

“Sarx zoopoios” – Incarnation and Eucharist in the teachings of Saint Cyril of Alexandria

Revd. Assoc. Prof. Nicolae Moşoiu

Abstract:

In this article the author is dealing with the close link between the Incarnation and Eucharist in the teaching of the Saint considered to be the Father of Orthodox Christology *par excellence*. Although the Eucharistic doctrine was not the object of direct disputes, some debates over the Eucharist occurred indirectly and temporarily during the Christological disputes. In the article are highlighted some important aspects like: the value of the human body which clearly results from the Incarnation, the reality of the presence of Jesus Christ in the consecrated Gifts, a short exegesis on 2Pt1:4 - one of the main biblical text on *theosis*, the Eucharist as the union of the faithful to the life of the incarnated Logos and with the Holy Trinity and finally the Eucharist as seed of immortality and the gift of eternal life.

Keywords:

human body, Incarnation, changing of the Gifts, „Sharers of the divine nature” (*theias koinonoi physeos, divinae naturae consortes*) (2 Pt1:4), Eucharist, *theosis*, incarnated Logos, Holy Trinity, seed of immortality, gift of eternal life

Saint Cyril of Alexandria is considered to be the most important representative of Christology the Church has ever had and, after Saint Athanasius the Great, the writer who has most influenced the articulation of this fundamental aspect of Christian doctrine¹. Also, Saint Cyril is for the Eastern Church, the Father of Or-

* Revd. PhD Nicolae Moşoiu, Associated Professor at the *Andrei Şaguna* Faculty of Orthodox Theology, *Lucian Blaga* University of Sibiu, Romania. Email: nicolaemosoiu@yahoo.com

¹ John A. McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria. The Christological Controversy. Its History, Theology and Texts*, E.J.Brill, 1994, p.1

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thodox Christology par excellence, a great interpreter and a spiritual father, a saint in the fullness of doctrine and life, the two inseparable aspects in the Orthodox understanding of the nature of theology and holiness².

In an important study, Father Professor Ion Caraza noted that: „Eucharistic doctrine was not the object of direct disputes. Moreover, neither before nor after the 5th century, were there such disputes during the patristic age, because the teaching of the Holy Eucharist was accepted by the whole Church from the beginning as Holy Sacrament through which the Saviour instituted the continuation and completion of His work of salvation begun in the Incarnation. This teaching has been preserved by the Divine Liturgy and catechesis, which eliminated controversy without any errors”³. But disputes over the Eucharist occurred indirectly and temporarily during the Christological disputes⁴.

For Saint Cyril, but also for many other Church Fathers, the theology of the Eucharist is inseparable from theology of the Incarnation. In every Holy Liturgy, the Son of God comes in the flesh again (*palin en somati*) to give it (*idia sarx*) to the communicants.

1. The body (*sarx*) as reference to the human being man in its entirety⁵

There is a great contrast between the importance of the human body⁶, between the inestimable gift of life itself and the value of its various components⁷.

² *Ibidem*

³ Diacon Prof. Ion Caraza, „Doctrina Euharistica a Sfântului Chiril I Alexandriei”, in *Studii Teologice*, XX (1968), nr. 7-8, p. 528, republished in *Spovedania și Euharistia, izvoare ale vieții creștine, II Sfânta Euharistie – arvuna vieții veșnice*, Ed. Basilica, București, 2014, p. 241; a very good study based on new quotations as well as references to the theme of the present paper.

⁴ *Ibidem*

⁵ Lawrence J. Welch, *Christology and Eucharist in the early thought of Cyril of Alexandria*, International Scholars Publications, San Francisco, 1994, p. 46

⁶ See Francis S. Collins’ *Language of God*, an exceptional book. The author coordinated the international team of geneticists who succeeded, at the beginning of the 3rd millennia, in mapping the human genome. See also conferences like: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DjJAWuzno9Y>

⁷ “The human body contains approximately: 65% Oxygen, 18% Carbon, 10% Hydrogen, 3% Nitrogen, 1.5% Calcium, 1% Phosphorous, 0.35% Potassium, 0.25% Sulfur, 0.15% Sodium, 0.15% Chlorine, 0.05% Magnesium, 0.0004% Iron, 0.00004% Iodine. The body contains also trace amounts of other elements, such as silicon, manganese, fluorine, copper, zinc, arsenic and aluminum. The going rate for a body’s worth of these elements is about one US dollar!!! The skin would be worth about \$3.50 if it were sold at the price of a cowhide, which runs around \$0.25 per square foot. A dollar’s worth of elements plus the value of the skin would round up to \$5” [<http://chemistry.about.com/b/2011/02/06/how-much-are-the-elements-in-your-body-worth.htm>].

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The body is not devalued in Christianity. Father Stăniloae calls it „*a transparent organ of infinite mystery of God*”⁸.

A very good summary of the Old Testament anthropology is owed to Marius Lazurca⁹. The human being, says the author, belongs intrinsically to both the terrestrial and the celestial, but must enroll in a continual upward movement. One significant argument is that the term designating flesh (*basar*) is never understood separately from soul (*nefesh*)¹⁰. The body should not be understood at any moment, even theoretically, as separate from its deep connection to the soul. This rigorous interdependence between body and soul reflects an absolutely positive vision about the human body. In fact, the body, the rabbis say without hesitation, is a perfect creation, the Creator’s masterpiece. Marius Lazurca warns, however, that some Old Testament texts were drafted in a climate dominated by the Hellenistic culture. Therefore commentators talk about the existence of two anthropologies in the Old Testament: the first, true to the original spirit of Judaism proposes, especially by Talmudic hermeneutics, a positive image of the corporality; the second, marked by fundamental ideas of Hellenistic anthropology, insists on the irreconcilable distance between body and soul. In *The Wisdom of Solomon*, a text written between 100 and 50 BC in Alexandria, there are visible signs of this influence, but without it becoming dominant for all Jewish anthropology. However, Olivier Clément shows that the biblical difference between the body and the spirit has no connection with the Hellenistic dichotomy between soul and body, despite countless historical confusion that often made Christianity a „Platonism for the people”¹¹.

In conclusion, biblical anthropology systematically refuses dualism. Human body is *animated* and the soul is *embodied*, soteriology is not understood as a radical break with the body, but rather a good harmonization of their relationships¹².

⁸ Pr.Prof.Dr.Dumitru Staniloae, *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu (God’s Immortal Image)*, Ed.Mitropoliei Olteniei, Craiova, 1987, p.164

⁹ Marius Lazurca, *Invenția trupului, (The Invention of the Body)*, Ed. Anastasia, București, f.a., p. 97.

¹⁰ The words that name in the Old Testament the spiritual part of man are: *nefesh, neshamah, ruach, leb*, the last refers to the anatomical organ (the heart) but it also means “the intimate life of the sentiment, the passion and thinking”. (Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique, Paris, 1923, tome I, p. 969). Frequently, the term *nefesh* designates man in his entirety, see Drd. Petru Semen, „**Învățătura** despre suflet **în** cărțile *Vechiului Testament*” („The teaching about the body in the Old Testament”), in *Studii Teologice*, nr. 9 – 10 (1977), p. 674.

¹¹ Olivier Clément, *Trupul morții și al slavei. Scurtă introducere la o teopoetică a trupului*, (The Body of death and of glory. Short introduction to theopoetics of the body) Ed. Christiana, București, 1996, p. 8.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 98, 99.

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Claude Tresmontant states that the Hebrew people created a culture whose noetic structure is „entirely original”, „the originality of this thinking has been taken into account only in a small measure in our Western world dominated by Greek and Latin culture”¹³. The removal from the Scriptural spirit led to the formation in the West, of an anthropologic mentality of Platonic and Neoplatonic type, except the Aristotelians of the 13th century. The deviation is explained by the fact that when Old Testament books were translated from the Hebrew into Greek, the word *nephesh*, in Hebrew designating the principle of life, has as equivalent in Greek the word *psyche* and in Latin *anima*. „The great illusion and the big mistake, says the author, is to imagine that one can pass from one universe of thought to another simply through an established linguistic correspondence between terms that in reality have not the same meaning. Because the Hebrew Bible has a term that has been translated into Greek *psyche* and into Latin *anima*, we thought that we could think about what the Bible calls the soul the same as what Plato, Plotinus, and Descartes call soul (*psyche*). This was the mistake. Under the term identity, in translations, the differences in content are radical”¹⁴. Indeed, while the Orphic, Platonic and Neoplatonic traditions, the soul is divine and eternal by right, preexisting to „body” in which it „falls” as if in a prison and seeks to be released as quickly as possible to return to origin, in the Hebrew tradition the soul is ontologically a substance other than God who created it, not preexisting to a „body”. The idea that the existence of the soul in the „body” would be a calamity, the consequence of a mistake, is foreign to Jewish tradition. Therefore, the Jew has no idea of a substantial duality between *soul*, on the one hand, and *body* on the other. In Hebrew there is no word to describe the body in the sense that Plato or Descartes speak of the body, a substance distinct from the soul. There is a word to describe the corpse, which is no longer a body. The confusion between corpse and body is a Cartesian error¹⁵.

Another confusion has been caused by the translation of the Hebrew word *basar* by *sarx*, in Latin *caro*, in French *chair*. „While for the Frenchman of the 20th century, *chair* means the body, especially as a source of passions, *basar* covers the human entirety, the living man, what in French *ame* and *corps* are together”¹⁶.

A more convincing evidence that, in the Hebrew tradition, man is understood as an inseparable psychosomatic unit is that functions or conditions which, in a dualistic anthropology are attributes of *body*, in Hebrew, they are attributes

¹³ Claude Tresmontant, *Le problème de l'âme*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1971, reviewed by C. Iana in “Ortodoxia”, nr. 2 (1971), p. 233.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p.234

¹⁶ C. Trestmontant, *op. cit.*, p. 62, apud C. Iana, *op. cit.*, p. 234 sq.

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of *nephesh*'s: „He fills the hungry soul”(Ps. 106(107): 9), „Like cold water to a weary soul”(Prov.25, 25). „*Nephesh* and *basar* are not two things, two different substances, like *psyche* and *soma* from Plato, but two words to describe human being as *psyche* and in terms of his psycho-biological organization”¹⁷.

Saint John the Evangelist says: „The Word became flesh (*sarx -kos*; lat. *caro, -nis*)”(Jn1:4) not *soma*, to show clearly that the Logos assumed the whole human nature (soul - body), according to the Jewish conception of man. The mission of the Fathers of the 1st, 3rd, and 4th Ecumenical Council was also to save the content of the biblical thinking, seeking the correct terms in Greek: *sarkothenta, enanthropesanta* etc. Therefore the Fathers avoided the Platonic and Neo-Platonic terminology, which unfortunately seems to be present in the Western mentality.

It is significant that, unlike the French, which took over from Latin *corpus* and *anima*, and their different meanings, Romanian language has associated them. To designate the psychosomatic reality, in Romanian language there is *corp*, while *trup* refers to the human body where the heart (*inima* from lat. *anima*) is beating. The body corresponds to the Hebrew *basar*, expressing *corpus* and *anima* together. The word *suflet* (*soul*) comes from the Latin *sufflare*¹⁸, a verb suggesting movement, life.

Returning to the Cyrillian teaching, the Alexandrian Father states that in the Holy Scripture the word *sarx* is used to designate the entire human reality, as is evident from the comments to *John1:14*: „He has now entered openly upon the declaration of the Incarnation. For he plainly sets forth that the Only-Begotten became and is called son of man; for this and nothing else does his saying that *The Word was made Flesh* signify: for it is as though he said more nakedly *The Word was made Man*. And in thus speaking he introduces again to us nothing strange or unusual, seeing that the Divine Scripture oftentimes calls the whole creature by the name of flesh alone, as in the prophet Joel: «*I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh*» (Joel 2:28). And we do not suppose that the Prophet says that the Divine Spirit should be bestowed upon human flesh soulless and alone, for this would be by no means free from absurdity, but comprehending the whole by the part, he

¹⁷ “The same holistic biblical view can be found in Syriac tradition. In fact, « one of the most striking characteristics of ancient Syriac Christianity in all its forms is its intense physicality. The body provided a central focus of concern for religion in this region, and the primary instrument of religious expression. Throughout the spirituality of the Syrian Orient one finds a heightened awareness of sensory experience, of physical expression, of bodily knowing, of embodiment as the medium in which and by which the encounter between human and divine takes place.»”, S.A. Harvey, „Embodiment in Time and Eternity: A Syriac Perspective”, in *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 43:2 (1999), p.105-130; see also our art., „The human body *masterpiece of the Triune God*” in *European Journal of Science and Theology*, February 2013, Vol.9, Supplement 1, p.51-60

¹⁸ C. Iana., *op.cit.*, p. 234.

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names man from the flesh (...) But he says not that the Word came into flesh, but that It *was made* flesh, that you may not suppose that He came to it as in the case of the Prophets or other of the Saints by participation, but did *Himself become actual flesh, that is man*¹⁹.

Herman Diepen²⁰ showed that Saint Cyril had a positive understanding of the body (*sarx*). In the commentary on the *Gospel of Saint John*, Saint Cyril used many biblical arguments to condemn through 24 arguments the idea that the body was a penalty or a prison of the soul²¹. Saint Cyril rejected any dualistic understanding of human constitution. The Incarnation and the Resurrection of Christ show that the human body is an integral part to man. To consider that the human person is a soul imprisoned in a body would deny or would make it impossible to understand what Jesus Christ did for mankind when he became incarnate and when He resurrected and ascended bodily into heaven. Herman Diepen also showed that even in the early writings, Saint Cyril did not use the word *sarx* to refer to the inanimate body²².

In the *Festal letter* of 420, Saint Cyril stated: „According to the Holy Evangelist, the Word became flesh (*sarx*), not by turning into flesh (*ouk eis sarka metabeblemenos*), he actually did not say it, but instead of talking about human being in its entirety (*anti de tou anthropos holokliros*), he said body (*sarka*)”²³.

In the commentary to the fourth *Gospel* (9:27), Saint Cyril states very clearly: „Because the Son is one and only one, both before receiving the body and after He came in the flesh; and by body we understand the human being in its entirety, i.e. soul and body²⁴”.

2. Incarnation – a unique theophany

In his doctoral thesis, written under the guidance of the renowned theologian Lars Thunberg, Ezra Gebremedhin underlines the tension between two types of Christology: the Alexandrian prevailing understanding the Incarnation as union (*henosis*) of the divine nature with the human one, and the Antiochian - the prevailing understanding of Incarnation as *inhabitare* (in-housing, *enoikesis*) of the

¹⁹ Saint Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on John*, translation available at <https://archive.org/stream/CyriLOfAlexandriaCommentaryOnJohnVolume1Tr.P.E.Pusey1874/cyriLO#page/n163/mode/2up>

²⁰ Herman Diepen, *Aux origines de l'anthropologie de saint Cyrille d'Alexandrie*, Paris, 1957

²¹ Lawrence J. Welch, *Christology and Eucharist in the early thought of Cyril of Alexandria*, International Scholars Publications, San Francisco, 1994, p. 45

²² Herman Diepen, *op.cit.*, p.37

²³ Cyrille d'Alexandrie, *Lettres Festales* (VII-XI), tome II, SC 393, p.99-100, (PG 73, 569)

²⁴ *In Joannem*, v.2, 200, at Lawrence J. Welch, *op.cit.*, p.46

divine nature in the human flesh, or a link (*synapheia*) between the human and the divine nature of Christ²⁵.

For Saint Cyril, the Incarnation is a theophany that cannot be compared with the foreshadowing and the shadows of the time of the Law, the body of Christ being united with God in an unprecedented way²⁶. Referring to *Carmen Christi* in *Philippians 2*, Saint Cyril points out that His coming in the flesh does not mean separation from His divine nature²⁷, yet His theophany (except the Transfigura-

²⁵ Ezra Gebremedhin, *Life-Giving Blessing. An Inquiry into the Eucharistic Doctrine of Cyril of Alexandria*, Uppsala, 1977, p.34. Saint Cyril explains why Saint John and, generally, the Fathers prior to him, used «Λόγος-σάρξ»: «Thus, man is a rational being, but he is composed also of soul and this corrupted earthly body. But since it was created by God and brought into existence, not having from its own nature purity and eternity (because these exist *per se* only in God), it was sealed with the spirit of life, thus gaining through its relationship with God, the Good beyond nature: and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul (Genesis 2:7). But he was punished for the sin of disobedience, rightly hearing: *for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return* (Genesis 3:19), man was divested of grace; for the breath of life was banished from the earthly body, that is the Spirit of Who says: *I am the Life* (Jn 14: 6). And the being fell dead, but only with body, the soul preserving immortality, because it was only to the body that was said: *dust you are and to dust you will return*. Therefore, that part of ours, which was jeopardized particularly had to be saved quickly and by the union again with the Life by nature, be returned to incorruptibility. That which had suffered had to acquire the destruction of evil. The sentence given had to cease to be valid, as the body which had fallen before, was united unspeakably with Word, Who gives life to all. This, therefore, had to become His body and thus to partake of His immortality. Because it would be totally absurd that the fire may transfer into material bodies its energy, which it has by nature and can be perceived with the senses and transform, to some extent, into what it is those that it comes into contact, and we do not believe that the Logos of God, who is above all, work in the flesh, planting them His own proper good, that is life. I suppose because of these reasons the Holy Evangelist, highlighting the living being especially by the one who suffered more, said that God's Word was made flesh, so as to see at once wound and medicine, the ill and the doctor, the fallen and the One Who is beyond death, the lifeless and the Giver of Life. But he does not say that the Word came in the flesh, but that was made flesh, lest you think He came and stayed so as into the prophets or into other saints, i.e. through relationship, but that He Himself really made flesh i.e. man; for this is what we were discussing earlier. For this, He is God in the flesh by nature and body but, although His body is His own, He is thought of as something other than flesh, in the flesh and being worshiped with the body, according to what was said by the prophet Isaiah: "those tall Sabeans— they will come over to you and will be yours; they will trudge behind you, coming over to you in chains. They will bow down before you and plead with you, saying, 'Surely God is with you, and there is no other; there is no other god.'" (Isaiah 45, 14) Behold, I say that in him there is God, the Word and body undivided. I also assert that there is no God but Him, uniting with the Word which He acts like His own, i.e. the temple he took from the Virgin. Because Christ is One from both", St. Cyril, Comenatry to John, 1, 9, PG, 73, 160A-161A, quoted in Ddr. Viorel Veselin, *Antropologia Sfântului Chiril din Alexandria (St. Cyril of Alexandria's Anthropology)*, mms. PhD thesis, Bucureşti, 2012, p.229

²⁶ Ezra Gebremedhin, *op.cit.*, p.35

²⁷ *Ep.45, ACO1.16 153 1.4*

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tion, when the three were deemed worthy to see Him as He was eternally - *our note*) did not mean appearance in the fullness of His divine power and glory, in a blinding bright light²⁸.

Incarnation is a theophany in which two distinct natures, which are not equal²⁹ arrived in a union called „after hypostasis” (*henosis kat' hypostasin*), „natural or physical” (*henosis physike*)³⁰, „true” (*henosis alethine*)³¹. This theophany implies the unity of the Person resulting from the duality of the components³². Therefore, Saint Cyril often refers to Christ as „One of both” (*Eis ex amphoin*)³³. He often used expressions such as „His own body” (*idion somata*), „his own flesh” (*idia sarx*), „his own nature” (*idia physis*)³⁴ and even „own flesh of God” therefore „divine”³⁵.

“Regaining the gracious status of «son» of God by the fallen man is the noble and divine purpose of the Incarnation: «The body became proper to the One who, even then (from the Incarnation, *our note*) could suppress the fault and very legitimate to shake off the tyranny of sin (τὴν τῆς ἀμαρτίας ἀπεσείσατο τυραννίδα); it (the body) became rich in its own nature, thanks to the Word, which is united with him (ἐνωθέντος Λόγου) in an ineffable and indescribable way: it became holy, life-giving, full of divine grace (ἅγιόν τε καὶ ζωοποιόν ἐστι καὶ τῆς θεοπρεποῦς ἐνεργείας ἔμπλεων). And in Christ, as in our ripening (ἐν ἀπαρχῇ), we are also transformed (μετεστοιχειώμεθα) to become better than corruption (κρείττονες τῆς φθορᾶς)³⁶ and sin (καὶ τῆς ἀμαρτίας)”³⁷.

²⁸ *Is* 51, PG 70, 1169-1172

²⁹ *Ep* 40, ACO1.14 26 1.1. Saint Cyril wrote about the natures as being *anomoia pragmata*, being brought in an indissoluble union (*henosis adiaspastos*), Ezra Gebremedhin, *op.cit.*, p.44

³⁰ *Apol Thdt.*, ACO1.1.6 118 1.24

³¹ *Lc.* 14, PG72, 484B

³² Ezra Gebremedhin, *op.cit.*, p.36

³³ *Ador. In Sp.et Verit.*, PG 68 345C

³⁴ Ezra Gebremedhin, *op.cit.*, p.37

³⁵ *Ep* 45, ACO1.1.6 156 1.3

³⁶ Donning fully incorruptibility (ἀφθαρσία) is the capital prerequisite for the joy of sons in the Son. Everlasting joy presupposes the presence of the beloved and the lover. That which is perishable, having no consistency, can be neither source of joy, and is no shelter. Idem, *Coment. to Isaia*, 4, 3, PG, 70, 977A; Idem, *Coment. to Hebr.*, PG, 74, 969A. see also: St. Basil the Great, *on the Holy Spirit*, 35, PG, 32, 128C.

³⁷ St Cyril, Ὅτι εἶς ὁ Χριστός, SC, vol. 97, p. 330, 723a-b; PG, 75, 1269B-C. „Regarding the humanizing of the Word, he distinguishes two terms, the “One-Begotten” («ὁ Μονογενής») and «the First Born» («ὁ Πρωτότοκος»), as Truly Man; between the Son, as unique Hyposthesis, before the Incarnation, as being born eternally from the Father, after the Incarnation. The same Hyposthesis Who was born in time, according to the human law, from the Virgin Mary, as ripe or second root to humanity: «καίτοι γὰρ μονογενὴς ὑπάρων θεϊκῶς, ἐπειδὴ γέγονεν ἡμῶν ἀδελφός, ταύτη τοι καὶ ὀνομάσθη πρωτότοκος, ἵνα ὡς ἀπαρχὴ τῆς τῶν ἀνθρώπων υἰοθεσίας γεγωνός, καὶ ἡμᾶς υἰοὺς Θεοῦ

Lars Thunberg stated that: „Saint Maximus affirms about Saint Cyril that he never intended to abolish the distinction of natures after their union (as Apollinaris, Eutyches and Severus wanted to and which Saint Cyril very clearly pointed out). Saint Maximus shows that in numerous passages, Saint Cyril explains that the intention was not to prevent someone talking about the two natures after their union, neither did he want to abolish their union”³⁸. At the same time, Saint Maximus, as Saint Cyril, also says, states that the Incarnation is the union of Logos and flesh, which is animated by a „soul intelligible and rational” (νοερά τε καὶ λογικὴ ψυχὴ). He also states that, after the union, the expression „two natures” is used to indicate the difference between natures. But their union is so great that they cannot be seen as, separately, two. The unmistakable unity of natures is so great that they cannot be separated, even distinguished in reality, but by thinking³⁹.

3. The Eucharist – as the presence of life-giving power and work of the Logos united with the body

The terms „vivified” and „life” are used in almost all contexts in which they speak about the Eucharist. Thus we find expressions „life-giving body” (*sarx zoopoios*), or „body (the flesh) of life” (*he sarx tes Zoes*), but the first expression is most commonly used. Saint Cyril uses *zoopoion soma* or *soma zoes*. *Soma* and *sarx* are used interchangeably. The Eucharist is also called „life-giving blessing” (*euloghia zoopoios*); „Life-giving sacrifice” (*thysia zoopoios*); „Bringing of life-giving gifts” (*zoopoios dorophoria*); and „life-giving seed” (*sperma zoopoios*)⁴⁰.

Among the Alexandrian theologians, Saint Cyril is the one using most frequently the concept of life (*zoe*) with the meaning of divine and supernatural, and the verb *zoopoierein* in relation to the doctrine of the Incarnation. For Saint Cyril, Christ is the Giver of life, not only in the physical sense, naturally, but also in the sense of the supernatural. Man shares this life through Baptism and the Eucharist in particular, that conferres incorruptibility on mortal man⁴¹.

The Holy Eucharist is the Body and Blood (cf. 1Cor 10 and 11) of Him Who is „Life by nature” (cf. Jn 5), having in itself all the power of the Word, which is

γενέσθαι παρασκευάση. Ὡστε τὸ πρωτότοκον, περὶ τῆς οἰκονομίας εἰρῆσθαι νόμιζε. Κατὰ γὰρ τὴν θεότητα, τὸ μονογενῆς”. Idem, *Com.at Luck*, PG, 72, 485C-D, Ddr. Viorel Veselin, op.cit., p.225

³⁸ Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, p. 56.

³⁹ St. Maximus the Confessor *Scrieri și Epistole hristologice și duhovnicești*, translated by Pr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, în PSB 89, Edit. IBMBOR, București, 1990, p. 75-76. A se vedea și: Lars Thunberg, op.cit., p. 57-58.

⁴⁰ Ezra Gebremedhin, op.cit., p.54

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p.53

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joined to it and is full of His work (*energeia*) through which all are brought to life and kept in existence⁴².

For Saint Cyril, an indissoluble union exists between the Logos and His Body, which has consequences of the utmost importance to us:

„So Christ gave for all His life, His own body, and through Him, He makes life to dwell in us. And through Him, He dwelt in us life again, but how did this, I will say according to my powers. Because the life-giving Word of God dwelt in the body/flesh, He made it His own good, that is life, and showed it to be, by adding, life - giving, according to the ineffable reason of His union with the body/flesh, as He is Himself by nature. Therefore the body of Christ makes those who share Him alive. For when He comes to mortal ones, He banishes death and removes corruption, having in Himself the power to perfectly abolish corruption”⁴³. In note 724 to this passage, Father Stăniloae explains:

„The Son of God extended in His body, by extension, the life-giving power that He has by nature. It was a change of the body into a mean of the of divine life-creating powers, but not a change by nature, but by the addition of power that He gave to the body. Therefore, His body makes the communicants alive, for they share the divine power of the Son of God extended in His body. For He Himself, who is the bearer of divine Life, or of Life through Himself, is in the body that we share. Thus Saint Cyril made a connection between the death of Christ on the cross, where He defeated death in His body, and our sharing in the Eucharist of His body in which He conquered death through resurrection, giving us also life by sharing his body that defeated death by His death. The bread that came down from heaven, or He Himself who took flesh, is given to us by His body in which He conquered death by death”.

In the exegesis to *John 6:57*, Saint Cyril reiterates the teaching that through the Incarnation, the Son assumed the human nature as a whole, the body is called „the temple of (His) nature”, which He filled with life:

„When then the Son saith that He was sent, He signifieth His Incarnation, and nothing else. And when we speak of His Incarnation, we mean that He was made Man complete. As then the Father (He saith) hath made Me Man, and since I God the Word, was begotten Life of That which is by Nature Life, and, made Man, have filled My Temple, that is, My Body, with Mine own Nature; in like manner shall he also who eateth My Flesh live because of Me. For I took mortal Flesh: but, having dwelt in it, being by Nature Life, because I am of the Living Father, I re-elemented it

⁴² *Ibidem*, p.50

⁴³ Sfântul Chiril al Alexandriei, *Comentariu la Evanghelia Sfântului Ioan*, PSB 41,p.400-401 http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/cyrl_on_john_04_book4.htm#C2

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wholly into Mine Own Life, I have not been overcome of the corruption of the flesh but have rather overcome it, as God. As then (for again I will say it shrinking not for profits sake) although I was made (He says) Flesh (for this the being sent meaneth), I live again because of the Living Father, that is, retaining in Myself the natural excellence of Him That begat Me, so he too who, by the participation of My Flesh, receiveth Me in himself shall live, wholly trans-elemented entire into Me, Who am able to give life, because I am (as it were) of life-giving Root, that is God the Father"⁴⁴.

We also present here Father Stăniloae's explanatory note (755) where he points out the close relationship between body and person:

„The Son of God, having life by nature, as one born of the Father and consubstantial with Him, filling also His body with this life, He communicates it to those who open themselves by their faith and by sharing of His body. For he that received his body, he receives Himself and He Himself gives His life through His body. The body He assumed is so totally His own that it is of His Person, and one who receives His body receives in himself Him as Person, for He says: «he who eats Me». In general, my relationship in the body with the Body of Christ, is my relationship as person with Him as Person, i.e. with God - the Word, in the same way as my relationship with the body of a human person, is my relationship as person with that person. But no one can say that the relationship of somebody with me, which I shared Christ, is a direct relationship with Christ as Person exclusively, even if through me, he/she enters also in a certain relationship with Christ. For I have Christ by sharing (Holy Communion), for Christ's human nature is filled with the exclusive Person of God the Word, or it's His exclusively, no another person's”.

4. The changing of the Gifts in the teaching of Saint Cyril of Alexandria

There are several opinions regarding Saint Cyril's teaching about how are the Body and Blood of Christ present in the Holy Eucharist⁴⁵. Among those who argue that the Alexandrian Father would teach about a dynamic, spiritual presence of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist, there are: G.E. Steitz, A. Harnack, F. Loofs and E. Michaud. Other theologians such as F.C. Baur, G. Thomasius, P. Batiffol, J. Mahe and A. Struckmann claim that Saint Cyril teaches the substantial, corporal presence of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist, bringing forth clear arguments in this regard.

Saint Cyril insists that after the Incarnation, the Logos and His Body are inseparable. Christ is never so spiritualized that He ceases to be somatic. The terms

⁴⁴ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary to the Gospel of St. John*, <http://www.ecatholic2000.com/cyrl2/untitled-38.shtml>

⁴⁵ Ezra Gebremedhin, *op.cit.*, p.75

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pneumatike and *mystike* that Saint Cyril uses to describe the consecrated bread and wine in the Holy Liturgy should be understood in a sense that encompasses both ways: somatic and pneumatic through which ascended Christ is present in the Eucharist⁴⁶. Therefore, Saint Cyril’s teaching on the Eucharist is particularly important in terms of understanding the historical immanence of Christ risen and ascended, the Cyrillian conception about the consecration of Gifts and the epiclesis being relevant in this regard⁴⁷. Johannes Betz noted that Saint Cyril is the first theologian in Egypt that has a concept of changing of the Gifts (*Wandlungbegriff*)⁴⁸. Saint Cyril refers to Jesus Christ, not to the pre-incarnated Logos, when speaking about the changing (consecration) of the Eucharistic Gifts.

In an exegesis to *Matthew 26:27*, the Alexandrian Father affirms that in the same way as the Last Supper, so we prepare the Eucharistic gifts: „We ask (*deometha*) with sincerity that they are changed (remodeled - *plasthenai*) in a spiritual blessing, that by participating in them we become holy in body and soul. But He said very clearly, « This is my body » and that « This is My Blood », so you cannot assume that those we see are a type, but rather in an ineffable way, are turned (*metapoiesthai*) by God in the Body and Blood of Christ truly bestowed. By sharing them, we receive in ourselves the power of life-giving, sanctifying Christ (...), because God gives the power of life into gifts, lowering Himself to our weakness, and He exchanges (*methistanai*) their work (*energeia*)”⁴⁹.

We find the same teaching in the comment to *Luke 22:17-22* that says, „But He is also within us in another way by means of our partaking in the oblation of bloodless offerings (...). It was titling therefore for Him to be in us both divinely by the Holy Spirit, and also, so to speak, to be mingled with our bodies by His holy flesh and precious blood: which things also we possess as a life-giving Eucharist, in the form of bread and wine (...). For lest we should be terrified by seeing (actual) flesh and blood placed upon the holy tables of our churches, God, humbling Himself to our infirmities, infuses into the things set before us the power of life, and changes them into the efficacy of His flesh, that we may have them for a life-giving participation, and that the body of (Him Who is the) Life may be found in us as a life-producing seed.. And do not doubt that this is true, since Himself plainly says, « This is my body » and that « This is My Blood »”⁵⁰.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p.84

⁴⁷ Lawrence J. Welch, *op.cit.*, p.125

⁴⁸ Johannes Betz, *Die Eucharistie in der Zeit der griechischen Vater*; Herder, Freiburg, 1955, p.313, la Lawrence J. Welch, *op.cit.*, p.125

⁴⁹ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary to the Gospel of St Matthew*, 26:27, P.G. 72, 512CD

⁵⁰ Idem, the Syrian version translated by R. Payne Smith in, *Commentary on the Gospel according to Luke*, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 568-569; there are only fragments of this comentary in

As noted by Lawrence J. Welch in both passages quoted, Saint Cyril only affirms the changing of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. He does not attempt to explain in any writing how this change occurs. In his commentary to *John* 6:53, he tells us that we should not ask „how” the turning occurs because Christ „tells them not as yet, for He knew that they were in darkness, and could never avail to understand the ineffable: but how great good will result from the eating He shews to their profit, that haply inciting them to a desire of living in greater preparation for unfading pleasures, He may teach them faith”⁵¹. It is important to understand that the work and words of the Saviour are a model for our prayer and that our High Priest is Christ before God the Father, and the Eucharistic sacrifice transforms the old cult of the law into a new one⁵².

5. „Sharers of the divine nature” (*theias koinonoi physeos, divinae naturae consortes*) (2 Pt1:4)

The Son of God shared our flesh and blood, entered in supremely personal relationship with man, enhypostasized human nature, so that we share His Body and Blood and we enter into relationship with Him. He made Himself partaker of human nature for us to become „sharers of the divine nature”(2 Pt.1:4); just as He assumed *morphe doulou* (existential condition of servant) for man to receive *morphe Theou* (cf. *Carmen Christi* in *Philippians* 2) and became *sarkophoros* that we can become *pneumatophoroi*⁵³.

Daniel A. Keating in a remarkable paper argues that Saint Cyril quotes or refers to 2 Pt1:4 „sharers of the divine nature (*theias koinonoi physeos, divinae naturae consortes*) more frequently than any Christian writer before him⁵⁴. Only in comments to the New Testament of Saint Cyril, D.A. Keating identified 41 references to 2Pt1:4⁵⁵. Origen is the first Church writer who referred to 2 Pt1:4. Saint

Greek. also available here: http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/cyrl_on_luke_13_sermons_135_145.htm

⁵¹ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Comentary to St John's Gospel*, http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/cyrl_on_john_04_book4.htm#C2

⁵² Lawrence J. Welch, *op.cit.*, p. 126.

⁵³ St. Athanasius the Great *De incarnatione et contra Arianos*, 8, P.G. 26,996 C

⁵⁴ Daniel A.Keating, *The Appropriation of Divine Life in Cyril of Alexandria*, Oxford University Press, 2004, p.144; see also: Balas, David L. *Metousia Theou: Man's Participation in God's Perfections according to Saint Gregory of Nyssa*. Rome: Pontificium Institutum Sancti Anselmi, 1966; Balthasar, Hans Urs von. *Presence and Thought: An Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995.

⁵⁵ *In Matt. 11: 28* (Reuss, 201); *20: 1–16* (2×) (Reuss, 230); *In Luc. 2: 25–35* (Smith, 61); *3: 16* (Reuss, 61; Smith, 75); *3: 21–2* (Reuss, 63; Smith, 80); *4: 1–2* (Reuss, 64; Smith, 86); *4: 18* (Reuss, 236; Smith, 93); *5: 24* (Reuss, 248; Smith, 112); *7: 24–8* (Reuss, 76–7; Smith, 164); *22: 7–16*

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Athanasius the Great, also cites six times the text from *2Peter*, but according to D.A. Keating, there was no reference in the writings to the Cappadocian Saints⁵⁶. However it is likely that Saint Gregory of Nyssa was referring to the *2Pt1:4* in *De Professione Christiana*: „In other words, if we want to explain what Christianity after the appointment is given, then we will say that it's *imitation of divine nature* (*theias physeos mimesis, imitationem divinae naturae*). (...) If man was the old likeness to God, then we will not give another definition, foreign to his nature, but we say that being a Christian means to follow or imitate the divine nature (*mimesin theias physeos, imitationem divinae naturae*)⁵⁷.

References to *2Pt1:4* are also in the works of Saints Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose of Milan, Hilary of Poitiers, Didymus of Alexandria, Jerome, Procopius of Gaza, etc⁵⁸.

Here are two texts where Saint Cyril refers to Saint Peter's text in his analysis:

„The Only-Begotten partook of blood and flesh, i.e He became man, being Life by nature and born of Life by nature, that is of God the Father, that joining with corruptible body, according to the reason of its nature, in a mysterious and unspeakable way, and as only He knew how to bring him back to its own life and to show it partaker, by Himself, of God the Father. For He is the Mediator between God and man, as it is written (1 Tim 2:5): of God the Father naturally as God and

(Reuss, 207; Smith, 565); *In Jo. 1: 13* (Pusey, i. 136); *3: 5* (Pusey, i. 219); *6: 35* (Pusey, i. 476); *6: 37* (Pusey, i. 479); *7: 24* (Pusey, i. 639); *10: 14–15* (Pusey, ii. 232); *14: 4* (Pusey, ii. 406); *14: 16–17* (Pusey, ii. 469); *14: 20* (4×) (Pusey, ii. 484, 486, 487, 488); *15: 1* (Pusey, ii. 534); *16: 7* (Pusey, ii. 620); *16: 12–13* (Pusey, ii. 626); *16: 15* (Pusey, i. 639); *17: 18–19* (3×) (Pusey, ii. 720, 722); *17: 20–1* (2×) (Pusey, ii. 734, 737); *17: 22–3* (2×) (Pusey, iii. 2, 3); *20: 22–3* (Pusey, iii. 133); *In Acta 13: 25* (PG 74, 768b); *In Rom. 8: 8–9* (Pusey, iii. 214); *In 1 Cor. 6: 15* (Pusey, iii. 264); *7: 21* (Pusey, iii. 273); *15: 20* (Pusey, iii. 304); *In Heb. 10: 29* (Pusey, iii. 410)

⁵⁶ Norman Russell, „Partakers of the Divine Nature (2 Pt.1:4) in the Byzantine Tradition”, in J. Chrysostomides (ed.), *Kathegetria: Essays Presented to Joan Hussey* (Camberley: Porphyrogenitus, 1988), 57. Both Russell, „The Concept of Deification”, 298, and A. L. Kolp, „Partakers of the Divine Nature: The Use of II Pet.1:4 by Athanasius”, *SP* 17 (1982), 1018, identify Origen as the first Christian author to cite 2 Pt.1:4 (see *De princ.* iv. 4. 4; *Hom. in Lev.* iv. 4; *Comm. Rom.* iv. 9). Russell, „The Concept of Deification”, also identifies six citations of 2 Pt 1:4 in Athanasius (*C. Ar.* i. 16; iii. 40; *Ep. Serap.* 1. 23, 24; *Vit. Ant.* 74; *Ep. Adolph.* 4), but finds no citation of it in the writings of the Cappadocians.

⁵⁷ *De Professione Christiana*: PG 46, 244 c și d, trad.rm. în *PSB* 30, *Sfântul Grigorie de Nyssa. Scrieri. Partea a două. Scrieri exegetice, dogmatico-polemice și morale, & Despre înțelesul numelui de creștin, către Armoniu*, p.439-440. Text quoted also by Pope Benedict: „He found this supreme good in Christianity, thanks to which *the imitation of the divine nature* is possible (*De Professione Christiana*: PG 46, 244c)” (http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/audiences/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20070829_en.html).

⁵⁸ See also *Biblia patristica : index des citations et allusions bibliques dans la littérature patristique*, Paris : *Editions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1975-<1995*

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born of Him, of the people, as man, and having in Himself the Father, and being Himself in the Father. (...) For „*the Word became flesh (sarx)*” according to John (Jn1:14). *For we are made sharers of Him and we have Him in us by the Spirit. Therefore we have become sharers of His nature and we are sons, thus having also in us the Father, through the Son* (our emphasis)⁵⁹.

„Nicodemus could not understand properly what it means to be born anew, therefore Jesus portrays for his a more unveiled secret knowledge through clearer teachings. Our Lord Jesus Christ called the birth from above, the new birth from the Spirit, portraying the Spirit as being above all and through Him making us sharers of the divine nature, making it bring forth in us the One that comes existentially of it and, through Him and in Him, retyping in us the archetypal image of beauty and renewing us for the sonship”⁶⁰.

In the note (291) to this last text quoted, Father Stăniloae explains: „To share in the divine nature does not mean to have the divine nature. For having the divine nature is to have it by himself, by birth or by procession from the Father. To share it means having only the powers from it. In this sense, the human being bears fruits in the Spirit, that means that the Spirit produces the Spirit’s fruits in man, or that the powers of the Spirit, united with human powers, make them to bear not created fruits, but fruits that have also godly qualities in them. Through this man is like God effectively, as it was in the beginning, showing the divine beauty in himself, or the status of son of God by grace. In this way he was made in resemblance to the Son of God, through union with Him. This quality was brought again for man by the Son, through Incarnation, in that He first impressed in Himself as man the quality of Son of God, as to convey also to them that are united by faith with him”.

The phrase „*sharers of the divine nature*” (*theias koinonia physeos, divinae naturae consortes*) is *hapax legomenon* in the Holy Scripture and has often been incorrectly said that this text would be nothing but a Hellenistic influence and that it would not have another echo in the New Testament. For us it is an obvious basis of the doctrine of deification (*theosis*) of our participation in the divine, therefore we are very interested in a full and correct exegesis, therefore we offer here some introductory elements⁶¹.

⁵⁹ Sfântul Chiril al Alexandriei, *Comentariu la Evanghelia Sfântului Ioan*, PSB 41, p. 892.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 170.

⁶¹ Here we present synthetically the chapter „*Părtaşi ai dumnezeieştii firii*” (*theias koinonoi physeos, divinae naturae consortes*) (2Pt.1,4) – o introducere”, from *Hermeneutica Ortodoxă ca dezvoltare teologică în Tradiţie* (*Orthodox Hermeneutics as a theological development in Tradition*), Sibiu, 2013, p.283-320; for a very good analysis of the term *participation* in philosophy, in the New Testament and in several Fathers, see „Partakers of the Divine Nature” in: Daniel A.Keating, *op.cit.*p.144-190

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In the context of the threat to the teachings denying Christ's return, thus promoting licentiousness, the author of *2 Peter* feels indebted, inspired by the Spirit of God, to reformulate in new terms the understanding of the early Church regarding the configuration of authentic life lived in expectation of the Parousia. Impressed by the attention in the culture of the time to the relationship of humanity with the divine, the author emphasizes the purpose of Christian living in the world using a unique expression in biblical literature: „*hina genesthe theias koinonoi physeos*”⁶². The phrase „*sharers of the divine nature*” is part of a set of ideas, which refers to the progressive assumption of moral perfection and immortality attributes of Christ by knowing Christ as Lord and Saviour. Participation in the divine nature of he who believes in Christ is opposed to mundane desires that bring corruption. The letter specifies that escape from the mortal nature is inseparable from the escape of sinful desire, attainable only through life in Christ.

We know that in Hebrew there is not an equivalent term for the Greek *physis* and the words close in meaning are used in connection with people and things, and rarely with God. In fact, *physis* does not appear in the *Septuagint (LXX)*, but in apocryphal, where it is never used in combination with God⁶³. Far from speaking of God using abstract expressions, the Old Testament is replete with anthropomorphic expressions by showing how God is alive and present directly in the history of Israel with which He has a covenant. The antinomy between the Oneness of God and His revelation which is full of grace, between hidden transcendence and overwhelming immanence represent the two poles that are found in the Old Testament understanding of God. The sacred tetragrammaton referred only in the *Exodus 3:14-15*, where it seems to use a pun on the verb „to become”, which suggests that the identity of God will be revealed during his intervention on behalf of historic Israel. So as not to impede the sacrosanct name, the word „Lord” (*Ynda, Adonai*) is used, then translated into Greek by *Kyrios*. In the *Septuagint*, the word *Kyrios* became the name of God, and this use is reflected in *2 Peter*, especially 2,9,11 and 3:8-15. In *2 Peter*, *Kyrios* is taken and it is used as a title for Christ (3, 2, 8-10; 15, 18) which leads to the conclusion that Christ is truly God⁶⁴.

Even if the Old Testament does not speak of the divine nature itself, the numerous names and epithets highlight the teaching about the divine nature as transcendent, yet personal. In fact, this multitude of name expresses the degree to which the God of Israel was understood as the one that Israel personally knew in a long period of familiarity. God's nature is to act in history, especially as Saviour and Judge of

⁶² James M. Starr, *Sharers in Divine Nature. 2 Peter 1,4. Its Hellenistic Context*, Coniectanea Biblica, New Testament Series 33, Almqvist & Wiksell International, Stockholm, 2000, p.1

⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 67.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 68.

Israel based on existing partnership in the covenant. God's work in history shows the divine attributes of justice and holiness in particular. As to man's participation in the divine nature, the Old Testament seems to exclude this possibility. The manner to be near God is not through self-transformation - autonomously and called by the wicked - in the likeness of God: "*For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*" (Genesis 3:5), but rather through positioning oneself in a correct relationship towards God, obeying the existing covenant: "*He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God*" (Micah 6:8). However, the purpose of human life is theocentric, it is to achieve communion with God through knowing Him and walking in His ways. 2 Peter is written in natural continuity with the Old Testament theology⁶⁵.

James M. Starr notes that in 2 Peter, the author states that the ones who had escaped damage can be made sharers of the divine nature, not of God's Being. We could not participate in the divine essence, because we are humans created by God⁶⁶. The author borrowed the expression *divine nature* from the Greek philosophical vocabulary, but gave it a Christian meaning. If philosophers say that man escaped from corruption can become like gods by his own power and based on kinship with them, Saint Peter says that we can achieve this due to God's promise. This does not seem as a humanistic perspective, but one of grace. Through the promises of God we partake of God's holiness, the communion with the Holy Trinity (1Jn1:3). By virtues, the believer participates in the nature of God, putting on „*the new man, that after God, built in justice and holiness of truth*" (Ephes4:24, cf. Col3:10; Hebr12:10 and 1Jn 3:2)⁶⁷.

In a broad and thorough analysis, from which we present synthetically, Al Wolters⁶⁸ states, *ab initio*, that the text from 2Peter1:4 was understood very differently in the history of biblical interpretation, in particular the expression generally translated into „*sharers of the divine nature*". On the one hand it was considered an explicit biblical foundation for *theosis*, (the orthodox doctrine of deification), the teaching according to which the aim of salvation in Christ is the deification of the human being⁶⁹. On the other hand, many contemporary Western commentators said that it is a completely foreign element to the New Testament context.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 71,81.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 248.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*

⁶⁸ Al Wolters „Partners of the Deity": A Covenantal Reading of 2 Peter 1,4", Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan, vol.25,no.1, april 1990

⁶⁹ see T.Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (Middlesex: Penguin,1980), pp.236-42; T. Ware writes about the "famous text from 2 Peter", which is a part of 'the solid biblical base' for the doctrine of *theosis*, p.236-37, la Al Wolters *op.cit.*, p.28

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The apparent miss-match of this text throughout the New Testament is based on two widely accepted assumptions: 1) the apostle here speaks of salvation as participation in the nature of God and 2) the nature of God is in contrast with the nature of the world.

In other words, salvation is described in ontological terms as a kind of escape from reality (the perishable nature of the ordinary world) to participate in another reality (imperishable nature of God). Such ontological concept of salvation was quite common to the religious movements in the Hellenistic world, particularly to those influenced by Platonism, but it contrasts with the teaching of the New Testament, i.e. salvation is not a liberation from the world, but rather a release, remaining in the world, from the bondage of sin. Further, the author pleasantly surprise us by announcing the research that he has undertaken to support both the authenticity of the letter, and the perfect and full insertion of it into the *corpus* of the New Testament and of the Holy Scripture in general. In fact, he proposes a new translation where doctrinal discrepancies disappear.

Al Wolters then claims that the word *koinonos* is wrongly rendered into the adjectival equivalent *partaker*. *Koinonos* is a noun, not an adjective. In the Liddle, Scott and Jones Dictionary⁷⁰, *koinos* is translated as „companion”, „partner” or „brother, comrade (fellow)”. In classical Greek literature, the meaning of „partner” (or a synonym) would prevail. *2 Cor1:7*: „(...) partakers/sharers (*koinonoi*) of the suffering” and *1Pt.5:1*: „(...) partakers/sharers (*koinonoi*) of His glory” would be the only places where the meaning of the term *koinos* is that of fellowship, in the other eight cases the right translation would be *partner*. For example: *Lk 5:10*, where we are told that James and John were brothers, fellows⁷¹ (*koinonoi*) of Simon; *1Cor10:20*: “(...) I do not want to be partners (*koinonous*) of devils”. The rule would be: when associated with the genitive case and a noun designating a person, *koinonos* means *partner* and when it refers to a thing, it should be translated as partaker/sharer.

According to this rule, the word *koinonoi* of *2 Pt1:4* would be translated correctly into *partakers/sharers*. But Al Wolters goes on to show that the term *physis*⁷² is incorrectly translated into *nature*. He quotes the Liddle, Scott and Jones

⁷⁰ Liddel, Henry George, Robert Scott and Henry Stuart Jones, *A Greek English Lexicon*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.

⁷¹ *The Holy Bible*, Romanian translation by Metropolitan Bartolomeu Anania, București, 2000

⁷² In Greek literature, *physis* comes from the verb *ephyn*, *pephyka*, *phyomai*, from the indo-european root *bhu*, sanskrit *bhu*, Latin *fu-*, German *bi-n*, English *be*, and it means “to become”, “to grow”; it was initially used for growing plants. *Physis* also means ‘form’, ‘nature’, the meaning transferred from plants, to animals and humans. Homer used it for “the exterior form of nature”, Pindar is the first to use it as “exterior form” of man; he distinguishes between *physis* and *nous*. Nature and the qualities of man are often called *physis*. By contrast with human weakness and nature’s

Dictionary⁷³, where the noun *physis* is translated not only into *nature* but also by: *origin, development, constitution, character, instinct, species, creature*, and the Dutch scholar Holwerda⁷⁴ identifies no less than seventy meanings of the word. To the present study, some equivalents are important, such as: *creature, being, entity*. Although the term *physis* is rare in the Greek Bible, we find these meanings in both the Septuagint and the New Testament. For example 3 *Maccabees* 3:29 „*pase thnety physei* - any mortal *physis*” that „every mortal creature”; James 3:7, where „*te physei te anthropine*” (human nature) means humanity or human, because human nature, which is an abstract notion, tame wild animals. There are many examples, still authoritative, and extra-biblical Greek literature, from Plato to Philo and further. In *Timaeus* 42C, „*thereios physis*” actually means animal. Philon writes in *De Fuga* 172: „*Ho Theos monos, he ariste physis*” (The one God, the best Being), and other similar places⁷⁵. Moreover, citing other authors and by way of demonstration, he states that the terms „divine power” and „divine nature” is a „reverent circumlocution” something like „Majesty”, especially since definite article is missing. The practice of substituting the name of God with a word or phrase is common in Jewish and Hellenistic world. In the *New Testament* we have such examples: “Kingdom of Heaven” instead of “Kingdom of God”, or 1Cor10:18, where the word „altar” refers to God.

In conclusion, *theia physis* of 2 Pt1:4 would in fact translate into *the Divine Being* (NB not the being - *ousia*) or *Deity* or, more clearly, God, therefore we were promised that we shall be partners of God, in the language of Saint Paul, „co-workers” (*synergoi*) (1Cor3:9) with Him. The resulting expression „partners of God” is not literally from the New Testament, instead we find it in Philo⁷⁶ and in the Greek patristic literature. The equivalent Hebrew expression *sutap lehaqqados* and *sutap im haqqados*, which literally mean „partners of the Holy One”, can be found in the rabbinic literature and is a central expression. The phrase „God’s partners” can be perfectly inserted into the general Scriptural teachings about God’s covenant with man⁷⁷.

corruption, there is everything that transcends these limits, as a sign of participation to the divine nature, “entering the divine nature - *eis theon physin elthein*” is equivalent to gaining divine status, said Himerius (4th century BC).

⁷³ Liddel, Henry George, Robert Scott and Henry Stuart Jones, *A Greek English Lexicon*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.

⁷⁴ *Commentario de Vocis que est Physis Viatque Usu, Praesertim in Graecitate Aristotele Anteriore*, Groningen: Wolters, 1955

⁷⁵ *De Specialibus Legibus*, 2.231; *Quis Her.*115, *Mig.*139, *Abr.* 87, ş.a., la Al Wolters, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

⁷⁶ *De Spec.Legibus*, 1.131 (*koinonoi... Theou*)

⁷⁷ Al Wolters, *op.cit.*,p. 40.

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The author concludes by stating that he reads the New Testament, especially considering the canonical context and not extra-intellectual traditions of Hellenistic culture. The translation existing today is due precisely to these foreign influences, especially the idea of Platonic participation, without which it would not be preserved, therefore, based on the study undertaken he suggests the following translation: *He gave us the precious and very great promises for you to become partners of God, being acquitted of corruption that came into the world because of lust*⁷⁸. Therefore, the universe of biblical canon discourse is different from the philosophical one and the text analyzed falls naturally into first.

We quoted more extensively from this study in order to provide a model of exegesis, to highlight the *absolute dependence of the dogmatic discourse to the biblical text that inspired it and to its proper and its full interpretation*, to highlight how the Holy Scripture discovers God for us as alive and present in human life, not as an inaccessible withdrawn transcendence and also to reject the haste with which some acknowledge the existence of foreign influences in our sacred texts.

In conclusion, we can say that both versions of the translation of 2Pt1:4 have major doctrinal implications. If we follow the one in use, the focus is on participation in the divine attributes and Father Stăniloae originally discussed them. In the first volume of *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* he deals with attributes related to the super-essence of God: infinity, simplicity, eternity, over-presence, omnipotence and how the creature can participate in; also in connection with those related to spirituality: omniscience and wisdom, justice and mercy, holiness and good and love. Being (*ousia*) of God is without participation, but the attributes are participating because the *raison d'être* (*logos tes physeos*) of man is given by this virtuality, likeness to the Creator is possible, deification, or more specifically Christification (*-morphisation*) of man. If *syngeneia* as adoption is acquired in Baptism, the participation is possible due to the Holy Eucharist, „*Of Thy Mystical Supper, O Son of God, accept me today as a communicant (...)*”.

Regarding the translation we quoted above, we could say that it is acceptable in orthodox terms because Orthodoxy puts great emphasis on the person and communion of persons. The fact that the Divine Being is unknowable and incomprehensible does not generate gnoseological pessimism because the person transcends the nature, the Worker is present in the work (*energeia*), a fact evident in the Orthodox Mysteries. For example, the central moment of the Holy Mystery of Marriage is when the priest, with great emotion, invokes the direct work of the Holy Trinity asking: „*(...) extend now also Thy hand from Thy holy dwell-*

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 44.

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ing-place, and unite this Thy servant and this Thy handmaid... ”. This prayer is addressed to the Holy Trinity, the source and model for the family love.

Father Stăniloae in different contexts stated that God created us as partners in dialogue, genuine and living dialogue, a progressive dialogue in love, an endless ecstatic dialogue, man being called to rise „*from glory to glory (apo doxes eis doxan)*” (2 Cor3:18) in this dialogue, the partnership is based on adoption in Baptism and Holy Communion. On the basis of the above, one might think that Saint Peter suggested by this expression (2Pt1:4) that „the precious and very great promises” are fulfilled here when people, through the Holy Mysteries particularly through mystical co-sanguinity received through the Holy Eucharist, in the ambiance of the Church, *become brothers of God the Son and sons of God the Father through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit*, but all culminates with the promise that „*we shall see Him as He is (hoti opsometha auton kathos estin)*”, a communion of love and love of communion, given to all who choose consciously and freely:

“*Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as He is*” (1Jn 3:2).

6. The Eucharist - the union of the faithful to the life of the incarnated Logos

Receiving the Eucharist means to participate in the life of Christ. For Saint Cyril, Holy Eucharist means food and drink; it is „life-giving seed” and „the seed of immortality”⁷⁹. It acts as a ferment, and the effects are both spiritual and physical. Tasting Eucharist means direct contact with Christ - the living Lord, just as surely as touching of His hands on Saint Peter’s mother-in-law, the daughter of Jairus and the son of the widow of Nain. Through the Eucharist, the faithful share the Holy Body (*sysomoi*)⁸⁰ with Christ, become partakers/sharers of the divine nature through the Holy Spirit⁸¹. Christ is present eucharistically through a natural participation (*methexis physike*)⁸²; as two elements are melted by fire and results just one, in the same way are united to Him all those who partake, and He is united with them⁸³.

A term often used by Saint Cyril to name the union of the faithful with Christ through the Eucharist is *metalepsis*. Through the Eucharist, the faithful are united

⁷⁹ Lc.22,19, PG72,912A, at Ezra Gebremedhin, *op.cit.*,p.90

⁸⁰ In 11, PG 74,560B

⁸¹ *Glaph.* Gen 1, PG 69, 29BC

⁸² Io 10, PG 74, 341CD

⁸³ *Ibidem*

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(*synanakirnamenoi, anamignymenoi*) with Christ by participating in His Body⁸⁴. Christ implants (*empfutevein*) His own life in the faithful who receive His Body⁸⁵.

Saint Cyril uses other terms as well to describe the fruits of the Holy Eucharist. He talks about Christ Who bodily lives (*enoikein*) in the believer through sharing (*koinonia*) His Holy Body⁸⁶; or he talks of Christ Who is established (*katookein*) in the believer as „Life and Life-giving”⁸⁷.

In commenting *John* 6:53, Saint Cyril explains that the Body of Jesus is life-giving because it is united with the Life after nature that is the Son born from „the living Father”:

„For He is life after nature because He was born of the living Father. But no less life-creating is His Holy Spirit Who came unspeakably from above, being united with Him, the Word that makes all living. For through Him, He is thought and understood so as one with Him. He is not divided by becoming human being, although we know that the Word came from God the Father and His temple from the Virgin are not one by nature, because the body is not consubstantial with the Word of God. But, as one by meeting and engaging unspeakable and as the Saviour’s body was made life-giving, as One Who united Himself with Life by nature, that is the Word from God, when we eat it, we have life in us being also united to the Word, as He is united with the Word dwelt in it”⁸⁸.

Moreover, Saint Cyril continued, the life-creating power of the Body of Jesus is evident in the fact of the resurrection of the dead, when „the Saviour does not work only by word, nor only by God’s commandments, but He also took as co-worker His Holy body, to show that He can also make alive the people, being united with it. For the body really is His own and not another one. In fact, when He raised the child of the ruler of the synagogue, saying: « My child, get up!», He grabbed her by the hand, as it is written (Mk 5:35-41; Lk 8:49-56). For He was, as God, life-giving, making them all by His command, and also by tapping his Holy Flesh, showing a unique and related work by both. For when He entered the city of Nain and the dead son of the widow was taken out, He touched again the dead body, saying: « Young man, I say unto thee: Arise» (Lk 7:14). So not only did He give to the word to work on the resurrection of the dead, but to show His body as life-giving, as I said before, He touches the dead through it, and through it He communicates life to those who died. And if the touch of His body makes the dead alive, how do not we gain a richer life-giving blessing, when we also eat it?”⁸⁹.

⁸⁴ *Io* 4, PG73,584BC

⁸⁵ *Io*, 7 and 8, PG 73, 20 CD

⁸⁶ *Io* .10 PG 74,341 BC

⁸⁷ *ICor.*6,15, PG74,809CD

⁸⁸ St. Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary to St. John’s Gospel, PSB 41, p.408

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, p.408-409

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In an explanatory note (740) to this last quote, Father Stăniloae refers implicitly to the hypostatic union, for us to reflect more deeply on the Mysterion of the Holy Eucharist:

„We do not share Christ’s body without sharing God-Word Himself, which became the Subject of His body. But He makes Himself accessible to us, and even shared through His body, as through the body we receive in us all the spiritual ones. His divine person is alive by nature, that is, without beginning and without end. And we will be able to resurrect in our flesh, because we become alive in our soul by communication between His Person and ours. And to be alive means to consciously live”. And in the note 742 Father Stăniloae says even more clearly: “God the Word means after the Incarnation a single person with His body”, and in note 750, “By His blood, we received the very Person of the Son, in all of a person is the person himself that organize and harmonize into the whole person”⁹⁰.

Indeed, we confess that the human nature was united with the divine nature in the Person of the Son, undivided, inseparable, unmixed, unchanged. We say that we share the Body and Blood of the Lord, that is his own deified humanity, but we call the Holy Communion also Divine Eucharist⁹¹, that is a touch of the divine, and we also say that we share in Christ, so it is intimate communion with the Person of Christ. But, on the one hand, there is no unhypostathized nature, and on the other hand the two natures have one Hypostasis and are united inseparably forever. Therefore, we partake of Christ whole, so the Holy Eucharist is a touch of the divine, it is the foundation of *theognosia* – „*We have seen the true light; we have received the heavenly Spirit; we have found the true faith, worshiping the undivided Trinity, for the Trinity has saved us*”⁹², as we sing towards the end of the Holy Liturgy - , and of the deification of man.

In conclusion, in the teachings of Saint Cyril, the Holy Eucharist provides the most intimate way of union with Christ, which involves, of course, other ways of presence of the Saviour: in the service of other Holy Mysteries and religious services; in the words of the Holy Scripture; in the sermon of the priest; in prayers and hymns; in good works⁹³.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 412.

⁹¹ Pr.Prof.Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă (Orthodox Dogmatic Theology)*, vol.3, București,2003, p.83

⁹² <http://www.ocf.org/OrthodoxPage/liturgy/liturgy.html>

⁹³ See Pr. prof.dr. Ioan Ică, „Modurile prezenței personale a lui Hristos și ale comuniunii cu El în Sf.Liturghie și în Spiritualitatea ortodoxă”, in *Persoană și comuniune. Prinos de cinstitie Preotului Profesor Academician Dumitru Stăniloae 1903-1993*, (Person and communion. Honoring Pr. Dumitru Stăniloae 1903-1993) Pr.Prof.Dr.Mircea Păcurariu and Diac.asist.Ioan I.Ică jr (eds)., Sibiu, 1993, p.335-358

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7. The Eucharist – the union of the faithful with the Holy Trinity

Trinitarian theology is developed by Saint Cyril in the *Dialogues about the Holy Trinity*⁹⁴, but there are countless references throughout his work.

In the work of uniting the faithful with God and with one another, the Son and the Spirit act together, despite the fact that by virtue of the Incarnation, the somatic way of working belongs exclusively to the Son. Commenting *John* 6:63: „The words that I have spoken unto you, they are spirit and life”, Saint Cyril says: „All His body was filled with the life-giving work of the Spirit. Therefore, He called Him Spirit without denying His existence as a body. Since body united with Him in its peak and put on all His life-making power, He must henceforth be called Spirit. And it’s no wonder if one is confused. For if he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit with Him, how can His body not be one spirit with Him?”⁹⁵.

In the note (787) to this quoted text, Father Stăniloae states: „Unity in the Spirit of one and another does not confuse the two. This feature of the unity is achieved by the Spirit. For, in the Spirit, each one values the other and He considers him necessary for himself. And, since the Spirit in Whom are united two persons, is not identical neither with one nor the other, because in this case these would merge into the unity, the Spirit is between the two, or belongs to the One Who gives the Spirit and becomes of the one who receives the Spirit, but not the same as them and not confuses them”.

Saint Cyril emphasizes the Trinitarian dimension of the unity created among the faithful through their participation in the Eucharist. We are all one, says the great Alexandrian, in the Father and in the Son and in the Holy Spirit through communion with the Body of Christ. (cf. *2 Cor* 13:13), for in the Holy Trinity there is a unity of being, will and work:

„For when you hear that Father brings, and the Son gives those who come to Him, the power of resurrection, do not get to absurd thinking considering that each of them work by Himself and separate what is according to His own nature, but think with the mind that Father together with the Son, and the Son with the Father and, so to say, our salvation and return from death to life, is the work of the whole Holy Trinity: Father has the wholesome all power to the whole thing, likewise the Son, and the Holy Spirit. So, by all Holy Trinity, all the wealth come to us and the Father is All in all through the Son and Holy Spirit”⁹⁶; and in the commentary on *John* 10:30: “I and the Father are one”, Saint Cyril writes: „And we call one the

⁹⁴ Cyrille d’Alexandrie *Dialogues sur la Trinite*, Texte critique, traduction et notes par Georges Matthieu de Durand, o.p., Les Editions du Cerf, Paris, 1976, vol. I, SC 231; vol. II SC 237, Paris, 1977, vol. III SC 246, Paris, 1978.

⁹⁵ Sfântul Chiril al Alexandriei, *Comentariu la Evanghelia Sfântului Ioan*, PSB 41, p.427-428

⁹⁶ *Ibidem* p.383 -384

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Son and the Father, not confusing monads in one number, as some say that the Father and the Son are the same, but believing that the Father and the Son subsists in a particular way, but uniting the Two in the identity of a commun being and seeing Them as having one power, so that One is seen in the other One”⁹⁷.

If by receiving the Body we also are united with the Person, through its blood, the Saviour puts the adoptive sonship seal, so opening just in this way our access to the Father, for: „Father does not give all of His except through His only Son. Nor does He love other than because He has a Son Whom He loves. He does not give life except in loving union with the Son”⁹⁸.

In note 750, Father Stăniloae writes: „The Son of God puts on us, through the human blood assumed by Him, the seal of his status as Son of the Father, Son of God, making us also children, but not by birth from the Father, but by sharing. Living in His blood, entered in ours, makes us also alive, if not in all actuality, at least virtually and gradual upgrade, His purity that was conveyed to us, His spirit of sacrifice, the spirit of love for the Father and for people, and the movement toward resurrection. He passes these senses and powers all the more, because not only His blood becomes also ours, but also ours becomes His through this”⁹⁹.

8. The Eucharist – the seed of immortality and the gift of eternal life

The dominant trait of Saint Cyril’s Eucharistic theology is the teaching that the Eucharist confers the gift of incorruptibility. Saint Cyril uses the terms: incorruptibility (*aphtharsia*) and immortality (*athanasia*) as interchangeable, but *aphtharsia* still prevails about the Eucharist. Saint Cyril teaches that mortal man should share the body of He Who is Life by nature, if he wants to take back incorruptibility. Eucharistic Christ inserts life in the believer as a seed of immortality (*sperma athanasias*)¹⁰⁰ which abolishes all the corruption that is in man¹⁰¹. The phrase „seed of immortality” reminds „the drug of immortality” (*pharmakon athanasias*) from the work of Saint Ignatius of Antioch.

In conclusion, the victory of the Saviour over death is imparted to us by the Holy Eucharist, and the eschatological character of the Mystery of Mysteries is prominent in the work of Saint Cyril, reminding us the prayer:

„O Christ, great and most Holy Pascha, O Wisdom, Word, and Power of God: grant that we may more really partake of Thee in the never-ending day of Thy Kingdom”¹⁰².

⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 729.

⁹⁸ Note 769, p. 420.

⁹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 412.

¹⁰⁰ *Lc.22:19*, PG 72, 912 A

¹⁰¹ Ezra Gebremedhin, *op.cit.*, p. 101.

¹⁰² <http://orthodoxliturgicaltext.com/English-only/DivineLiturgyStJohnChrysostomandSt-BasilGreat.pdf>