

The Eucharist Theology in the Patristic Tradition

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Abstract: The Eucharistic theology has acknowledged its complete development following the anti-Arian controversies: the insistency of the defenders of Orthodoxy over the essential role of the Body of Christ within the mystery of salvation could not have done otherwise than draw attention with regard to the holing efficiency of the Eucharistic receipt of the body and blood of the Lord. We will focus upon representative authors of the period and until the times of Saint Gregory Palamas. The teachings of Saints Cyril of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, Maximus the Confessor, John the Damascene and Nicholas Cabasilas deserve particular attention due to their special importance; it will offer us - at the same time - the occasion of clarifying several of the theological assumptions that - in diverse nuances - condition the conception that the Holy Fathers place a significant importance upon the Eucharistic mystery.

Keywords: *communion, embodiment, iconomy, Liturgy, Mysteries, spiritual life, salvation.*

1. The Eucharist in the context of Salvation

The entire Iconomy of salvation comes together into and is fulfilled in the Person of the Logos of God who became embodied, in the Hypostasis of Christ, the God Man. Thus, Christ is not only the Redeemer, but Redemption itself; He is not only the Head of the Church but, as God Man, He is the Church itself. Moreover, He is the very mystery of godly Eucharist, because Eucharist is the repetition, update and extension of the entire mystery of Christ. Eucharist is the Mystery of Christ. All these are reflected and live genuinely and secretly in the godly-humanly frames of the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom. *Liturgy is the heart of the Church.* Therefore, we can say that the Divine

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Liturgy is the greatest Ecclesiology². It expresses and contains the entire Iconomy of the Holy Trinity for humanity; thus, Liturgy is three-fold. Liturgy is achieved through the presence and by the direct work of the Holy Spirit in the Church, which sanctifies and turns the holy gifts into the Body and Blood of Christ.

Its feature as epiclesis also sheds a Pneumatological dimension upon Liturgy. However, the Divine Liturgy is first and foremost Christological and Christ-centered³. Because Liturgy is Christ Himself in His mystical, active and true presence. Christ, Who is God Man, is the essence and the heart of the Church, is entirely present when the mystery of Holy Eucharist is fulfilled during the Divine Liturgy. The Incarnation, Passion, Resurrection and Ascension of Christ are living and perpetual foundations of the Church; it is also underlying the Godly Eucharist and the Divine Liturgy relies on it. Where there is the Redeemer, there is also His Church. And that is why the entire Church is present in the Eucharist, just like limbs in the heart, branches in the root and, as God said, like shoots in the vine⁴. Consequently, Godly Eucharist forms the heart of the Church, the very existence of the Church, its life, the source of its unity and the source of its redemption⁵.

The binder holding together the Fathers' Eucharist doctrine and their theology on the redemption and godliness of Christians is revealed in full light in a text by Saint Cyril of Alexandria: "... if we eat the body of Christ, all our Redeemer, and if we drink His Blood, we will get life, become one with Him, live in Him and have Him in ourselves. Thus, he has to come to us, as God wished, through the Holy Spirit, and blend in a way with our bodies through the Holy body and his most sacred Blood so that we can receive in blessing the gift of life through bread and wine. Indeed, in order for us not to be seized by amazement seeing the body and blood presented on the holy tables of the church, God was gracious to our weaknesses and sent us the power of life in the elements presented to us; He changed them by filling them with the energy of His own body, so that we may possess them in a life-giving communion and the body of life is in us like life-giving seed. Do not shy away from believing, it is true, because He Himself told it plainly: «This is My body» and «this is My blood.»"⁶ God may, without losing anything

² Hieromonk Atanasie Ieftici, *H εκκλησιολογία του Αποστόλου Παύλου κατά τον ιερόν Χρυσόστομον*, Αθήνα 1967, p. 129.

³ Please see Saint John Chrysostom, *In I Corinthians*, Homily 24, 1, PG 61, 199. Saint John of Damascus, *On Holy Images*, 2, PG 95, 408. G. Florovsky, „Le corps du Christ vivant”, in *La Sainte Eglise universale*, Paris, 1948, p. 29.

⁴ Please see Saint Nicholas of Cabasilas, *Comment on the Divine Liturgy*, 38, PG 150, 452 C.

⁵ Please see I. Καρμίρη, “Σώμα Χριστού, ό έστιν η Εκκλησία”, in *Εκκλησία*, 1962, p. 366: “Holy Eucharist is the center of Christians' unity with Christ in the body of the Church, also deemed as a mystery of the Church”.

⁶ Saint Cyril of Alexandria, *On Luke*, Homily 22, PG 72, 908-912.

of His transcendence, communicate freely and openly to all His creatures a genuine participation to His own nature (Acc. to 2 Pt. 1, 4) and thus bring them, by grace, in the scope of Godliness. However, this “spiritualization” may reach not only reason and will, where it grows into “knowledge” and “unit of spirit”, but also body, in a manner of which we are still unaware, but obvious to Parousia (Acc. to 1 Co. 15, 42-44).

2. Incarnation and Eucharist

We cannot talk about the Church without accurate Christology, without that unique fact – “God showed Himself in body...” – which comprises and interprets everything. But the Holy Eucharist is the most material Christology: “It is obvious that this godly mystery is examined by the Fathers in Christological light. The godly Eucharist is described as an extension of the godly mystery of Incarnation. Meaning, in a way, that Christ reunites the godly and the human nature, just like in the godly Eucharist Christ is present with both His natures, invisibly united with the believers sharing that mystery”⁷. Eucharist is the very body of God Man Who was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, Who was crucified, Who rose again, Who ascended into heaven and lives in glory. Eucharist is Christ Himself “known with two unmistakable natures”⁸.

Therefore, the relation between the Orthodox Christological teachings and the teachings on Eucharist is obvious, as these are the two sides of the same dogma, only one *theandric fact*⁹. These notions hold predominance over the entire Orthodox theology on redemption and Eucharist, as quoted from Saint Cyril above. God’s grace, lost through Adam’s sin, was returned to humankind through the incarnation of Christ and the redemption He brought. Saint Gregory of Nyssa had already stated this doctrine in more appropriate wording: “Our entire nature had to be brought back to life; God leaned over our corpse to extend a hand, one might say, to the being who was lying; He went close to death only to come into contact with the condition of corpse and to offer our nature, through His own body, a preview of resurrection, renewing man in all his being through His power.”¹⁰

Indeed, in view of hypostatic union, within Christ there is a genuine co-penetration of human nature through godly energy. “The sacrament with the body and blood of God shall be understood as full communion with Jesus Christ and communion with His godly and human nature... Communion is made with Jesus the God-Man forever living, the world’s Savior, God and Redeemer, the Lord of everlasting happiness.”¹¹ When up

⁷ A. Θεοδορού, *Η ουσία της Ορθοδοξίας*, Αθήνα, 1961, p. 116-117.

⁸ Saint John Chrysostom, *In I Corinthians*, Homily 24, 4-5, PG 61, 203-204.

⁹ G. Florovski, “Ocer Dom”, in *Hrskanski Zivot*, 4 (1926), 170. Saint Irinaeus especially emphasizes this theandric issue in *Against Heresy*, IV, 18, 5.

¹⁰ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *Orat. catech.*, 32, PG 45, 80 b.

¹¹ M. Σιώτη, *Θεία Ευχαριστία*, Θεσσαλονίκη, 1957, p. 53.

against this godly Fire, the consequences of sin – suffering and death – assumed by Christ in human nature, are abolished, being changed, at first, into signs of Son’s love for the Holy Father and for humans, and then disappear into the glory of resurrection. Christ resurrected rightfully receives, in His very body, the grace He had as God before the creation of the world.¹²

According to a conception shared by most of our God-praising Fathers, the Son of God “who became man had, in Himself, the entire nature so that he could rehabilitate it in full¹³”. The glorification of resurrected Christ’s human nature was, therefore, in a way, a glorification of the entire human nature: “And thus, humankind becomes one with God through the agency of Christ’s humanity. Through our reception which He assumed, the entire body was filled with godly virtue”.¹⁴ However, the redemption achieved universally in the person of resurrected Christ had to actually reach each and every man. This conveyance of godly life through time and space will be achieved through the agency of Christ’s humanity because the latter, entirely deified, is deifying in its turn: “If we consider bodily nature separately, it is obvious that it is not life-giving... but as soon as it is reunited with life-giving Gospel, it becomes itself so, it becomes body raised to higher virtue... Gospel filled its own body with the life-giving energy of the Spirit... that is why it calls its body as spirit; nevertheless, it does not deny that it is body, but given that it is entirely united with the spirit and enveloped in its life-giving virtue, it is deserves to be called spirit”.¹⁵

Therefore, we understand that Eucharist appears to be the privileged means whereby men’s personal deification is achieved. Church-goers are born into Christ through the Baptism and are fed with Christ in the Godly Eucharist¹⁶. Certainly, baptism is the one bringing the new life in us. “Baptism has an essentially eschatological meaning, granting us a «resurrection of the soul », awaiting the resurrection of bodies in the age to come... What the Christian is seeking in spiritual life is not beyond space or matter, but in the *future*: the Kingdom of God already present in sacramental mystery... the Christ sought after by the hesychast and found in himself is, thus, the Lord of the future, and the light he sees is the light of the age to come. Christian spirituality cannot have other foundation than this eschatological reality foreseen in sacrament and gradually assimilated into spiritual life.

However, the mystery of God’s body and blood perfects this work in sacramental terms, expressing and achieving, through the rite of Eucharistic food, the most intimate

¹² Acc. to Cyril of Alexandria, *On John*, Homily 11, 12, PG 74, 564 a.

¹³ Saint Cyril of Alexandria, *On John*, Homily 5, 2, PG 73, 754 a.

¹⁴ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomy*, 2 PG, 45, 533 a.

¹⁵ Saint Cyril of Alexandria, *On John*, Homily 4, 3, PG, 73, 601 c-604 b.

¹⁶ Saint John Chrysostom, *On Matthew*, Homily 82, 2, PG 58, 740. *Catechesis* 3, 16-19, EPIE 30, p. 392-396. Please see Methodius of Olympus, *Banquet*, 3, 8, PG 18, 198.

union that can be: “The binder of our union with God the Father is certainly Christ: it unites us with Him as human, but, being God, he lives through spirit in God the Father. The nature fallen into sin could only reach a state of non-sin again if that nature – which is above any sin and any change – descends down to it, raising and lifting it to the convenient borders of a nature created through communion and mixture with the superior nature and forging, in his own image and likeness, what was not the same. We are thus consumed in the union with God the Father through the agency of Christ. Indeed, in receiving in our bodies and spirits the One who is the true Son by nature, substantially united with the Father, we are saved through participation in and communion with the supreme nature.”¹⁷

The foundation of Church is the Mystery of the Incarnation of the Word, and the Divine Eucharist is the body of God Himself which was Incarnated. Church was redeemed, saved, reborn, baptized and glorified through the redeeming sacrifice and the blood of God-Man which was spilled on the Cross – the Godly Eucharist being also this sacrifice¹⁸ of the body and blood of Christ¹⁹. The Church was resurrected together with Christ, it was saved together with Christ and was seated together with Christ at the right hand of the Father – Godly Eucharist is the very body of resurrected Christ, ascended into heaven and praised, the One seated at the right hand of His Father, in other words, Eucharist is Christ Himself. Christ is present in the Church as well as in His theandric body in all days until the end of the world– He Himself is present in whole in Eucharist in the most genuine manner.

Saint Gregory Palama in his homily on the *Saint and Sacred Mysteries of Christ*²⁰ describes the elements of a hesychasm integrated in the sacramental life of the Church. It may be noticed that Palama, touched by certain meanings of his sacerdotal office, did not isolate the practicing the prayer of Jesus from the office of the Saint Liturgy and set a close connection between the union with Christ (and, through Him, with the Holy Trinity, which is at the center of hesychast spirituality) and the sacramental mystery of officiating the Eucharist. Just as the mystery of redemption is “present” or retrieved (not in a realistic or naturalistic manner) within Eucharist, the name of Jesus constantly repeated (not in its almost magical meaning, claimed by “onomatodox”) contains the entire mystery of redemption, from Incarnation to Resurrection, to Ascent into heaven and the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

¹⁷ Saint Cyril of Alexandria, *On John*, Homily 12, PG 74, 564 a.

¹⁸ Saint John Chrysostom, PG 48, 867. See: PG 49, 390-391. PG 56, 102. PG 58, 743. PG 61, 230, 361.

¹⁹ Saint John Chrysostom, *On John*, Homily 46, 3-4, PG 59, 261-262.

²⁰ Saint Gregory Palamas, *Homily 22*, Athens: ed. S. Oikonomos, 1863, pp. 200-212.

Homily begins with a long exposé on the importance of preparation²¹ for the holy communion: repentance (*metanoia*) and the confession of sins in the presence of a spiritual father (*pater pneumatikos*) are necessary, especially during these forty days which: “bring us closer to the annual feast of the birth into body of God the Lord and our Redeemer Jesus Christ, a feast during which it is advisable for all Christians to take communion with His Body and Blood and by them be united with Him, become only one Spirit and one Body with Him.”

This insistence on the preparation leads us to believe that it was not customary for “all Christians” in that age to take communion every time Eucharist was officiated²². Speaking of confession and the need for a spiritual father to be present, Saint Gregory emphasizes the fact that the remission of sins is not automatically granted through confession, but it is achieved through repentance and the acts of repentance, which are self-*sacrifice*, the *sacrifice* of our life before God: “To make us worthy of repentance, or better still to give ourselves, through the acts of repentance, to the One who may make us, the unworthy, worthy.” “Even as Sacrifice, it is a Mystery, because, in giving ourselves before God, we are raised and share His holiness and blessing, and the Sacrifice itself is a Mystery, because the Body of God which is given to us is in a state of sacrificed and resurrected Body, and imprints on us the condition of sacrifice, through which we are raised and progress towards resurrection”²³. This “sacrifice”, as we will see, is deemed by Saint Gregory Palama to be a form of participation to the sacrifice of Christ Himself, His death and resurrection.

This identity between Eucharist and Christ’s sacrifice, confirmed by the Council of Constantinople in the 12th century, bestows the deepest meaning of the mystery of Eucharist, meaning that contains *our sacrifice*, meaning the “sacrifice of our glory” together with the angels and giving God the gifts of bread and wine (which stand for the

²¹ This is confirmed by Saint Nicholas Cabasilas, also acquainted with the hesychast environment, who insists on the need of frequent communion – in a literal meaning, “continuous” (*Life of Christ*, IV, 34-354, SC, 355, Paris, 1989, p. 294) – meaning that Eucharist being officiated shall not be an isolated event. This ordinary abstinency seemed so natural in the 18th century that Saint Nicodemus Hagiorites initiates a scandal on Mount Athos with his treaty *On Continuous Communion*. The same sacramental theology and the same living and lived experience is also found in Saint Gregory Palamas’ homily: Eucharist is seen as the foundation, the center and the purpose of spiritual life.

²² In another study (*Decalogue*, PG 150, 1093d), Palamas wrote that Sunday, “God’s Day”, is the day when “we need to share from the Sacred Body and Blood of Christ”. Which does not necessarily mean that in the times of Gregory Palamas churchgoers used to take communion every Sunday.

²³ Father Dumitru Stăniloae, *Dogmatic Orthodox Theology*, vol. 3, p. 104.

gift of life or the entire creation)²⁴. In this respect, Saint Cyril also says that “we bring them in the name of Christ and through Him we the sinners come closer. But we head towards faith and we offer ourselves to our Father to smell of good fragrance, we no longer have ourselves, but Christ in us, good spiritual fragrance”²⁵.

In the end, the Godly Liturgy is a gift offered by God, through which we partake in His sacrifice and through which we come closer to Him, which leads to an evocation of the theme of God’s mercy: “Oh, wonder! Great is the love that God spilt on us! We were reborn through Him in the Spirit and became only one Spirit with Him, as Saint Paul states: «And he who joins God is one spirit with Him » (I Co. 6, 17).”²⁶ This topic of God’s love will be resumed in the homily. Thus, as suitably summarized by the Bishop Irinaeus of Oltenia, “the transformation is beyond words, the same as incarnation. The difference of mode and substance is not a difference of position, in both cases, God’s Body performing the same work. Eucharist is the necessary continuation of incarnation, while being another mode of presence, but the same body which gives us life and unites us with life.”²⁷

3. Con-corporeal into Christ

In the mystery of Holy Eucharist there is a mystic substantiation of “the union of Church because they all take communion from a Single body.”²⁸ The Godly mystagogy of the Body and Blood is an “achievement of unity between human nature and Christ and concomitantly with all members of the Church.”²⁹ In the text *Comment on the Gospel according to Luke*, a significant matter of the Eucharist doctrine of Saint Cyril remained in the shade: the community nature of our incarnation into Christ. Cyril explains this in another passage. Because each Christian sees himself mystically identified with the glorified body of Christ through the energy of the Spirit of which it is filled through participation to the Eucharist body, we ought to come to the conclusion that all Christians become, through this participation, “con-corporeal”³⁰.

Saint John Chrysostom described the mystery of the relationship between the Church and the Godly Eucharist as follows: Christ “made us His own body, shared with

²⁴ *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France publishing house, 1967, p. 72.

²⁵ Saint Cyril of Alexandria, *Adoration in Spirit and in Truth*, 15, PG 68, 973 b.

²⁶ Saint Gregory Palamas, *Homily* 22, p. 31.

²⁷ Bishop Irineu Slătineanu, „Experience of Eucharist reality as Body of the Son of God who became man after Saint Cyril of Alexandria”, in *Metropolitan Church of Oltenia magazine*, year LIII, issue 5-6/2001, pp. 17-18.

²⁸ Florovsky, „Ocer Dom”, p. 170.

²⁹ V. Lossky, *Theologie mystique de l’Eglise d’Orient*, Paris, 1944, p. 212.

³⁰ “Concorporeal” – having (or forming) the same body. This phrase originates from Ef. 3, 6 and was often taken over by the Fathers after Saint Athanasius.

us His own body”³¹. There is a close communion between ourselves and Christ in Eucharist, this is the bodily and spiritual union with Christ: “He did not like to be a man, to be slapped and wronged, nor to mingle with us. However not only in faith, but also in fact, He makes us His own body.”³² Christ “mingled Himself with us and formed with us one body, to become one, just as the body is united with the head”³³. And somewhere else, Saint John places with much poetry in the mouth of God Himself the following: “And I descended again, and not only simply unite with you, but mingle, I am eaten, I become thinner and thinner, to increase the mingle, kinship, union. Because they who are united retain their conditions, but I become inextricably united with you. I do not wish there to be anything between us; the two shall be one”³⁴.

These words of Saint John Chrysostom express, beyond any doubt, the rationale of Apostle Paul who, writing to the Ephesians about the Mystery of Christ and describing its content, says: “that people are ... together sharers of promise in Jesus Christ...” (Ef. 3, 6). Here *σύσσωμα* (copartners, con-corporeals, sharers), which has to be immediately correlated with the expression in Christ and not with the statement “of promise”, has a much deeper soteriologic, and of course ecclesiological and Eucharist meaning³⁵.

The text in Jews 2, 14 will help us understand the entire content of the term “copartners” or sharers. The text in Jews refers to the fact that God Himself took our body and our blood first, thus He became the first “copartner” with us and afterwards He made us partners and con-corporeals with Him³⁶, on the one hand through his Incarnation and, on the other hand, by our union in one body with Him, making us limbs of His theandric body, which happens, first of all, in the Godly Eucharist (and also in the “communion with His body and blood”). Just as he acquired body and blood, says Saint

³¹ Saint John Chrysostom, *On Ephesians*, Homily 3, 3, PG 62, 27. Also see *On Colossians*, Homily 8, 2, PG 62, 353.

³² Saint John Chrysostom, *On Matthew*, Homily 82, 5, PG 58, 743.

³³ Saint John Chrysostom, *On John*, Homily 46, 3, PG 59, 260.

³⁴ Saint John Chrysostom, *On I Timothy*, Homily 15, 4, PG 62, 586.

³⁵ The word “σύσσωμος” is not often met in the classics and has a completely different meaning than the one given to it by Apostle Paul and the Church’s fathers, which borrow this term from life and Eucharist experience (K. Kern, *Anthropology sv. Grigoria Palami*, Paris, 1950, p. 144). This term, according to Paul, is referred to by many Fathers (Irineu, Cyril of Jerusalem, Athanasius, Cyril of Alexandria, Damascus, Simeon the New Theologian) and in particular Chrysostom, who clearly uses it with Eucharist meaning. Saint Simeon the New Theologian says that Christians “have become partners with God, by eating His body and drinking His blood, and through the consecrated bread and wine they become concorporeal and blood brothers with the incarnated and sacrificed God” (*Word 1*, D. Zagoraiou publishing house, p. 31).

³⁶ Saint John Chrysostom, *On Jews*, Homily VI, 2, PG 63, 56. Please see Saint Gregory Palamas, *On the Holy Hesychasts*, I, 3, Hristou publishing house, p. 449.

John Chrysostom, so we become his sharers. And this does not happen only through faith, but also through our incarnation in His body, which is made through communion with His body and blood³⁷. And this is precisely the real meaning of the phrase “copartners or sharers of Christ”. “What does «we become sharers of Christ » mean? We are a part of Christ, he says, Him and we became one, like He is the head and we are the body, we are joint heirs and united in one body. We are a body from His flesh, he says, and from His bones”³⁸. “Co-partners” means, therefore: We became united with the body of Christ and we form, together with Him, one body³⁹. This is why the Eucharist represents the heart of the Church and the Church is contained in Eucharist⁴⁰.

In stating God’s transcendence, the theology of Saint Gregory Palamas always claims a distinction between the three hypostases of God and ourselves, although united by the sacred communion. A similar distinction appears in the images employed in describing the relationship Christ maintains with us. Christ is our “Brother”, “Friend”, “Father” and even “Mother”: “Oh, multiple and inexpressible communion! Christ became our Brother, having the same body and blood *almost as ourselves*, and through them being assimilated with us... He made us His friends, doing us the honor of communicating His mysteries... But He also became our Father, through the godly baptism in His name. He nurtures us at His bosom, like a tender mother to her still suckling children.”⁴¹

Saint Nicholas Cabasilas describes the unity of Christ’s body as follows: “through Communion, Christ remains in us and we in Him: In Me and I in them (John 6, 56). And if Christ stays in us, what is there missing or what other treats for us to share?... If Lord Jesus Christ Himself fills our soul, pervading all our depths and all outlets, enveloping us from all sides, then what other good thing could come over us or what could be added to us? He fills the entire house of our soul. And then, we do not take communion of any of His treats and we do not take communion with any ray and any brightness from the godly solar disk, but from that very disk (the Holy Communion), so that we have Him living inside us, reaching deep into our marrow and limbs, and moreover we form but one and the same Body together...”⁴². “...That is why we eat the most holy food of Communion and feed from the godly chalice, to share from the very Body and Blood which Christ assumed from the womb of Virgin Mary – Mother of God. So that, in

³⁷ Saint John Chrysostom, *On John*, Homily 46, 3, PG 59, 260-261. *On Ephesians*, Homily 3, 3, PG 62, 27. Homily 20, 3-4. *On I Corinthians*, Homily 24, 2, PG 61, 201.

³⁸ Saint John Chrysostom, *On Jews*, Homily 6, 2, PG 63, 56.

³⁹ Saint John Chrysostom, *On Jews*, Homily 6, 3, PG 63, 58.

⁴⁰ “The Holy Mass is the heart of the Church, the heart driving the thaumaturgic body of the Church as life-creating body of Christ, the God-Man” (Iustin Popovici, *Dogmatika Pravoslavne Crkve*, Beograd, 1932, vol. II, p. 281).

⁴¹ Saint Gregory Palamas, *Homily 22*, Cler publishing house, p. 32s.

⁴² Saint Nicholas Cabasilas, *Life of Christ*, pp. 83-84.

truth, we become one with He who became incarnated and deified, He who died and resurrected for us.”⁴³

Saint Gregory Palamas says in the same paragraph that the relationship between Christ and the members of the Church is very close and very intimate, similar to that between two spouses. However, the text further emphasizes that Christians are not equal to Christ. He partook in the same body and blood “almost as ourselves”. Thus, the subject of the relationship between Christ and us needs to be considered within a relationship of *love*. The purpose of marriage is the bodily union between man and woman so that they are “closely connected” to one another and become “only one body”. Nevertheless, in the mystery of Eucharist⁴⁴ “we are not only closely connected, but even *mingled* with the body of Christ, due to the sharing of this godly Bread and we become not only one Body with Him, but only one Spirit” (once again “Spirit”, *Pneuma* means godly energy or godly life in which Christ’s body is impregnated). Through the Holy Communion, Christ “brings us to an even greater wish, fulfilling our wish to see Him, and even more, to touch Him, to live together in his kindness, to have Him into our hearts, to bear Him in ourselves, in our own entrails”⁴⁵.

Eucharist is the mystery which truly turns a human community into God’s Church and is the ultimate criterion and the foundation of ecclesial structure. “The Church is the body of Christ, Eucharist sacrifice is also the Body of Christ. Consequently, the Church has an Eucharist nature. There is no Eucharist outside the Church and there is no Church outside Eucharist. Godly communion is the union with the mystic body of the Church. He who believes in Eucharist becomes united with its head, with that of Christ, in one body, the Holy Church.”⁴⁶ That is why there is no Eucharist outside the Church, because “there is no body outside the Body”⁴⁷, but also there is no Church without and outside Eucharist.

4. Receiving the life-giving body of the Resurrected Christ

Various texts may be put together through patristics, indicating that the doctrine to which Saint Cyril of Alexandria lent such a comprehensive expression is the shared good of the Church. The phrases of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem are already very close to those of his Alexandria homonym: “In the image of bread you are given the Body and in

⁴³ Saint Nicholas Cabasilas, *Life of Christ*, pp. 26-27.

⁴⁴ Saint Gregory Palamas quotes *Letter 5*, 31s.

⁴⁵ Saint Gregory Palamas, *Homily 22*, ed. cit., p. 33.

⁴⁶ Cyprian Kern, *Euharistiae*, Paris, 1947, p. 304.

⁴⁷ Cyprian Kern, *Euharistiae*, p. 33. Also see B. Bobrinskoy, “Το Ἅγιον Πνεῦμα εἰς Θεῖαν Λειτουργίαν”, in: *Εκκλησία*, 11 (1965) 317 and 321: “Eucharist is the hypostasis of Church. Where there is Eucharist, there is also the Church... Church and Eucharist are inseparable. Eucharist is for Church and inside the Church. Church, through its nature, is Eucharistic”. Μ. Σιώτη, *Θεία Ευχαριστία*, p. 70-71.

the image of wine you are given the Blood so that, through communion with the Body and Blood of Christ, you become united into one Body and Blood with Him”⁴⁸. We partake in the body and blood of Christ in full confidence. Because, “in the appearance of bread you are given His Body, and in the appearance of wine you are given His blood, so that, partaking in the body and blood of Christ, you are and consanguin with Him. We thus become «bearers of Christ », His body and blood spread through our limbs. This is how, according to most blessed Paul, we partake of the divine nature.”⁴⁹

Saint Gregory of Nyssa uses the images of antidote, dough and seed, images later taken over by Cyril of Alexandria. “As a little dough leavens without being knead, as the Apostle says (I Cor. 5, 6), so the body which God rose to immortality, once it enters ours, changes and transforms it entirely into its own substance”⁵⁰. “God was mingled with the sinful nature to deify humanity, allowing it to partake in its godliness; that is why it spreads like seed among believers, in the middle of this body whose substrate is made of bread and wine and becomes united with the bodies of worshipers: so that, through this union with immortality, man comes to share in unperishableness”⁵¹.

Saint John Chrysostom adds to his ideas a sense of sacred, with focus on tenderness to the person of Christ and with emphasis on the moral applications specific to the particular genius of Syrian authors: “He whom the angels watch shivering, or rather He whom they do not dare watch because of the brightness He emanates, is He who serves as our food, who is united with us and with whom we form but one flesh and one body.”⁵² Godly Eucharist is the source from which the life of Church springs; furthermore, it is the very life of Church, “the redeeming and continuous life of our souls”⁵³, says Saint John. Eucharist is the “Bread of Life”⁵⁴ giving us eternal life⁵⁵, is Christ Himself (Cf. In. 6, 51- 54.). He lays as Sacrifice on the mystic table, as the “Lamb of God...” as “mystic sacrifice, at whose sight even the angels shiver” and as “source of redeeming drinks”⁵⁶.

Saint Maximus the Confessor says: “he who reached full union with the Person of Christ or with the truth in Eucharist never stoops down again to the virtues which are only preparation for this meeting, only endeavors in view of love, and not true rest in

⁴⁸ Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses*, second part, Bucharest, 1943, p. 562.

⁴⁹ Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech. Myst.*, 4, 3, PG 32, 1100 a.

⁵⁰ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *Orat. catech.*, PG 45, 93 b.

⁵¹ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *Orat. catech.*, 37, PG 45, 93 b.

⁵² Saint John Chrysostom, *On Matthew*, Homily 82.

⁵³ Saint John Chrysostom, *On II Thessalonians*, Homily 4, 4, PG 62, 492.

⁵⁴ Saint John Chrysostom, *On I Corinthians*, Homily 27, 5, PG 61, 231.

⁵⁵ Saint John Chrysostom, *On John*, Homily 44, 1, PG 59, 250. *On Psalm 144*, 1, PG 55, 464.

⁵⁶ Saint John Chrysostom, *On Repentance*, Homily 9, PG 49, 345. *On I Corinthians*, Homily 41, 5, PG 61, 361. *Catechesis* 6, 24, SC 50, 167 and 227.

itself. Neither death, nor life, with the possibilities it affords for virtues separate from Christ him who met Him, but is capable of facing even death for Him, knowing that, by remaining with Him, he will pass through death with Him, to resurrection with Him.”⁵⁷ Saint Maximus is one of the few exceptions who approached, in the patristic period, the eschatological aspect of Liturgy occurring in the celebration of Eucharist as revelation of the Kingdom and Glory of Christ in the second section of his famous work *Ambigua*, where he interprets the rites of Eucharist synaxis. This eschatological aspect, outlined in the Apocalypse and in Didache, would afterwards fade out in favor of the anamnestic aspect: Eucharist as memorial of Christ’s death and resurrection, as image and anamnesis of His life or soteriological Iconomy. This will dominate both patristic mystagogical catecheses, and Byzantine and modern liturgical comments.

5. The body of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit descended into the Church and stays in it for ever, in Eucharist His presence and energy achieves the mystery of the body and blood of Christ⁵⁸, and we “feed on the Spirit, through these two”⁵⁹. The Church and Eucharist become one in Christ, they are His only theandric body, “from His body and from His bones”. The teachings about the Church – body of Christ hiding in its being and forming the echo of liturgical experience, voice the Eucharist reality⁶⁰. That is why godly Eucharist is indeed Church’s greatest, oldest and most substantial tradition, the very essence of Holy Tradition: “Liturgy and Eucharist are like a great sacred chain of tradition, uniting into one inseparable whole the historic life of Church, and even more: Eucharist is this life of the Church”⁶¹. As long as there is Church, there will also be this sacred Tradition: “every time you eat this bread and you drink this glass, you herald the death of Hold until he comes”(I Cor. 11, 26).

The Holy Spirit is the creator of the unity between the Body of Christ, of the Church and the Savior of Christ’s Body in Eucharist⁶². By taking communion with Godly Eucharist the soul becomes heave⁶³ and is seated next to the throne of Lord Christ, becoming transubstantiated through the inspiration and energies of the Holy Spirit⁶⁴. As the soul becomes, through personal worship, a nave of God and is spiritually

⁵⁷ Saint Maximus the Confessor, *Answers to Thalassius*, 30, in *Philokalia*, vol. III, p. 114.

⁵⁸ Saint John Chrysostom, *On Pentecost*, Homily 4, PG 50, 458-459.

⁵⁹ Saint John Chrysostom, *On I Corinthians*, Homily 30, 2, PG 61, 251.

⁶⁰ G. Florovski, “Evharistia i sobornost”, *Put* 19 (1929), p. 7.

⁶¹ Nicholas Arseniev, *O Liturgii i tainstvje Evharistii*, Paris, 1938, p. 38. Please see Philaret of Moscow, *Slova i reci*, vol. II, Moscow, 1848, p. 54. Please see: I Cor. 11, 23-24.

⁶² Saint John Chrysostom, *On Pentecost*, Homily 4, PG 50, 458-459.

⁶³ Saint John Chrysostom, *On Hebrews*, Homily 16, 3, PG 63, 126.

⁶⁴ Saint John Chrysostom, *On Colossians*, Homily 6, 3, PG 62, 341.

reborn, so through the Godly Eucharist the soul “becomes part of the Church”, as it becomes the *nave of Holy Spirit, in other words it becomes the nave of Holy Trinity*⁶⁵.

In true Pauline spirit (Acc. to *Rm.* 6, 3–4. 5 și 11. 19. 22; *Rm.* 8, 4–13 and *Col.* 2, 12; 3, 1–17.), the patristic tradition stated that the Christian ethical endeavor is nothing else but the ascetic assimilation with the death and resurrection of Christ, experimentally lived in Baptism and Eucharist. Asceticism thus becomes “the death of death”, death of passion through the similarity of Christ’s death, that leads to the death of sin and of the sinful death and the gradual instauration of true, spiritual life in the human being; asceticism is thus “*nekrosis zoopoios*”, as stated by Saint Simeon New Theologian, heroic life-giving mortification with Christ into Christ. Because “as the death of spirit, like decay caused by sin, does not occur at the final moment, but cankers away like a worm for a long time, so the death of death and of sin is not only momentary, but something that has to be prepared for a long time, through ascetic mortification. Asceticism is therefore the gradual removal of the poison leading the nature to decay and corruption. It is the removal of the disease leading to death and consequently to the strengthening of nature”⁶⁶.

The life into Christ is preceded and permanently accompanied by sinless death, just like an obscure death within the meaning of plenary dedication or surrender of one’s whole being to Christ, because we cannot be resurrected until we die first. Even in Eschaton, the obscure death – full surrender of our lives to God – and our resurrection into Christ are two sides of the same spiritual reality. Because Resurrection has no meaning without death which, in its obscure, positive meaning, is a confirmation of resurrection⁶⁷. Therefore, the purpose of asceticism, both in its negative side, as death of passions, and in its positive one, as spiritual resurrection of nature, through appropriate virtue, is no other than to make us “*sons of resurrection*” (*hyoi tes anastaseos*), living on the earth like God’s angels and therefore citizens of eschatological Kingdom.

Saint John Damascene sets forth the doctrine which has become common⁶⁸ and especially reiterates the image of incandescent coal: “Let us come closer with burning desire, with folded hands and receive the body of He who was crucified; and with our eyes, lips and forehead, receive the godly coal, so that the fire of our desire, lit by the coal, burn all our sins and brighten our hearts so that, through our partaking in the godly fire, we are inflamed and deified.”⁶⁹ Saint John Damascene states that “bread and wine

⁶⁵ Saint John Chrysostom, *On Psalm 133*, 1, PG 55, 386.

⁶⁶ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, Bucharest, 1981, p. 9.

⁶⁷ Stăniloae, *Dogmatic...*, III, p. 221–233: death as mystic, full and free surrender of the entire human being before God, mystic anticipation of the final eschatological condition.

⁶⁸ Acc. to Theodor of Mopsuestia in *La messe, Liturgies anciennes et textes patristiques*, by A. Hamman, Collection Sources chétiennes 9, p. 180 *et seq.*

⁶⁹ Saint John Damascene, *On Orthodox Faith*, PG 94, 1148.

are in truth the Body united with godliness..., the very bread and wine are turned into the Body and Blood of God... through the Holy Spirit..., and the bread and the wine are the deified body of God”⁷⁰. The body of God is life-giving spirit, because it “was conceived by the life-giving Spirit, and what is born from the Spirit is spirit. I do not say this in order to suppress the nature of the body, but to point out its godly, life-giving virtue ... We rightly call (this mystery) communion, because through it we partake of Christ and His body and His godliness, being also united among us. Because all of us who partake of the unique bread are the unique body and the unique blood of Christ, and we are limbs for one another, becoming concorporeal with Christ... We also call it type of future things, not because they are not indeed the body and blood of Christ, but because we currently partake, through them, in Christ’s godliness, when this is done sensibly, through one sight.”⁷¹

Conclusion

With the Holy Fathers, the Eucharist – mystery of the deified Body and Blood of God – appears, first of all, as the privileged means whereby Christians’ bodies and souls receive the immortal and godly life that God, in His love, wanted to bestow upon them. It is, therefore, the very sacrament of ecclesiastic unity: since every worshiper becomes the same body and spirit with Christ, we are all complete in unity. Because where there is Christ, there is the Church, and where there is the Church, there is also Christ. No severe deficiency may affect a Church where Christ gives Himself through Eucharist in all certainty: “How would God not give us everything through His Son?” (Acc. to Rom. 9, 32.) “Because all fullness of Godliness lives, in body, through Him, and you are whole in Him, Who is head of all reign and dominion” (Acc. to Col. 2, 9-10.) Pope Leo the Great was speaking in the name of the entire Old Church when saying that, outside the confession of true faith “in God’s Church, that is the body of Christ, there is no authentic priesthood, nor genuine sacrifice”⁷². Thus, any Eucharist partake was devoid of meaning. We could not better summarize the conception of the Fathers on the inseparable binder which, in their eyes, united Eucharist, Church and the rightness of faith than by resuming these words by Saint Ignatius Theophoros: “Thus, sons of the true light, shy away from divisions and from corrupted doctrines... Be not deceived, my

⁷⁰ Saint John Damascene, *On Orthodox Faith*, PG 94, 1149.

⁷¹ Saint John Damascene, *On Orthodox Faith*, PG 94, 1152 d-1153 a.

⁷² Saint Leon the Great, *Ep. 80 ad Anatolium*: please see comment by C. Vögel, *Ordinations inconsistentes et caractère inamisible*, Turin, 1978, pp. 21-22. It describes how close Leon the Great remains to the “orthodox” doctrine on exactitude and iconomy in sacramental practice. The studies gathered together in this volume prove the un-traditional feature of the Augustinian theory on the validity of mysteries for heterodoxies, in respect of ordination and sacraments depending on it; this theory gained prevalence in the Roman Church as late as in the wake of the 13th century, with the support of scholastics.

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brothers: he who follows a doctrine that is alien (to the true faith), he shall not be in concord with Christ. Therefore, take care to only take part in one Eucharist; because there is only one body of our Lord Jesus Christ and one chalice to unite us in His blood, only one altar and only one bishop with his rectory and deacons, my fellow worshipers; so whatever you do, do it according to God”⁷³.

⁷³ Saint Ignatius Theophoros, *Aux Philadelphiens*, 3-4, Col. Sources chrétiennes, 10, p. 143.