

The relationship between the Confession and the Eucharist in the tradition and contemporary times – in the thinking of the Metropolitan bishop Anthony Plămădeală

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Abstract:

The study presents some aspects of the relationship between the Confession and the Eucharist as this relationship has been defined in the pastoral practice of Western Christian confessions as compared to that of the Orthodox Church, both in the tradition of the past centuries and the contemporary one. The views of some well-known theologians and hierarchs of the Orthodox Church are reviewed in response to the challenges and confusions of modernity in an effort to reaffirm and return to tradition.

Keyword:

Sacrament of Penance, Eucharist, Communion, Antonie Plămădeală, tradition,

The present study deals with the connection between the Sacrament of Confession and the Sacrament of the Eucharist, based on less “orthodox” ideas and practices which are now supported and put into the religious practice by certain dioceses and parishes.

Spiritual life, in its pursuit and development, gets to know a series of steps which in the church are being marked by the Holy Sacraments that are being administered to the believers. Each Sacrament is a different way of meeting Christ and a way of living and feeling this encounter. In each Holy Sacrament, the believer personally meets Christ and experiences the communication of love with Him.

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As far as confession and the traditional Orthodox communion are concerned, they are more severe than other Western religions, where practically confession was abolished, being replaced with a collection demand for forgiveness during liturgical worship. In the Orthodox diaspora as well, one can feel the separation and sometimes the cancellation of the relationship between confession and communion, which is inconsistent in Orthodox spirituality.

There have been in the past several attempts to move towards new habits, but quickly the attempt fell into disuse, though its time it has given rise to heated discussions among theologians and clergymen, reaching up to the agenda of the Holy Synod in the fifties¹. However, we can also remind the theological dispute arisen at the Holy Mountain as a collar of controversy of the Kollyva (ritual food related to funerals/death). The paper of Neophyte Kavsokalivitul also published in Brasov in 1722, on the frequent Communion, raised high controversy and required prompt intervention of the Patriarchate of Constantinople².

For instance, certain theologians consider that all believers who take part at the Holy Liturgy must receive the Communion without any special preparation, while others, more detained, believe that the parishes have intensified communion of the faithful, but not to everyone taking part at the Divine Liturgy only those who have confessed their sins and have received absolution from their confessor. The communion at the Divine Liturgy of all those present, without adequate preparation, steps out of the regular practise and experience if the Church is a sign of responsibility and sufficiency of knowing what the Holy Communion means. The good believers refuse themselves to approach the Holy Chalice if they are not prepared for this. The church has never imposed to anyone to get closer to the Holy Chalice, on the contrary. Also, it must be taken into account that not all who are present at the time of the Communion are ready, some of them being only visitors of even non-Christian, and so on.

¹ Anthony Plămădeală, *Tradition and liberty in orthodox spirituality*, Sophia Publishing house, Bucharest, p. 202.

² Saint Nicodim Agioritul publishes in 1783 the paper *Useful book for the soul on frequent Communion with Christ's most pure Sacraments* placing himself into a normal descent of Neophyte without undertaking the dogmatic error on the fact that the Eucharist body of Christ after the Communion is not a living body, animated and incorruptible of the Saviour after the Resurrection, but His body before the Resurrection, but the one from the Mystical Supper. Although he is a strong supporter of the frequent Communion, Saint Nicodim still has a balanced attitude, which we believe is consistent with the Orthodoxy, highlighting in his speech the need for the compliance of the soul to the communion requirements soul worthy, of the most pure Sacraments, as well as the value of the communion under different which the ascetic mystical life provides within Orthodoxy. The Orthodox Church has officially seen thus issue not so much under the temporality spectrum of communion but most of all in light of the need to respect the soul conditions of approaching the Body and Blood of Christ.

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Regarding this „ordinance” which has echoes in the contemporary times, I have analyzed the connection between the Holy Confession and the Sacrament of the Eucharist as it is in the tradition of the Orthodox spirituality, using the writings of the scholar bishop Anthony Plămădeală concerning this spiritual issue.

Confession and Eucharist today

It must be highlighted from the beginning that we take communion from the Body and Blood of Christ “for forgiveness of sins and eternal life”, thus for our spiritual perfection. „The effects of the fruits of the Holy Communion do not depend on the number of communions or on the intervals we receive the Holy Sacrament, but on the disposition or spiritual preparation we receive. To this regard, the guiding words of Saint Paul must be remembered: *Anyone who shall eat this bread and who shall drink the cup of God unworthily shall be guilty of the Body and Blood of Christ. Since the one eating and drinking unworthily of Christ’s body, is eating and drinking damnation to Himself, ignoring the body of the Lord.*³. Therefore, for the Holy Communion to become a true remedy of immortality, and the antidote against death, as the Holy Fathers used to call it, everything that is sin and imperfection must be eliminated from the soul, so we must prepare ourselves in a special way in order to perform the act of overwhelming importance that is the Holy communion. Therefore, the Holy Fathers often underline the rule applied and high respect to the Orthodox Church practise which does not encourage anyone to come to the Communion without the necessary preparation and especially without a purified heart that is achieved by the Sacrament of the Confession. This explains why in the Orthodox Church, the Communion is not a very often met phenomenon in the life of the Christians, as in the one of the Roman – Catholic Churches or even in Protestant ones⁴.

„In Western confessions and unfortunately in certain Orthodox Churches from the East, the Holy Communion is performed on a daily basis within the Holy Liturgy. If it were only that and if it were just meeting all canons, the work would be really reviving Christian life and salutary for the Orthodox Church. An intensification of Christian life could also be detected, and also achieving a complete ecclesiastic community, the coexistence and loving each other could also be given as an example, but ... Daily communion has been the object of several manifestations of piety and numerous theological disputes during the history. Nowadays, it has been stated that the practice is allowed by the church, that it is possible and even desirable.

³ *I Corinthians* 11, 27, 29.

⁴ Ph.D. Priest Nicolae D. Necula, *Tradition and renewal in the Liturgical service*, Trinitas Publishing house, Bucharest, 2014, pp. 485-486.

However, the facts show us that by the previously mentioned practices, it is truncated, in another spirit, without compliance with the obligations imposed by the church, in the preparation of the faithful and on the way it is administered. Following the dissolution of the Sacrament of Penance, the concept itself about the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist has undergone a change, a transformation, a renewal. It does not have anymore the gracious function Orthodoxy had. Its value was significantly decreased, and therefore the respect for it also decreased considerably, thus relating only to its forms of communication and to its features. It became compulsory for all those participating at the Holy Liturgy, regardless of their worthiness or unworthiness. For the church has never imposed compulsory communion for all those participating, regardless of their spiritual and moral state (...) If general communion is mandatory or only allowed at the Holy Liturgy, so if the communion has lost its meaning of reaching its goal, then Christ is not an arbitrator anymore. Than Christ is not anymore in the fullness of His divine qualities, he is Christ and not a righteous judge, yet forgiving and merciful. Thus, such a Christ is not Christ anymore, Or, Christ is far more patient and more gracious, but also a right judge and rewarder, now and forever, since Christ is the same as yesterday, today and forever. And then Christ wants us to move through painstaking. Since communion should be and it is better to be more frequent, his is true indeed but not under any circumstances. Unconditioned by anything”⁵.

The Metropolitan Bishop Serafim Joantă states in his pastoral letter the date of the clergy and of the faithful on the Feast of the Navity in 2013: „that we always tie communion to confession. Most of the faithful believe that we cannot receive communion without first confessing. However, we msut know that no canon of the Church and no Holy Father imposes any fasting before confession and does not condition communion to confession”⁶.

However, father Nicolae Necula confesses the fact that even at the Fourth International Congress of Orthodox Theology Faculties held in Bucharest between August 12-17 1996, an Orthodox theology belonging to the Eladei⁷ Orthodox church supported the idea of removing the iconostasis from the architecture of the Orthodox church and the dissolution of the Proskomedia or returning to the habit or practice from the beginning to being gifts of bread and wine directly to the Holy Table.

Another proposal that was made then ,was that of giving communion to all faithful attending the Holy Liturgy, without any special preparation, that is with-

⁵ Anthony Plămădeală, *Tradition and liberty of Orthodox spirituality*, pp. 215-216.

⁶ His Eminence Metropolitan Serafim Joantă, *Pastoral to Nativity 2013*.

⁷ The Greek Biblical scholar from Tesalonic Petros Vassiliadis.

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out fasting, confession and absolution⁸. Another example was the one stated by the Priest professor Konstantin Karaisaridis of Tesalonic who, starting from the spiritual lineage, this time far away, claimed that confession by modern means, such as Skype, and then absolution by laying of hands should be made by a priest.

Vision of the Metropolitan bishop Anthony Plămădeală

In order to show the between the Holy Sacrament of Confession and the Holy Communion as it is normal in the Orthodox spirituality, I have stressed the healthy, balanced vision and in accordance to it , as it is described by the worthily bishop Anthony Plămădeală in the book *Tradition and liberty of Orthodox spirituality* and in several studies.

The Priest Professor Dumitru Stăniloae speaking about this volume and about the thinking of the bishop from Sibiu, was saying: „the book provides such a spiritual life of the community, imprinted in the shades of all kinds of contributions from his members, who compete and urge themselves, who, on the one hand enrich with the content of the community life, and on the other hand they preserve in the balance of the rightful judgement and humility, important virtues of spiritual life in the Eastern spirituality and authentic human heights, the only ones capable of promoting true communion and love among people, constantly shaping the human and scraping away any opacity of him and making him the transparent divine”⁹.

Tradition and liberty are, as the bishop Anthony was saying, the most important two poles, among which spiritual life of Orthodoxy takes place¹⁰.

With respect to the preparation of the soul, the first condition to be met is confession or confessing sins. cea dintâi condiție de îndeplinit este spovedania sau mărturisirea păcatelor. One cannot conceive receiving the holy communion without confessing to the confessor, the sins we have made from the last confession of communion. „In early times, Christians could not gather daily for communion, only by hiding themselves and by chance. Every day communion later generalized, when the church became victorious. . But in time eagerness decreased and daily communion decreased to. The eagerness for renewal by the return to the primary state of the Church in a distorted way represented the mobile of initial eagerness of the entire Protestantism, which was born all the multitude, of sects and heresies that especially the West suffers of”¹¹ and not only. In the early Chris-

⁸ Pr. Prof. Dr. Nicolae D. Necula, *op. cit.*, p. 543.

⁹ Anthony Plămădeală, *Tradition and liberty of Orthodox spirituality* , Sibiu, 1983, p. 3.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 203.

tian years there were prayers which had a penitential content and character. One of these was incorporated in the official ordinance prayer of the church. Others were part of the particular ordinance of the prayer, but which, in time, under monarchic ordinance have acquired public, official and compulsory character for all Christians. Thus, in the ordinance of the Holy Liturgy, described in the Apostolic Constitutions, are listed at the end of the Liturgy catechumens, four litanies and four prayers. Speaking about the role that a bishop had, about the conversation with the latter in the Seat of the Holy Confession, the Metropolitan Anthony was saying: „The conversation with a priest is always sacred. During confession he is being prepared for communion. He cleans the home which shall receive Christ, that is why he is being very attentive, sometimes very strict. But even when he is strict, when he forbids or delays the communion, he finds the fatherly advice, for purification and forgiveness. From time to time, he calls on him to check his state of spirit and the spiritual progress. If he observes any progress and repentance, he can shorten the period of penitence. Great Fathers are not only limited to the formal, liturgical and spiritual aspect of confession. They slowly become advisers also outside the Holy Confession, they become tutors”¹². Public confession has become abolished. In Church only personal, individual confession is compulsory. Between the confessor and the penitent there is a parentage relationship, of rebirth. How this relationship can be achieved, this rebirth, when the penitent is lost in the crowd, when he is not an individual anymore, but an anonymous and impersonal mass? And how can an anonymous, impersonal mass fell before the spiritual confessor as before God? And how can the spiritual confessor consider himself a worker of the Holy Sacrament when the penitent is anonymous? And how can he be the witness of the penitent before Christ, when he doesn't hear his sins, when the penitent tells them in his mind or even aloud and not to his spiritual confessor? Why to say „Look son...” of the service of confession, if this should be collective? And why for absolution to say : „I forgive you” and not „I forgive you all”? And to establish the degree of the sin's severity and its Canon circumstances, when confession is collective and when the spiritual advisor does not hear it, does not make the difference between them, and when he absolutes several after a supposed confession, levelling all listeners' prayers under the same dispensations unconditioned by anything? How can consciousness reconcile through such a confession and when does the sin heal? Is it really possible for a collective forgiveness to be made? The church teaches us that it isn't. The same goes for the application of canons, as patients receiving their drugs¹³. This is where the importance of

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 198-199.

¹³ *Ibidem*, pp. 203-204.

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giving this Holy Sacrament comes from, since its effects depend on the way we administer it. In the Holy sacrament the priest can build or break down. Of course, he must build through his pastoral skill and artistry, through his life and spiritual experience. Speaking about the tie between the priest and the faithful, Anthony Metropolitan Bishop stated between the pages of *Romanian Telegraph* „the obedience to such a an adviser opens the Kingdom of Heaven. Listening opens the Kingdom of Heaven. Here an extraordinary aspect must be noted. You obey to a man and God rewards you. It is as if you obey God. The explanation is not too difficult: you obey to a man, but you obey for God. The criteria and the reason for the obedience is not the man no matter how spiritual he might be, but God”¹⁴.

Spoken responsibility arisen from the mandate assigned by God and the knowledge that through the holy servant the sanctifying grace is working, words of forgiveness and absolution, in Confession formula, have the gift of deleting all confessed sins. As the priest says „And I , unworthy priest and confessor, by the power invested in me, I forgive and absolve you of all your sins, in name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁵. As the profound scholar and theologian of our Church observes, Anthony Metropolitan of Transylvania, it is important to have the certainty that those sins have been forgiven. Making the distinction between the psychoanalyst physician and the confessor, the bishop was saying: „it’s one thing to go to the doctor, who shall seek to find the cause of a disease from some facts and memories left in your subconscious, which he shall try to make you acknowledge, to forget or to understand them, and another thing is to go to a spiritual father and to tell him, as before God, your wrongs and your repentance and to ask for forgiveness and also to fell that when the priest says *I forgive and absolve you*, everything is erased, as if washing off the board where you have written a thousand sins. More than that, if you wet the sponge in some water, everything is erased even better. That is why, parents talk about the tears of penance, tears of repentance”¹⁶.

Referring to the Holy Confession and grounding on the profound belief and belief, the Holy Fathers highlight the idea that sincere confession has the power to forgive any sin¹⁷. The only sin which is not forgiven is that when the man does not show remorse. To this regard, Saint Isaac the Syrian is quite categorical: „There isn’t a greater unforgiveable sin then the one for which repent-

¹⁴ Metropolitan Bishop Anthony Plămădeală, “God listens to those who listen to their spiritual father”, in the *Romanian Telegraph*, no. 29-32, 1991, p. 1.

¹⁵ *Agheasmatar*, I.B.M.B.O.R. Publishing house, Bucharest, 1992, pp. 67-68.

¹⁶ Anthony Plămădeală, *New meanings to old texts*, Sibiu, 1989, p. 128.

¹⁷ Pr. Viorel Sava, *The Sacrament of Confession in actual rites*, Trinitas Publishing House, Iași, 2004, p. 45.

ance is not made”¹⁸. This thesis is also encountered at the Philokalia parents. For instance, the Venerable Theognostus was saying in one of his works : „We shall not be punished and condemned in the era to come for having sinned, once having received a cranky and unstable nature. But because by sinning, we have not repented, neither we have turned the evil way unto the Lord, after having received the power and the time for repentance...”¹⁹ Other Fathers go even further and state that sins are forgiven because profound and intense repentance is manifested. The simple formal act of confessing sins, without heart breaking does not entail forgiveness, but rather damnation: „And if you would happen to get muddy or slip into a fall and stray from what is right, you have to quickly reconcile with the one that upset you and that you repent from your heart and to cry and to shed tears or made you angry and to rebuke yourself”²⁰. Diadochus of Photice also emphasizes the same thing. He says: let’s ask God, „to teach us the difference between virtue and sin. Last but not the least, we must bring Him constant confession of sins and tears n not devoid retreated and even more, since this is the only way we can, by increasing labours, to make God merciful, to look deeply within our hearts”²¹.

Another aspect is that of confession as a means of spiritual growth. Confession is also an example of spiritual maturity. Repentance is yearning for liberation from the old man and putting on the new one. Embodied in the confession of sins, it brings spiritual help. To this regard, here it is what Peter of Damascus says: „Nothing brings cancellation of sins than repentence and evil cutting; and neither the highly increase of the soul like cutting down the needs and own thoughts”²², and he also says that, ultimately, salvation is gained by permanent confession: „But if someone wants, he starts again by repentance. If you have fallen, he says, stand up; and if you have fallen down again, stand up again, not giving up on salvation, no matter what”²³. Or, acquiring salvation involves the state of purity of mind and spiritual abundance which have as main cause, repentance itself. Bad

¹⁸ St. Isaac the Syrian, *Words of the holy labours*, translation, notes and introduction Ph.D. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, Bucharest, 1981, p. 161.

¹⁹ The Venerable Theognostus, *About creation, contemplation and priesthood*, translation, notes and introduction of Ph.D. prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, Harisma Publishing house, Bucharest, 1994, p. 284.

²⁰ Calist and Ignatie Xanthopol, *Method or the 100 heads*, translation, notes and introduction of Ph.D. prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, in *Filocalia*, Vol. VIII, Bucharest , 1978, p. 175.

²¹ Blessed Diodocus, Bishop of Foticeii, Ascetic word, *about moral life , about knowledge and the righful spiritual account, divided into 100 heads*, in *Filocalia*, vol. I, Harisma publishing house, Bucharest, 1992, p. 437 and 448.

²² Petru Damaschinul, *Spiritual teachings*, in „Filocalia”, vol. V, Bucharest , 1976, p. 155.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 144.

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thoughts and sins give the man a negative charge. The release of these by confession enable fullness of the place which became empty with a positive charge.

Confession is the regeneration of our soul, the renewal and cleansing of baptism clothes which we have defiled by sins. We all make sins, we all need repentance, forgiveness and cleaning. Regarding the connection of confession, especially the intense life of the monks, bishop Anthony said: „In monasteries the confessors confess both the public and the laymen. In good tradition monasteries, the monks' confession is performed every week, and communion at 40 days interval. It can be performed more often and also more rarely, only in the four fasting. Tradition imposed frequent confession and rare communion. The Holy Communion is given only after confession and absolution from the spiritual confessor. They always absolve of sins but not always give blessing by communion: sometimes they impose canons of prayers and repentance, give advice to reconcile with those he upset, to repair what they have damaged, and so on ²⁴.

The communion should not be neither frequent nor rare, it should be continuous, with repentance and vigilance. The idea that bishop Anthony Plămădeală highlights is that problem is not a frequent communion, but a disordered communion, without a valid confession supported by some bishops, priests and contemporary theologians leading to the communion ad St. John Chrysostom says „usually, for casuality, not under the law or clean thoughtfulness”²⁵.

Repentance is one of the most important works in life, sanctifying believers, since through it the communion with God is restored, broken by sin, and it restores the new man or the lightful coat of Baptism, dark and dirty due to sinful life. That is why life can not be conveyed without true confession. The more we confess, the more we are on right path of true Christian life and we preserve the connection to God, which is the course of all gifts and blessings. If all sin is a pride, a departure from God, then getting close to Him can only be achieved by denial pride, that is simplicity. This is also the disposition towards returning mentioned by Trullo Canon 102.

„Repentance is fulfilled in hope and absolution and remission of sins. It never leads to hopelessness and despair but it sets you free from one and the other. And the shapes that it takes never reach ascetic excesses. Or if they reach, they are then motivated by a rightful path, especially by not damaging the others' law of love. True repentance is the one that creates not the one that simply destroys the man! The purpose of repentance is not to abolish the existing earthly man, nor of the sick for the cripple, not to make him fit for life. Orthodox appearance involves

²⁴ Antonie Plămădeală, *The Tradition of Life. Romanian Essays in Spirituality and Theology*, în „Studies Supplementary” to Sobornost, nr. 2, 1971, pp. 44-45.

²⁵ N. Milaş, *Canons*, vol. II, p. 261.

the psycho-physical integrity of the one who does not sin and not his decay into nothingness. St. John Climacus considers that excesses are working without discernment²⁶ „ leading to the loss of mental equilibrium²⁷”²⁸.

St. Gregory Palamas calls the weeping bathroom forgiveness and the second baptism²⁹. In all texts about tears one can clearly see that it is not talking about giving up on optimism, on natural optimism of the man, but it is a bitter-making into account the decay and sin, as Arsenie says. „We shall not be considered guilty, St. John Climacus says, because we haven't made miracles, because we haven't been theologians, because we haven't had visions, but we shall definitely have to explain God why we haven't cried out our sins”³⁰. The meaning of repentance in Orthodox spirituality is thus return to what it is true in nature to whatever is true against nature.

As for confession and Western contemporary Eucharist are concerned, the metropolitan bishop says that: „The church has led to the teaching of St. Paul: *Try all and keep in mind what is good*³¹. That is why, until today, the Church had not made a decision on this case, leaving it forgotten as an isolated event within a local church. And is hasn't also made a negative decision yet and that Father John of Kronstadt was an exceptional spiritual personality, entirely dedicated to orthodoxy, collective confession performing it for necessity, due to the increased number of the faithful, which were coming to see him and which urged him to listen to their confessions. In the West things were not like that. Here the crowd is not the one asking, but the clergy is calling for the faithful to communion after a semblance of collective ritual confession... But it's not so much originality that matters. It is more about the consequences of this practice. Forgiving easily, in the same easy way is that man passes to sin and minimizing it, his consciousness is being perverted. The feeble soul rejoices when sin is allowed and when, at the same time, he is ensured that he is being reconciled with God. With such practices and with such weak people, it is not had to do match!³²

²⁶ *Scara*, Neamț Monastery Publishing house, 19841, Teaching IV.

²⁷ *Scara*, Cuv. V.

²⁸ Anthony Plămădeală, *Tradition...*, p. 85.

²⁹ Cf. Pr. D. Stăniloae, *Life and teachings of St. Grigorie Palama*, Sibiu, 1938, p. 31.

³⁰ *Scara*, Cuv. VII, 73.

³¹ *1 Thessalonians* 5, 21.

³² Döllinger was saying that the Lutherans have gained ground at the beginning, because they were preaching that one can be in peace with God through the mere act of faith, thorough a simple movement of the conscious, to the certainty of reconciliation. And Wezel reports that „the more the man is carnal and worldly, the more he is drawn to this by this sect which allows the old man to do everything that in the Old church (Catholic) was considered a grave sin ”. Luther also teaches that the Gospel is all about forgiveness. And even for excising some of his actions, he has written a treaty

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In terms of participation and communion of the faithful, Father John Ica keeping in mind the theological line of those faithful of scholar lack of segregation between the Liturgy and the Eucharist of Father Dumitru Stănilaoe who promotes a unitary vision on the presence of God at the Liturgy, presence which is not reduced to the level of the Eucharist one, stating that: „the entire Holy Liturgy as our meeting place with God, from the beginning till the end ... is a gradual epiphany of our presence, spiritual one of Christ, where several ways of the presence and of His work can be distinguished, as so many ways of meeting and communicating with Christ³³. The Holy Liturgy has not always been seen in Orthodoxy as a whole in, where “nothing is static, nothing is isolated. All are moving and changing in continuous harmony with the whole³⁴, the entire mass being „as an icon showing one body of the Saviour’s work in the world³⁵. „Meeting the commands and all virtues is the way through which is being stored, updated activated and given birth to a new life in Christ, acquired through the Holy Sacrament³⁶. The purpose of Christian life is the union with God, „this union being achieved by the work of the Holy Spirit, but until its reaching the man must undergo a long effort of purification³⁷. This effort materializes into a conformation process of the human life through the divine will by meeting all commands and virtues, where the Eucharist Christ dwelt within us, and all His gifts are put into the paper. „St. Maximus the confessor was saying that the virtue being among us all is the unique Word of God since the being of all virtues is our Lord Jesus Christ.³⁸ and Saint Mark the Ascetic was saying that „God is hidden in His prayers and the ones looking for Him, find Him while receiving His commands³⁹. As shown in Ph.D. Prof. Ioan Ică „the powers of the cross and Christ’s resurrection become ours only if we apply them,

on the Genesis, highlighting the Patriarchs as sinners. Only that towards the end of his life, seeing the disasters brought by collective confession, and that he has lost all control on believers, himself fell into discouragement, complained of having increased corruption, and thought to establish an ecclesiastical prison for pastors. Abolition of individual confession is what most of the Protestants lament about. Sebastian Frank was writing that „the vice has become the food, as the everyday life bread”. André Osiander, who at the beginning has abolished individual confession in Nurnberg, in 1533 was demonstrating that collective absolution are not grounded in the Scripture, that they are an invention of the devil, which motivates the progress of corruption.

³³ Personal modes of the presence of Jesus Christ and sharing Him in the Holy Liturgy and in the Orthodox Spirituality .

³⁴ Archimandrite Vasilios, *Entering the Kingdom*, Deisis publishing house, Sibiu, 1996, p. 67.

³⁵ St. Nicolae Cabasila, *Interpretation of the Divine Liturgy*, I.B.M.B.O.R. Publishing house, Bucharest, 1997, p. 9.

³⁶ Ph.D. Prof. Ioan Ică, *Ways of...*, pp. 346-347.

³⁷ Ph.D. Prof. Dumitru STĂNILAOE, *Ascetic and mystic of the Orthodox Church*, p. 5.

³⁸ *Ibidem.*, p. 54.

³⁹ Apud. Ph.D. Prof. Ioan Ică, *Ways of...*, p. 353.

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by using all His commands, if we die to sin and rise with it all of Christ⁴⁰. Meeting commands does not therefore represent an independent effort of purification from Christ's communion, on the contrary, it is the process of meeting Christ and of achieving the communion with Him, as a result of finding and highlighting His Eucharistic presence in us, since, any man who shares the virtue by habit unwavering partakes of God, as one who has added, by free choice the natural good of the Image⁴¹.

Contemporary theology highlights several ways of Christ's real presence in the entirety of the Holy liturgy : a) in the Words of the Holy Sacrament legibly by the priest in the church; b) in the preaching word of the priest; c) in the prayers uttered by the priest, in the songs of the faithful; d) in the Eucharistic sacrifice; e) in the service of other Sacraments; f) in the faithful reading of the Scripture, and so on⁴². Ph. D. Prof. Ioan Ică stresses the fact that „considering the different ways of presence and the work of Christ in the Holy Liturgy, /which are all necessary and complementary, it means that through all these the faithful meet with Christ and communicate with His work, receiving something from the Holy Liturgy even if they do not receive communion. Affirming the value and centrality of the Eucharistic presence of the Divine liturgy, Father professor makes a series of epiphany statements pointing out on other modes of sensing the presence of Christ in the Liturgy : a) all codes of presence and the work of Christ in the Liturgy are different forms of communion with Christ, necessary and complementary; b) and the ones who do not convert and they do not take part at the Holy Liturgy ; c). Eucharistic communion cannot and must not be seen exclusively as a detachment from the assembly of Holy Liturgy, from Orthodox teachings and spirituality. At the same time, the father professor just like Anthony Metropolitan bishop underlines that the Holy Communion is not only the means of Christian's communion, but even the target and the goal of the entire Christianity highlighting that: the Eucharist communion has never been separated from the spiritual life whose purpose is the total communion with God; spiritual communion with the Body and Blood of God is not a means, but a purpose, the central top of the spiritual path which implies an elevated training, thus being the ultimate goal and just like Eucharistic communion it has always been linked to to ethical – ascetic endeavours in order to preserve to the end the treasure gained by grace pine deified life, according to the gift received.

⁴⁰ Ioan Ică, *Jesus Christ – Our Easter*, RT, 72 (1991), nr. 2, p. 71.

⁴¹ Ph. D. Prof. Ioan Ică, *Ways of...*, p. 353.

⁴² Ciprian Cherecheș, „Personal modes of Jesus Christ's presence and teh communion with Him”, in *Tribute to Father Ph.D. prof. Ioan Ică*, Renașterea Publishing house, Cluj Napoca, 2007, p. 306.

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In conclusion, the Church recommends that communion to be made through confession. This is the best practice during the Fasting, but if someone is more zealous and of pure heart, it can be done more often. Even to a 40 days interval. That is why one can receive communion several times and the validity or the duration of the Holy Communion is not conditional upon within 40 days, but the cleanliness or sinfulness that we find ourselves in. As for communion and of the terms we are receiving it, it always remains valid the rule set and recommended by Saint Apostle Paul in his Epistle 1 to the Corinthians: „Since every time you shall eat this bread and drink this glass, The death of our Lord you shall announce until It shall come. Thus, anyone who shall eat this bread and drink the glass of God unworthily shall be guilty of Lord’s Body and Blood. Let the man search within himself and thus to eat and drink, disregarding the Lord’s body”⁴³. We have presented these reflections on the role and the necessity of the Communion and at the same time the absolution of sins, before communion, by appealing to the authority of a bishop and theologian of wide reputation, because, as we have seen today, there is the tendency for certain Orthodox theologians to diminish the importance of the importance of confession and its necessity for receiving its Holy communion, going as far as stating that Confession must be made only for the sins which make us separate from the Church, make us stay aside from the other, for the deadly sins, until there isn’t anymore the need to be confessed and untied. Furthermore, one of these theologians considers it as a magic formula. „This formal absolution, half magical, half liturgical, but not a reconciliation with the church, of which he was excommunicated due to his sins, are seeking today the Sacrament of the Holy Confession”⁴⁴. This prayer of absolution, he says, would be of Western origin and was introduced in our religious books during the intense “Latin” influence of Orthodox Theology, during the time of , Petru Movilă and of his successors⁴⁵.

Father Dumitru Stăniloae was writing that „by confession we acknowledge our wrongs: this is the way that we cut off our pride. Therefore the Orthodox Church preserves the order to make the participation at the Eucharist Sacrifice of sins confession, of acknowledging our guilt”⁴⁶.

As for the practice of confession before the Communion and the tie between them, they are considered as applications of the „faithful parishioners of harsh canons which have been provided for monarchs during centuries of Church re-

⁴³ 1 Cor: 11, 26-29.

⁴⁴ Alexander Schmemmann, *The great lent*, Bucharest, 1995, p. 139, also to be seen Ph.D. Prof. Nicolae D. NECULA, *Tradition ..*, p. 537.

⁴⁵ Alexander Schmemmann, *The great lent*, p. 137 și 142.

⁴⁶ M. Costa de Beauregard, Dumitru Stăniloae, *The little spoken dogma*, Deisis Publishing house, Sibiu, 1995, p. 108.

gression.”⁴⁷. That is why we must stress the fact that: 1. All these theological concepts which did not receive in any way the acceptance of the church and which are in contradiction with the entire teaching and practice of the orthodox Church, they stay just simple theological reflections arisen from the desire of renewal and practise within certain Orthodox communities which carry out their life and activity in the diaspora and in the Protestant world; 2. Because we present ourselves before the Holy Grail we need to be cleared off sins and this can be achieved only by Confession and repentance. It is however true that that we shall never be so clean of sins, that we can say we deserve to receive the Holy Communion, but not without any kind of preparation we can present ourselves before the Holy Grail. Coming to the Eucharist Supper totally unprepared represents a desecration of the Holy Communion, a complete disregard of hers⁴⁸. 3. In the order of the Holy Communion, as in the theology regarding this Holy sacrament, no distinction shall ever be made between the sins which break us away from the Church and those easy ones which are forgiven without Confession or not needed. Not even the canons of the Orthodox Church make any difference, they only set certain “punishments”, as spiritual remedies and healing means, according to the seriousness of their sins, not to say that certain separate us from the Church and other don’t, and that certain must be confessed and forgiven by absolution, and other don’t. Any sin separates us from God and from the church and for any if the sins we need Confession and absolution. On the one hand, Father Prof. Nicolae Necula from Bucharest states that „to let at this point such a conception groundless, that for certain sins we must confess and for other we don’t, it means to create confusion and boundless lunacy in the souls of the faithful who know that every sin must be confessed and unbound by the confessor priest. There is not in the teaching of the Church and of the Holy Fathers the statement that absolution is being given only for the sins which extra communicate us, but it is given for all sins”⁴⁹. 4. The canons applied to believers in the act of Confession and of the Communion are the work of the Great Theology Fathers of the only Church. They were not simple monks, ordinary and naive monks, but Theology geniuses, who have set them in the Ecumenical Councils, local, particular and personal, not in the regression periods and centuries of the Church, but during flowering times, distinguishing among them the entire church life. All this emphasis made on the proceeding of Confession before Communion can be also a sign for those who are trying to break this tie. For instance, it has come today that for Greek churches and where Arab

⁴⁷ Ph. D. Prof. Ion Bria, *Liturgy after Liturgy*, Athena publishing house, Bucharest, 1996, p. 61.

⁴⁸ Ph. D. Prof. Nicolae D. Necula, *op. cit.*, p. 538.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 540.

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language is spoken, the consciousness of confession has vanished. Confession is reduced to uttering certain prayers from the Sacrament and after that the penitent must not do any actual confession of sins. This is done only for the case of serious sins. However, the practice of confession was preserved in monasteries. In Slavic churches, the practice of confession was maintained, but there tends to be reduced to once a year. In the Serbian church, every time confession is performed, the faithful prepare themselves through a sever fasting during a week and by taking part at the Holy Liturgy. In the Church from Finland and the USA, where the faithful receive communion every week, the practice of monthly confession has started to take roots. Father John Ică jr. States that „this problematic character of appealing to the method of frequent communion comes, therefore, from the pressure exercised by its believers to give up on traditional elements, such as the prior ascetic preparation by fastening and especially the tie between Communion and Confession”⁵⁰. All these specifications are meant to strengthen our belief that taking part at the Confession and of sin absolution before the Holy Communion, just as our Church has preserved it, is accurate and is being situated on the true line of faith. Communion without confession is not accepted, and for an efficient work of faithful spirituality for our believers, this practice must be kept scrupulously.

⁵⁰ *Continue with the sacraments Sharing*, Deisis publishing house, Sibiu, 2006, p. 86.