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The Sacrament of the Eucharist as a Real, Mysterious and Personal Union of the Savior Jesus Christ with the Human Being Transfigured in Subject of Sacrifice

Abstract

The Holy and Divine Sacrament of the Eucharist constitutes the Mystery of the Church par excellence. It testifies the real, personal and mysterious presence of Jesus Christ in the shape of bread and wine through the work of the Holy Spirit during the epiclesis of the Eucharistic Liturgy. The Holy Eucharist leads us to the fullest state of "christophorus" and stresses in our lives responsibility, spiritual discernment, and worthiness for Communion. Eucharist differs fundamentally to religious conceptions like transub-



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stantiation. For the Orthodox faith there is an outright rejection of any form of rationalization of the divine mystery. Finally, the topic is crucial for an ecumenical theology due to the issue of inter-communion.

Keywords

Eucharist, communion, intercommunion, transubstantiation, salvation, epiclesis

1 Introduction

Sacraments have always been a fundamental dimension of the Christian Church. This dimension is a living and dynamic one, making that the whole 'Mystical Body' of the Savior(the Church) to become a witness, missionary and working one to gain salvation for the people. It is alive because within works the One that lives for eternity, the presence of the Holy Trinity, through the work of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, being the guarantee of that what happens on the sacramental dimension of the Church is not delusion or fantasy.

The presence and work of God in the Sacraments gives to the man integrated into Church the certainty of sanctification and salvation, a real and mysterious presence at the same time. Knowing that *a Person* is the absolute mystery of existence, the tri-personal character of God – the Holy Trinity – implies the existence of mystery, namely the mysterious presence of God, even if this presence manifests on the coordinates of creation. The personal and mysterious presence of God is the source of all apophatic knowledge of Him, as mystical/experimental, a fundamental dimension of the process of salvation.

However, there is another motivation for the mystic work of God. In His omniscience, God always knew that man would

alienate himself through the fall, and that man would serve the creature rather than the Creator. He will operate a reductionism of this relation that would reduce the greatness of God's creation only to its material side. Through ideology, man will falsify the truth about the creation of the universe/man and deny the spiritual or sacramental dimensions of creation. As a consequence man would be seen only as a cosmic accident occurred by chance or, in a best case, as the fulfillment of an evolutionary, strictly natural process, by natural selection, also randomly. The danger of naturalism for the modern and postmodern Man remains a serious one; the mystery of Christianity is the one that removes ideological naturalism as a malignant tumor both from the body of Church and of the man, which leads to spiritual and physical decease for the contemporary Christian.

The Sacramental dimension of the Church is part of its mission related not only to ecclesiology and pneumatology but to triadology or Christology as well. Under the influence of Scholasticism, various classifications were made, some of them considering the sacraments as means of initiation, others essentials, while others would have a strong ecumenical impact (e.g. the ecumenical documents relating to BEM). From a missionary point of view, all mysteries lead us to the union with God, to the level of His everlasting work as an objective condition for salvation. However, we must distinguish the Holy Sacrament of Communion (Eucharist) between all the mysteries of the Church and that occupies a unique place in the divine economy of salvation. In this study, we will try to emphasize the dogmatic, missionary, and with-ecumenical-impact aspects considered relevant by us for understanding the importance of the Eucharist for the salvation of man and the whole Christian Church.

2 The Sacrament of the Eucharist in the Light of the Teachings of Orthodox Faith

The Eucharist is the crowning of the Sacraments of Baptism and Chrismation, and not only the plenitude and strength of the new life that virtually begins through Baptism and has the virtual powers consequentially developed through Chrismation. The Eucharist implies full power over death as a separation of existence from God, started with Baptism and developed by Chrismation¹.

In the Eucharist, the man reborn into Christ and strengthened by the Holy Spirit, is no longer unite only with Christ, Who was born and died for our sins, but with Christ who died at the end of His work to rise for eternal life².

The union with the Lord in the Holy Eucharist is a full union precisely because He is no longer working in us only through His energy, brought by His Spirit, but through His flesh and blood, both imprinted in us. Moreover, where there are His body and blood, He is fully present and active as a personal subject. So the subject itself of Christ, as the subject of His body and blood, is made through the Eucharist the direct subject of our body and blood intimately united with His body and blood. Moreover, since each of us is subject of our flesh and blood, works penetrated by the body and works of Christ, we are together with Christ the subjects of our transformed body, or His body became our flesh.

In fact, the everlasting life rises within us from the supreme and concrete intimacy in which we enter, stay and grow thru the Eucharist with the divine Person of the Word, Who made

¹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă* (Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al BOR, București, 1978), p. 81.

² *Ibid.*, p. 82.

possible this intimacy with us and the communication of His divine life of our body through the human body He assumed, filled by this life through His real death, by overcoming death incurred by him in a state of mystical death and resurrection. Through this perfect intimacy and communication with Him, we live moods, feelings, and works of Christ and He lives ours penetrated and qualified by His. "From now on, I no longer live, but Christ lives in me," said St. Paul (Galatians 3, 20). In fact, the full union between Christ and us, achieved through the Eucharist, is the supreme testimony of His love for us, and this is the basis of perfect mutual communication between Him and us³. The full union to which Christ draws us to Himself through His extending with his body to us means that our union with other believers, in which Christ is extending with the same body of His. Therefore, the Eucharist is the act of achievement and continuous increase of full unity of the Church as the extended Body of Christ, perfecting the work started through the Baptism and Chrismation⁴. Thus the Eucharist is par excellence the Sacrament of the Church's unity⁵.

³ St. John Chrysostom, Homily. 46 Ev. Matthew, in J. Bareil, *Oeuvres completes de Saint Jean Chrysostom*, tome 13, p. 18: "Christ has made this rising us to greater love for Him and showing His love toward us, not only gave to see him who wishes, but to touch Him, eat Him and stick to their teeth in His flesh and unite with Him, fulfilling all desire."

⁴ Theophanes of Nicaea describes the difference between Baptism and Eucharist, stating that the work of Baptism is completed by the Eucharist. If through the baptism Christ makes men brothers, the Eucharist makes them even parts of His body. So it gives a much greater degree of annealing, of bonding. "What's next after this? He does not only please to make them the same way with him and brothers. For it does not stop with benevolence. But He makes them body and parts of It that is rather called our head like the one we are members of the body, not only brothers, through the connection with Him above mind and word. Therefore, those intending to unite with Him, as some members of Him, first makes them the same with the head through Baptism, then, by communicating and sharing His own

The Eucharist is the fulfillment of the economy of salvation, the dispensation of God's love for people and His union with us. If the Son of God wanted to come so close to the people that to unite with them as one way of their salvation and deification, He couldn't be content to incarnate only as a man with the intention of staying separate from the others, but to go further, He is incarnated in all men, not impeding them to remain special people and not ceasing to remain himself a special person for practicing perfect love.

He must always come to us, so, on the one hand, He must be on us, and on the other He must remain different from us and above us, so that He can always come in greater way to us to continue enhancing the relationship of love, to nourish the love which is also showing by the union of our body with His immaculate body and blood. A friend, although he became interior because he gave himself to you once, he always gives himself, increasing his inner side⁶.

The intimate union of the bread with the body of Lord, hypostatized in the Word, for this is the reason of bread: to be turned into flesh. Not even for the reason that with the body of the Lord through His intimate union with him, nor with our body by uniting with the body of the Word. Only *the body of Christ* deifies and pneumatizes, for His reason is to persist even in the hypostatic union with God. Much less our body is transformed into something else in the union with the assumed and pneumatized body by the Word. Our body no longer starts in the way of pneumatization and deification, as the Lord's

body and blood, sticks to himself and between them these deiform parts. To this Baptism foreruns Holy Communion "(Ep. III, PG, 150, 329-340)

⁵ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, p. 91.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 93.

body. For the reason of each body is to remain a person's body, either of the Person of the Logos or of a special human being⁷.

The appearance of Sacrifice and Sacrament of the Eucharist are inseparable. Even if the Sacrifice is a Mystery, for giving us to God we raise and partake of His holiness and blessing⁸. Moreover, even the Mystery is a Sacrifice, for the body of God which is given to us is in a state of sacrificed and risen body and is imprinting us the state of sacrifice, by which we raise and forward towards the resurrection⁹.

In the Eucharist, Christ gives us not only an irradiation of His state of sacrifice and resurrection but also His body itself in this state. That is why the Eucharist is the culmination of all other Sacraments. Believers ascend to it, or are preparing to receive the full of Christ, in the beginning through the Sacrament of Baptism and Chrismation, and then, if they have committed sins through the Sacrament of Penitence, or, in any event, by fasting and a great faerie of thoughts and wrongful deeds. Thus, strengthened by receiving Christ in the Eucharist, they can get the power of His sacrifice for worship or sacrifice their lives to God and Church, or duties filled by the Spirit of Christ to one another¹⁰.

There is no individualistic separation between Christ's sacrifice and our own. It is a full meeting between Christ and us, an intimate communication in His mood of sacrifice and state of

⁷ Ibidem, p. 101.

⁸ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Worship in Spirit and Truth*, Book X; P. G. 68, 688 A: "For it is said that is sanctified what is brought to God". Or: "Sacrifice sanctifies the one who touches it. Because we are approaching for the holy nothing else, but to partake of Holy Christ through unspeakable, spiritual sacrifice"(Ibidem, Book XII, col. 829 A). Or: "Eating bread from heaven, that is Christ, or bloodless sacrifice, we are blessed" (Ibidem, Book XIII, col. 853).

⁹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, p. 104

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 105

sacrifice and ours. So, on the one hand, we offer ourselves to God, but on the other Christ takes us and encloses us in His sacrifice, or He updates His sacrifice for us, as our sacrifice made by Him. "Each offers his life as a gift to God almighty"¹¹ But it is surrounded by Christ in His sacrifice, offering it as a fruition of His sacrifice for us, as an update of it.¹²

The removal of the epiclesis in the Catholic liturgy is connected to the decrease of the importance of priest's and community's prayer in the Eucharistic transformation. Moreover, with it, and with the diminishing of the role of the Holy Spirit. For the Spirit works through prayer. Transformation became the automatic consequence of words of establishing the Mystery by Jesus Christ at the Lord's Supper, so of some words spoken in the past.

By epiclesis stands out the importance of bishop's or priest's prayer, as an expression of the humble feeling of work of the Spirit of Christ working through him and as a means of vibrant living of community's prayer, united in him and with him in prayer. The unity of Church is lost where men pray separately, or look for a unity of their prayers, their momentary vague feeling and transformation is not related to united in Christ community's prayer, which lives this unity of prayer in one representative person and seen as the objective center of convergence. This is the case of Protestantism. It also weakens where members of hierarchy use foreign means of prayer for maintaining the unity of Church into Christ, which is designed more as impersonal and antipersonnel unity, united by Christ,

¹¹ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Închinare în Duh și Adevăr*, cartea XVI, col. 1013 D.

¹² Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, p. 109

as is the case of Catholicism, where also the transformation is not tied by this unity in the prayer of Church, with Christ¹³.

3 Missionary Aspects of the Holy Eucharist

Missionary speaking we must point out some important aspects related to the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist. We need to start from the confessed and assumed truth of the Church that the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist remains par excellence the Sacrament of the Church. In it we have the real presence of the Savior in His capacity as the Head of His Church; also, we must affirm the presence of the Savior in other manifestations of the Church, such as word, icons, religious services, blessings, doxologies, etc.

It is also important to note that this Holy Sacrament value on the most fully as possible, the great virtue of Christian responsibility. The responsibility as a Christian virtue with missionary pastoral meanings implies the existence of two basic elements: 1) on the one hand the awareness that the Eucharist Christ is truly the heavenly bread descended from heaven for our salvation, according to the word of the Savior¹⁴ and 2) accountability as a virtue implies the presence of spiritual discernment as special and important virtue for man to union with Christ, and achieve salvation.

Holy Communion helps us to understand as much of what it means worthiness of the man that truly wants to unite with Christ while being at the same time aware of nobody is truly worthy to receive the real Savior, under the form of bread and

¹³ Ibidem, pp. 117-118

¹⁴ "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (John 6:35)

wine. We see therefore the unbreakable bond between Christian virtue of responsibility and the virtue of worthiness for Holy Communion, understanding, speaking missionary the danger and harmfulness of unworthy communion of both the clergy and the laity, which St. Paul speaks in the Epistle to the Corinthians¹⁵.

Missionary speaking must be strongly affirmed that all Sacraments lead to the acquisition of the state of "Christophorus", but the Holy Eucharist gives us the most authentic and perfect state of "Christophorus", moreover the literal fulfillment of the word of St. Apostle Paul: "I have been crucified with Christ; I do not live, but Christ lives in me. (Galatians 1.20)

The Church rejects any form of rationalization of Holy Communion Sacrament, whether is about transubstantiation, about impanation, or the reduction of the Eucharist to a mere symbol without soteriological effect over the life of Church, such as the "Lord's Supper" which rejects real and mystic presence of the Savior in the Eucharist and says it's just a symbolic presence.

Some Catholic theologians have spoken of three bodies of Christ after the Eucharist transformation: His personal body, his mystical body or Eucharistic community and the Eucharistic body. however, other Catholic theologians have noted, rightly, that in reality it's only one body, because the mystical body is nothing but an extension of the personal body, and the Eucharistic body is the body of Word Himself offering to the continuation of Church community, as a continuation of his mystical body which does not cancel the distinction between it

¹⁵ "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord." (1 Corinthians 11:27).

and the personal body of Christ, which always forms his Mystical Body¹⁶.

The Eucharistic body is nothing but the personal body of Christ, about to feed forward his mystical body opened to this feeding and thirst of it. The Mystical body or Eucharistic community has, on the one hand, something in addition to the personal body of the Lord, entering in its composition bodies of believers, too; on the other, much less divine present life, but the personal body of the Lord, and therefore is able and willing to feed continuously from that body, and the Lord always gives His body as Eucharistic body. The community surrenders Lord with the thirst to reduce what distinguishes the Lord's body and fills more with Him; and the Lord surrenders to it, meeting its need and demand for to be filled with more than Himself. In this sense, Christ's heavenly bread always gives Himself as food and never ends and never definitely quenches the need for food of the faithful and the community Church. The transformation of the earthly bread in heavenly bread and its sharing with the community is thus an act of God but also provoked by the demand and necessity felt by the Eucharistic community. During the transformation and Eucharistic sharing occurs an act of organic fulfillment of what is already in the church, but also a coming of the Lord as surplus in its womb. Throughout his love of people, each is giving, and each is ever asking. Throughout the Eucharist love, the community only demands and Christ only gives Himself. However, the demand too is in the power of what already has and matters in fulfilling love and its receiving; in this sense, it also plays a active role in producing this new coming of Christ, which on the other hand is

¹⁶ H. De Lubac, *Glauben aus der Liebe*, (trad. germ. a opere: *Le Catholicisme*, Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln), p. 86-87

part of it and so it comes from it. Therefore Eucharist may take place in the Church and share it too¹⁷.

Protestantism, thinking that our salvation issue is resolved legally, through the death supported by Christ in our place, is natural not only to recognize the Eucharist as a sacrifice but as the foundation of all Sacraments, whose personal content is the power of the actual status of the sacrifice of Christ. Catholicism, considering the question of salvation resolved in a legal way, maintained Eucharist as Sacrifice and all other Sacraments based on ancient church tradition, but does not put the Eucharistic Sacrifice in touch with the current state of the sacrifice of Christ, but also use all kinds of other unconvincing explanations of the nature of sacrifice of the Eucharist and does not see any more the close connection between the communion of the faithful of Christ and His condition of sacrifice; but sees only the union of love with Christ as the source of power, joy and resurrection. So it separates the sacrament nature of the Eucharist from the nature of sacrifice, and, in agreement with this, no longer sees other Sacraments as a sacrifice. Moreover, this is connected to ascetic removal efforts of believers, claiming only the importance signs of strength, not seeing that strength without ascetic feature becomes worldliness strength, unclerical.¹⁸

The protestant theologians deny the special ministering priesthood because they still do not consider the presentation of Christ's sacrifice before the Father for believers and their necessity for them to bring their sacrifice that Christ may receive, uniting it with His sacrifice. They challenge the need to continue the sacrifice of Christ and believers need to sacrifice, believing that salvation was achieved through the sacrifice of

¹⁷ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, p. 103

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 106

Christ on Calvary, which is equivalent legal substitute for human sins once and for all. For them it is not so necessary an update of this sacrifice, because those who want to be saved have to unite with Christ who continues to be a sacrifice, living out of them as a man and as God. Denial of ministering priesthood is based on the conception of salvation externally accomplished in a past moment of history, accepting belief as a purely subjective act of those who want to acquire this salvation without current saving work of Christ, as further objective work¹⁹.

The catholic doctrine has sought an explanation of this mysterious transformations and learn that are being transformed (transubstantiated) only the substance of bread and wine in the Body and Blood of Christ, remaining unaltered the form of bread and wine, that accidental substance of bread and wine. Moreover, this transubstantiation of bread and wine substance into the Body and Blood of Christ takes place when the bishop or priest says the Savior-words of the arrangement of the Sacrament: "Take, eat: this is my body ... Drink ye all, this is my blood of the New Law... ".²⁰This doctrine is rejected by orthodox teaching which is based on the theology of St. Gregory of Nyssa. He thinks a change of form, not substance, but by the importance, he attributed to form, he eludes the difficulty of explaining the change of the substance. This doctrine has exerted a decisive influence on Eastern theology. Sf. John Damascene takes as the basis but does not exceed the precision. Indeed, St. John says, on the one hand, the full identity of the consecrated elements and the body and blood of Christ, and on

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 120

²⁰ *** *Îndrumări misionare*. (Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al BOR, București, 1986), p. 537.

the other hand, he says that the bread and wine become, by consecration, the historical body of Christ.²¹

About a presence of Christ in the Eucharist also Protestants talk, but different from Orthodox and Roman-Catholics. Protestants have not, however, a unified doctrine, but varied views, according to concerned reformers. After *Luther*, in *Holy Eucharist*, Christ is present, but not by the transformation of bread and wine, but *per impanationem* (*Latin*). That is that the Eucharist bread and wine remain what they are, bread and wine, but with and under the bread (*in pane, cum pane and sub pane*) are present, but invisible both the body and blood of Christ. So, the Eucharist is only a co-existence of Christ and the Eucharistic elements, which are kept further the same, and the Eucharistic Body of Christ is only spiritual, not material.²²

For *Zwingli*, which represents the most extremist Protestant position and whose ideas are less Christian, the Holy Eucharist is only a memorial of the Last Supper. The Eucharist is just a symbol of the Body of Christ. "This is my body" from Christ's words would mean "This is the symbol of my body."²³

Baptists do not recognize the Eucharist as a sacrament, but a symbol or remembrance of the Last Supper attended by Christ the Savior and the 12 apostles, for which is also called the Lord's Supper or "Holy Communion with God."²⁴

Lord's Supper is a commemoration of the death of Christ (1 Corinthians 11.24, 25). The elements are symbols of Christ's broken body and His shed blood (1 Corinthians 10.16, 11.24,

²¹ Petre Semen și Liviu Petcu (coord.), *Părinții Capadocieni*.(Editura Fundației Academice "Axis", Iași, 2009), p. 37.

²² *Îndrumări misionare*, p. 537

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ *Official responses of Burma Baptist Convention*, in "Churches respond to BEM", vol. IV, Edited by Max Thurian, (World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1987), p. 187

25). Dinner is a prophecy of Christ is coming for us and of our dinner with Him in Heaven (Matthew 26.29, Mark 2.25, Luke 10.16,1 Corinthians 11.26).

These two ordinances, the Baptism and the Lord's Supper, were commanded by Christ, but they say wrongly, there is no evidence in the New Testament that there is a sacramental (sanctifying) value in any of them. Also, say that in the New Testament there is no text to confirm the statement that "every baptized member of the body of Christ receives in the Eucharist the insurance of forgiveness of sins."²⁵

The Eucharist also called the Lord's Supper (many Baptists avoid using the word "Eucharist" because of its use particularly in the Orthodox Church) is a symbol modeled after the Last Supper narrated in the Gospels, in which Jesus commanded to "do this in remembrance of me." (Luke 22.19). It should be chaired by an "ordained priest."²⁶ Also, the word "Eucharist" is not common, although it is legitimized by an old tradition which confirms it.²⁷

Baptists recognize the validity of the Bible, but they understand the Eucharist as a dinner in the sense of gratitude. It was instituted by Christ when He broke the bread and poured the wine into the chalice. Nevertheless, Baptists have preferred the title of *the Lord's Supper*, emphasizing that this not be the Supper of Church, but the Lord's Supper, and also remember the words of Jesus: "Do this in remembrance of me." They

²⁵ *Official responses of Baptist Union of Scotland*, in "Churches respond to BEM", vol. III, Edited by Max Thurian, (World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1987), p. 235.

²⁶ *Official responses of Covenanted Baptist Churches in Wales*, in "Churches respond to BEM", vol. III, Edited by Max Thurian, (World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1987), p. 255.

²⁷ *Official responses of Union of Evangelical Free Churches in the GDR*, in "Churches respond to BEM", vol. IV, Edited by Max Thurian, (World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1987), p. 195

believe that this perspective is consistent with "the meaning of the Eucharist conferred by BEM text, that of anamnesis."²⁸

It is necessary to mention also the harmfulness of frequent Communion without discernment confession, and especially, a sign that the Church rejects any or fanatical pious people influence on the Holy Eucharist.

The importance of the Eucharist - the missionary perspective - is fundamental, especially in the current controversy on the issue of inter-communion, subject that we will highlight in the next section.

4 The Holy Eucharist in Contemporary Ecumenical Documents

Roman-Catholic teaching says that the Eucharist is "the source and summit of the whole Christian life." All sacraments, as well as all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound by the Eucharist and ordained to them. For in the Holy Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, Christ himself, our Pasch.

The Eucharist signifies and realizes the living communion with God and the unity of the People of God by which the Church is itself. The Eucharist is also the peak of the action, in Christ, in which God sanctifies the world, and of the worship in the Spirit that people bring to Christ and through Him to Father. Finally, by the Eucharistic celebration, we already unite with heavenly liturgy and anticipate eternal life when God will be all in all. The Eucharist is the central act of worship the church. For this

²⁸ *Official responses of American Baptist Churches in the USA*, in "Churches respond to BEM", vol. III, Edited by Max Thurian, (World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1987), p. 260.

reason, the BEM text recommends frequent celebration of the Eucharist.²⁹

Celebrating the Last Supper with His apostles in the Paschal feast, Jesus gave the Jewish Passover its definitive meaning. Indeed, the passage of Jesus to the Father through the death and resurrection, the New Passover (TN Jewish), is anticipated in the Supper and celebrated in the Eucharist which perfects the Jewish Passover and anticipates the final Easter of the Church in the glory of the kingdom.

"Formulating that the celebration of the Eucharist includes the proclamation of the word can be misunderstood because it may give the impression that the proclamation of the word is just kind of part of the sacrament of the Eucharist. It would be better to say that the Supper of the Eucharist is always in connection with the proclamation of the word"³⁰.

The command of Jesus to repeat His gestures and words "until He comes" (1 Cor. 11.26) not only requires us to remember Jesus and what he did. It concerns the liturgical celebration, by the apostles and their successors, of the memorial of Christ's life, death, resurrection, and intercession to the Father.

The Eucharist is the sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Father, a blessing by which the Church expresses its gratitude to God for all His blessings, for all that He has committed through creation, redemption, and sanctification. Eucharist means first of all "thanks giving." The definition of the Eucharist as "a sacrament of the gift which God gives us in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit combines the two aspects of the sacrament of the

²⁹ *Official responses of Roman Catholic Church*, in "Churches respond to BEM", vol. V, Edited by Max Thurian, (World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1988), p. 11

³⁰ *Official responses of Old Catholic Church of Switzerland*, in "Churches respond to BEM", vol. III, Edited by Max Thurian, (World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1988), p. 11

Eucharist: real presence of Christ made by the Holy Spirit and the gift signified by this.³¹

The Orthodox Church believes that the documents from Lima show both the anamnestic character of the Eucharist but particularly the Eucharist as epiclesis issues which are inseparable. The texts concerning this sacrament, another indisputable aspect is the presence of Jesus Christ Himself in the Eucharist. "Should welcome the recommendation that all Christians to share as often as possible under the condition of them to be morally prepared, as it is still since the early Church."³²

The Declaration on the Holy Eucharist, established at Lima, is a serious and successful attempt to overcome those differences between churches on this teaching of major importance for the ecumenical movement. To understand the doctrine of the Sacrament of the Eucharist is necessary to consider the texts of the Holy Bible and patristic clarifications, even if patristic literature does not abound with texts in this respect.

Regarding the introduction of documents from Lima called "The Institution of the Eucharist" is very fair to say that the Eucharist is "the central act of worship of the Church." From this statement, it is indeed possible to make considerable progress towards approaching churches to liturgical life and practice. In the next section, "The meaning of the Eucharist" is clarified the miracle of transforming the elements of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. Also is correctly defined the purpose of the Holy Eucharist, namely communion with the body of

³¹ *Official responses of Roman Catholic Church*, in "Churches respond to BEM", vol. V, Edited by Max Thurian, (World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1988), p. 17

³² *Official responses of Russian Orthodox Church*, in "Churches respond to BEM", vol II, Edited by Max Thurian, (World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1986), p. 7

Christ, with the kingdom of justice, love, and peace in the Holy Spirit. It would have been complete defining the purpose of the Holy Eucharist if it were included the renewal and salvation of all mankind.

Section "The Eucharist as Anamnesis or Memorial of Christ," emphasizes the uniqueness of Christ's redeeming sacrifice and everything the Son of God made by his incarnation, life, sufferings, death, resurrection and ascension to heaven; this perspective provides protection against those unorthodox teachings which argue that the Eucharist not an update of the redemptive sacrifice and see It only as a remembrance of what was done in the past, at the Last Supper. "The Eucharistic Anamnesis" Christ is present with everything He has done for us, allowing us the communion with Him.

In the document from Lima regarding the Holy Eucharist, we see a positive trend to link the sacrament to Holy Church. "From the Orthodox point of view, however, this relationship should be expressed more safely and thoroughly, because, according to Orthodox teaching, the Holy Eucharist has a profound ecclesiological aspect and can be committed only in the Holy Church, while the Church grows only by Eucharistic communion with Christ Redeemer, Head of the Church".³³The Eucharist can also be defined as a "commemoration of the Holy Spirit, the communion of the faithful, thanksgiving and supper of God's kingdom."³⁴

Orthodox teaching on the Sacrament of the Eucharist includes several aspects that are essential, that relationship of the

³³ *Official responses of Bulgarian Orthodox Church*, in "Churches respond to BEM", vol II, Edited by Max Thurian, (World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1986), p. 17

³⁴ *Official responses of Finnish Orthodox Church*, in "Churches respond to BEM", vol II, Edited by Max Thurian, (World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1986), p. 27

Eucharist to the Church, the report (NT relation) of the Holy Eucharist with the unity of faith, the role of the Holy Spirit in relation to the anamnestic and the "epiclesis" appearance the true meaning of the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus Christ and His real presence in the gifts of bread and wine and the giving of Eucharist to baptized children³⁵.

However, the Orthodox Church makes several criticisms of items in the Lima Declaration text which recognizes the sacramental character of the Eucharist, but sometimes uses the word "symbol" when speaking of the Eucharist: "The Eucharist is the living symbol of the sacrifice of Christ" "bread and wine are symbols of profound realities of Christ's being", "the Eucharist is the symbol of the Kingdom of Heaven", "the Eucharist is the sacred supper symbol by which we humans communicate with love of God in Jesus Christ". Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist is an essential teaching (NT doctrine), but the statement "Christ's anamnesis is crucial in the Eucharistic supper" changes its importance from the real presence of Christ in anamnesis or memory of Christ's presence, without emphasizing the fundamental unity of epiclesis and anamnesis as a link between the work of the Son of God and the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist.³⁶

The Eucharist is above all that the Church has made itself as sacred body and bride of Christ, in time and space in this fallen world. In the Eucharist, every believer becomes a member of the Church of God. In the Eucharist the kingdom of God brought by Christ Savior of the world is made more accessible through

³⁵ *Official responses of Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria*, in "Churches respond to BEM", vol III, Edited by Max Thurian, (World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1987), p. 2

³⁶ *Official responses of Romanian Orthodox Church*, in "Churches respond to BEM", vol III, Edited by Max Thurian, (World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1987), p. 7

the Holy Spirit who is sent by the Father to all who acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Messiah and God. In the Eucharist the Church's unity is present, the apostolic faith is expressed, the universality is expressed, and the holiness is offered to all. In the Eucharist, the Church's theological vision is lived, its evangelical mission is strengthened, and the spiritual life of its members nurtured and renewed.³⁷

In Orthodoxy the wealth of traditional elements which are found in the Holy Eucharist is evidently proven. It is also evident that in the Eucharist is present the Trinitarian sacrament: the world is present in thanksgiving to the Father, the Eucharist puts up to date the transformation of Christians in the image of Christ, the Holy Spirit by the Eucharist gives a foretaste of the Kingdom of God, Christ is really present in gifts of bread and wine transformed into the body and blood of the Lord, which brings the kingdom of God as a foretaste of Parousia of God.³⁸

The exclusive character of memory is disapproved by the Romanian Orthodox Church because it is necessary to put emphasis on anamnesis. As with Baptism, using the word "symbol" in the text of BEM about the Eucharist is considered ambiguous. More appropriate terms would be elements, matter, and act. These terms may not be interpreted dogmatically wrong. In fact, the term "symbol" is too often used in the entire document. The claim that by the Eucharist is received "assurance of forgiveness of sins" is regarded as evasive. Simpler would be to use the words of the Holy Bible: "for the forgiveness of sins." Romanian Orthodox theologians

³⁷ *Official responses of The Orthodox Church in America*, in "Churches respond to BEM", vol III, Edited by Max Thurian, (World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1987), p. 18

³⁸ Vladimir Berzonsky, *Baptism, Eucharist And Ministry, a pastor's view*, in "St. Vladimir's theological quarterly", vol. 27, 1983, p. 254

emphasize the less ambiguous statement, even very clear regarding the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. In this sense, the meaning or nature of memory can be accepted. Any ambiguity about this term is eliminated by the translation into Romanian of the word "remembrance."³⁹.

5 Conclusions

Considering everything presented, we understand how important the sacraments are in the Christian life and the Church, the more we must emphasize the unique importance of the Holy Eucharist for eternal union and communion with God - the Holy Trinity to acquire salvation. Thus, all the sacraments and especially the Holy Eucharist, are truly essential in our soteriological effort. When we talk about salvation, we must identify - by the doctrine of the Church - God's side in salvation, as well as man's side in salvation. From meeting and harmonizing of the two "sides," it reaches the reality of acquiring salvation. So God comes with His grace, and with His real presence in human life, as fruit of His will to save the man, and man responds to God through his effort in the process of salvation by working faith through facts, metamorphosed into Christian virtues as fruits of the free and full will of man to be saved.

Thus, both the sacraments of the Eucharist and their goal -the salvation, we must see them as God's gifts as an expression of His absolute and eternal love to man, knowing that salvation,

³⁹ Antonie Plămădeală, *The BEM Document in Romanian Orthodox Theology: The Present Stage of Discussions*, in "Greek Orthodox Theological Review", Volume 30, No 2, 1985, p. 201.

"although it is free, it is not cheap although it costs nothing, is extremely expensive."⁴⁰

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⁴⁰ Andrei Pleșu, *Parabolele lui Iisus. Adevărul ca poveste*, Editura Humanitas, București, 2012, p. 269

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