receive the Communion. And the priests, who have a parish and the people⁴⁴, must teach them to receive Communion during all year fasts, and take part willingly, open-heartedly and piously into the Communion, and if they wish to receive Communion more times than during the fasts, for seven days, or at least five they will have to fast and attend the service at the Church all these days, or read it in their homes, always free willingly and when in need

⁴³ *A guide for Priests and Deacons*, p. 23.

⁴⁴ Meaning their parishioners, believers.

to fast at least three days before the Divine Confession, as well as the married ones, to abstain those days, and to stay away and be watchful from intercourse on the day they are to receive Communion, and they shall eat nothing from the evening on. And if they are weak and elderly, or children, little will they eat, and after the usual time has passed they shall be vigilant not to put anything in their mouths, but only to spend their time praying, bringing worship, and having spiritual thoughts as possible as it is to get prepared⁴⁵.

The last part of the book comprises several little spiritual stories, which are explained from the historical point of view.

5. “Man is what he eats”

The whole life of any human being is without a doubt a continuous mindful thankfulness offered to God for “all His perfect gift and everything He has offered us”. Thus, or better said from this position, the son of the divine breath “blesses God for the food and life which he receives from Him”, thus answering the blessing with his own blessing⁴⁶.

“Man is what he eats”, said Ludwig Feuerbach, thus striving to find answers to the so-called “idealistic” claims on human existence. Beyond the formalism of his statement, he “expresses, without knowing it, the most religious idea about the man”. This is very true if we take into account that we, the ones sealed with Christ’s name through Baptism, have received as nourishment the medicine for immortality. This reality is proved through our Christ the Saviour’s natural presence in our body, which is constantly carried out “with the purpose of sin forgiveness and everlasting life”. In this way, man achieves a greater life goal: the perpetual connection to the Spring of existence through personal union with Christ in the view of eternity.

The Divine Liturgy is, therefore, a gift offering. However, they are gifts that God “does not want, but He refuses them, because of the sinfulness of those who bring them. There are plenty of such cases, not only for the elderly but also for those who live under Grace. Therefore, we should be careful and mindful of the gifts brought to the Altar for which the service is useless. God Himself refuses the gifts of unworthy give. Even if the gifts were offered in such a way, they are not received, but rejected together with their givers”. Nevertheless, the one who serves

⁴⁵ *A guide for Priests and Deacons*, p. 23.

⁴⁶ A. SCHMEMANN, *For the Life of the World. Sacraments and Orthodoxy*, Bucharest 2012, p. 16.

the Holy Altar, not being able to know the nature of the one who brings gifts, all the gifts brought are received here. In this context, St. Nicholas Cabasilas talks about two offerings: “the first one is when the lays his gifts into the hands of the priest, and the second one when the church brings to God. The former is indeed worthless, if the bringer is a sinner, meaning, that it is of no benefit for him since he himself is unfaithful; but the gifts in themselves are not unpleasant to God, for every creature of God is good. As for the second offering, being carried out by the holy servers, to the glory of God and the saints, to the salvation of mankind, or righteous demand, nothing prevents it from being well-received. For the hands of he who has brought the gifts to the altar have not tainted gifts at all; in neither rational or inanimate creatures can the impurity of sin dwell, for sin is a sickness of will, and therefore defamation by sin belongs only to rational beings. So, remaining pure and being offered by pure hands, the gifts are blessed and, in their turn, they also bless those who approach them”⁴⁷.

Beyond all these material gifts, God wants as an “eucharistic” sacrifice man’s heart: “My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways”⁴⁸. For Christ the Saviour what matters first is “the inner sacrifice, the purity of conscience, the free will to glorify God... Material sacrifices and offerings are worthless in themselves unless they are animated by a personal sacrifice”⁴⁹. The baptized Christian no longer brings before God animal sacrifices or burning at all, but brings as a sacrifice his own life, full of faith, purity and good deeds. “The ordained priests (of the Old Testament)”, says St. Ephrem the Syrian, “offered as sacrifices the bodies of the animals killed. / You, the anointed ones to victory, offer your bodies as offerings! / The Levites brought animals’ kidneys⁵⁰. / You have earned these from them, offering your hearts, instead!”⁵¹.

The greatest joy for every Christian who sacrifices himself to Christ is the everlasting Eucharist of the Sacrifice of His Body and Blood, offered during every Divine Liturgy, on the Holy altar and offered to the new mankind, reborn in Him and united with Him, to His Holy Church. And if “His life offered by Him in His perfect sacrifice is given to us as our life, as our original and genuine Life, as the

⁴⁷ N. CABASILAS, *The Interpretation of the Divine Liturgy*, trad. E. Braniste, Bucharești 1997, pp. 102–103.

⁴⁸ PROV. 23:26.

⁴⁹ P. YOUSIF, *Le Sacrifice et l’Ofrande cher Saint Éphrem de Nisibe*, „Parole de l’Orient” 15 (1988–1989), p. 34.

⁵⁰ EX. 29, 13-22.

⁵¹ EPHREM, *Hymns on the Nativity and Hymns for Epiphany* 2:12., Ioan Ica jr. (ed.), Sibiu 2012.

fulfillment of the divine idea of eternity in man ... then also, our life in Christ and the life of all the Church is sacrifice and offering”⁵².

Abstract

The issue of this study is, as noted in the topic, “The Unification Mystery of Christ in Church”. We try to underline the Orthodox specifics from the patristical and apologetical point of view. Therefore, one of our principal point of the analysis is the preparation of priests and believers for the Eucharistic moment in the Orthodox Liturgy. In the apologetical approach of our presentation, we try to offer an actual interpretation of this Holy Sacrament, together with its necessity on the actual society and to offer some theological solution in the actual context.

Keywords: Church, Liturgy, Orthodoxy, Eucharist, Sacraments.

Jednoczące Misterium Chrystusa w Kościele. Prawosławne spojrzenie na przygotowanie do przyjęcia Najświętszej Eucharystii

Abstrakt

Cel niniejszego studium nakreślony został już w jego tytule: „Jednoczące Misterium Chrystusa w Kościele”. Autor podejmuje tu próbę ujęcia specyfiki prawosławnej z patrystycznego i apologetycznego punktu widzenia. Dlatego też jednym z głównych założeń analizy jest przygotowanie kapłana i wiernych do eucharystycznej części Świętej Liturgii w prawosławiu. W apologetycznym podejściu niniejszego opracowania znajduje się z kolei aktualna interpretacja Sakramentu Ołtarza wraz z Jego koniecznością dla współczesnego społeczeństwa. Ponadto czytelnik znajdzie tu kilka ważnych wskazówek teologicznych dotyczących podjętego zagadnienia.

Słowa kluczowe: Kościół, liturgia, prawosławie, Eucharystia, sakramenty.

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⁵² A. SCHMEMANN, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom*, p. 133.

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