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The Eucharist as “Hermeneutical” Centre of the Sacramental Life of the Church

Abstract

Orthodox belief bestows a significant role on the Eucharist not as individual sacrament, but as worship component of the great liturgical system that the Orthodox faith *calls the worship of the Holy Trinity*. All sacraments are rooted in the Sacrament of Christ and his redemptional deeds: the Birth, the Passion, and the Resurrection. The Eucharist is the pinnacle of liturgical worship as it is the act that establishes the Church as the Church of Christ. It is the symbol of sacrifice that includes the sacrifice of the Church.

In the Church’s liturgical and pastoral tradition, the relation between the Confession and the Eucharist is viewed in various manners. Both in



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the East and the West, the two sacraments are considered part of the twofold system consisting of Confession and Communion, which resulted in the subordination of Confession to the Eucharist, a thing harmful to both concepts.

Keywords

Eucharist, Sacrament, Supper, Confession, Penance, Worship

1 Introduction

The entire system of the Orthodox faith is essentially liturgical. In the life and spirituality of the Orthodox Church, the divine worship centres around the Eucharist, the nucleus and specific element of ecclesiastical life. In its extended meaning, divine worship includes all the acts that place man in a relation with God¹, and it represents the catalyst of faith alongside its components: doctrine, spirituality, church practices.

In the Orthodox faith, worship is the nourishment for the reason of being a Christian. While the initially Catholic Western world from scholastics on views worship as a shield for theological meditation and the Protestant world acknowledges it as mere sermon, the Orthodox faith has always regarded worship as a manner of living, a genuine dialogue between God and man. Through its forms, worship is in itself a sermon on God as well as His teachings and commandments, especially

¹ E. Braniște, *Liturgica specială*, (București: Bible and Mission Institute of the Orthodox Church, from her: IBMBOR Publishing House, 1980), p. 91; cf. L. Streza, *Cinstirea lui Dumnezeu. Cultul și formele lui*, in: *Credința ortodoxă și viața creștină*, (Sibiu: Faculty of Theology Publishing House 1992), p. 259, (223-259).

since the act of worship, including church services, anthems, liturgical acts and symbols, displays a rich revelational content². According to the Orthodox faith, the worship is based on the spirituality of the Divine Liturgy. To the Orthodox Christian, the Divine Liturgy is the privileged space of the liturgical-sacramental Parousia of our Lord Jesus Christ³, a *sui generis* manner by means of which the sacraments of Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection are performed between the Pentecost and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ⁴.

2 The Liturgy as Sacrifice of the Church Par Excellence

To the Orthodox Church, the ecclesiastical community lives through and within the Eucharist that encompasses the whole universe, and theology, as the science of God, becomes doxology, a liturgical expression⁵. As theology of Jesus Christ's sacrifice, the Orthodox liturgy is filled with symbols, significations and mystery. Therefore, the Orthodox liturgy introduces us to the sacraments of Jesus Christ's Incarnation, Birth, Gospel, Passion, Burial, Resurrection and Ascension in an uninterrupted flow of a symbolic and mystical nature, making use of the entire historical, dogmatic and ethical material, like a true compendium of theological truths. The Divine Liturgy's antiphons, litanies and prayers express a profound theology

² N. D. Necula, *Cultul divin mijloc de apărare a dreptei credințe*, in: *Glasul Bisericii*, 9-12 (1976), p. 902, (901-907).

³ L. Streza, *Valențe ale misterului liturgic în Sfânta Liturghie*, in: Mircea Păcurariu (coord.) *Teologie, Slujire, Ecumenism*, (Sibiu: Andrei Șaguna Faculty of Theology Publishing House, 1996), p. 110, (110-123)

⁴ C. Vagaggini, *Il senso teologico della liturgia*, (Roma: Edizioni San Paolo, 1957), p. 30.

⁵ I. Zizioulas, *Creations as Eucharist*, trans. Caliope Papacioc (București: Bizantin Publishing House, 1999), p. 11.

that centres around Jesus Christ, the God-Man sacrificed for us⁶. From this standpoint as well, the Orthodox liturgy foreshadows the experience of God's Kingdom through apophatic view.

Centred around the Eucharist, the Orthodox liturgy foreshadows the future, preparing believers for the afterlife, and mirroring God's Kingdom. This is conspicuous from the very beginning: "*Blessed is the kingdom of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages*"⁷. This blessing is not uttered randomly by the priest who performs the liturgy, but only after the opening of the Gates of the Heavenly Kingdom, as an invitation for all participants to take part in the Kingdom of the Holy Trinity.

In his work, "*Spiritualitate și comuniune în Liturghia ortodoxă*" [Spirituality and Communion in the Orthodox Liturgy], Father Dumitru Stăniloae finds six meanings for these introductory words of the Divine Liturgy. 1. The praise of the Kingdom of the Holy Trinity entails the community's will to progress on the path of spirituality, as the person who praises also desires to be in harmony with the thing praised; 2. The Kingdom is the Kingdom of the Father who has always loved human kind: "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life*" (Jn 3.16); and the Son, who has become our Brother through his Incarnation; and the Holy Spirit who cleanses us of our sins; 3. As the Kingdom of the Holy Trinity is the Kingdom of Love, it is obvious that it is the Kingdom of Communion, a communion that grows deeper with every Divine Liturgy attended, only to reach perfection in the afterlife; 4. This Kingdom is also eternal, meaning that the Divine Liturgy brings forth the eschatological

⁶ T. Valdman, La celebrazione eucaristica culmine della vita comunione ortodossa, in: Luigi Sartori (coord.) *Eucaristia sfida alle Chiese divise*, (Padova: Messaggero Publishing House, 1984), p. 168, (151-175)

⁷ *Liturghier, of Saint John Chrysostom*: <http://www.orthodox.net/services/sluzebnic-chrysostom.pdf>

aspect of Christian life; 5. The Kingdom's Gates were opened by the Son of God through His Sacrifice that is reiterated and renewed with every Liturgy, placing the entire world in the position of the sacrificed party; 6. The Divine Liturgy is, thus, a celebration to the full extent of the word⁸.

From this perspective on the Kingdom of God, the mentioning of the First Coming and the waiting for the Second Coming during the liturgy are not only psychological moments, but real moments when the Holy Spirit performs in a mysterious manner the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the deified Body of Christ. The mysterious movement in the Divine Liturgy becomes the mysterious descend and ascent, the Ascension and the Pentecost, the anamnesis of Christ turned into a real presence, meaning an anticipated Parousia⁹. While the Divine Liturgy is, to us, a reiteration of Christ's work, starting with his Incarnation and ending with His death and Resurrection, the Liturgy may receive the attribute of apophatic knowledge. This statement is also based on the fact that the Divine Liturgy brings together past, present and the eschatological eternity, meaning that it provides us with the opportunity to overcome the barrier of time and bathe in the light of the future alongside Jesus Christ. In fact, there is no actual reference to time or space in the Divine Liturgy. In the Orthodox liturgy, the barriers of time and space are dissolved through Christ's sacrifice that is reiterated with every Eucharist. Liturgy is, thus, defined as an eternal present, an eternal reiteration of our salvation through Jesus Christ, an eternal present of redemption, or the Eighth Day mentioned by the Church Fathers. The Divine Liturgy paradoxically brings

⁸ D. Stăniloae, *Spiritualitate și comuniune în Liturghia ortodoxă*, (Craiova: Mitropolia Olteniei Publishing House, 1986), p. 134.

⁹ C. Olivier, *La Chiesa Ortodossa*, (Brescia: Queriniana Edizioni, 1989), p. 80.

together “*God’s time*” and “*man’s time*”¹⁰, becoming, thus, a truly divine as well as human work, as Jesus Christ is the God-Man who also includes the believers in His sacrifice that takes place beyond time and space, through joint prayer and the gifts brought to the Altar. Therefore, there is a continuous movement that takes place during the Divine Liturgy, a continuous dialogue between God and man, a movement that places us in the Kingdom to come. All in the liturgy moves forward: nothing remains static. The symbolism is not allegorical or parable-based in nature, but iconic, in the sense that the believers take part in the sacrifice of Christ¹¹. To that extent, the Eucharistic gathering is more than a sign or a symbol. The Eucharistic synaxis represents the community of those living a continuous participation in the divine life and who are, thus, the main liturgical sign. Through his participation in the liturgy, man ceases to be a mere individual and becomes a partner in the dialogue, who may follow the example of Jesus Christ and sacrifice himself. During the Liturgy, “*I*” inevitably becomes “*We*”. The liturgical gathering is not the history of one man, but a way to experience the alterity of the other¹².

Such a sacramental view of the Church is the core theme of Eucharistic ecclesiology. It is derived from the liturgy which takes place in the midst of the Church community, and its roots lie in the Orthodox theology. “Eucharistic ecclesiology” means: in the Eucharistic assembly of a local community the mystery of the Church manifests itself essentially as a sacramental community. In it is manifest what Church is in itself: the descent of the heavenly liturgy, man’s entry and with him the world into the same life-giving communication with God through Christ,

¹⁰ A. Catella, *Eucaristia Domenicale vertice della vita cristiana*, in Rinaldo Falsini, *Il mistero cristiano e la sua celebrazione*, (Milano: Edizioni OR, 1994), p. 68, (66-85)

¹¹ I. Zizioulas, *Creations as Eucharist*, p. 30.

¹² A. Catella, *Eucaristia Domenicale*, p. 68.

whose human nature here and now in the happening of the liturgy opens the source of deification for man and the world¹³. The Church, as Body of Christ, is first and foremost a harmonious unity in faith and the Holy Spirit. The Eucharistic communion with and in Christ entails communion in faith and understanding and it cannot be seen as a mere sentimental, shallow, or transient encounter between individuals belonging to different ecclesiastical groups that remain forever separated. The Eucharistic communion cannot be intercommunion between spiritual fragments that continue to remain separated from the ecclesiastical body. Those who commune with the Body and Blood of Christ must follow the advice of the Liturgy: "*Let us love one another that with one mind we may confess 'I love You, Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Trinity one in essence and inseparable'*"¹⁴.

During the communion, the believers become One Ecclesiastical Body and they may embrace and kiss, bearing the kiss of peace as sign of their unity in faith and confession. Those belonging to Churches in schism from the Orthodox Church cannot receive communion together with Orthodox Church members as they lack the love for the same Church as well as the same faith¹⁵. Therefore, the Eucharist, as both Sacrament and Sacrifice, represents the unity of faith and confession of a community gathered together with a priest ordained by a bishop to perform the Divine Liturgy. Therefore, the Eucharist supports

¹³ M. Kunzler, *The Church's Liturgy*, (London: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2001), p. 56.

¹⁴ *Liturgier*, (2000), p. 157, (trans.: *The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*: <http://www.orthodox.net/services/sluzebnic-chrysostom.pdf>)

¹⁵ D. Stăniloae, *Teologia Euharistiei*, in: *Ortodoxia*, 3 (1969), p. 360, (343-364).

the unity of the Church as well as its status as mystical Body of Christ¹⁶.

The components of Eucharist's double meaning as Sacrament and Sacrifice in the Orthodox belief are inseparable, complementary and they cannot be divided, just like the two dimensions cannot be divided in the life of Christ. The Orthodox rite of the Divine Liturgy states profoundly and expressively this unity between the Sacrifice on the Golgotha mountain and the Sacrifice of the Eucharist. The Divine Liturgy aims at achieving the communion of the believers with the Body and Blood of Christ and is rooted in sacrifice. These two aspects represent the same liturgical action. It is only to human beings that the two aspects appear differently from a theoretical standpoint. To human beings, as material and transient beings, therefore subject to the limitations of time and space, the historical Crucifixion occurred one time and therefore, the Liturgy seems to be a celebration, a periodical repetition or reiteration of this event that occurred 2,000 years ago. From God's point of view, as entity not subject to time or space, the Sacrifice on the Cross is a permanent, continuous, present event, reiterated by means of the Eucharistic sacrifice¹⁷, which is why it is accurate to state that the Divine Liturgy occurs outside time and space. The inclusion of man's Sacrifice (the bread and the wine, the Church's prayer) in the Sacrifice of Christ was expressly clarified by the Orthodox liturgical theology through *transformation* (μεταβολη), an act that confirms the homogeneity between the sacrifice on Golgotha and the sacrifice of the Eucharist¹⁸. Highlighting the presence of Christ's Sacrifice in the Holy Eucharist, Nicolae Cabasila explains this act of *transformation* as follows:

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ E. Branște, *Explicarea Sfintei Liturghii după Cabasilas Nicolae*, (București: Printing Religious Books 1943), p. 76.

¹⁸ C. Galeriu, *Jertfă și Răscumpărare*, (București: Harisma Publishing House, 1991), p. 236.

" the Lamb of God was sacrificed once only, for all time. Now let us see whether the liturgy is a real sacrifice, and not just a representation. The sacrificing of a sheep consists in a changing of its state; it is changed from an unsacrificed sheep to a sacrificed one. The same is true here; the bread is changed from unsacrificed bread into something sacrificed. In other words, it is changed from ordinary unsacrificed bread into that very Body of Christ which was truly sacrificed"¹⁹.

This *transformation* (μεταβολη) determines the essence of the Eucharist, and basically, the essence of every Sacrament, as each Sacrament not only entails, but also achieves this transformation, under various forms. All Sacraments include the Sacrificial and the Sacramental dimensions to a certain extent, because Jesus Christ sacrifices himself for us and offers us as well as Himself as sacrifice to His Father for the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life in all sacraments. All sacraments are related to the sacrifice of Christ and all of them bestow onto us the power to offer our own sacrifice, drawing on Christ's act of sacrifice²⁰.

Therefore, the Church lives under the sign of Sacrifice and Resurrection. Its condition is both sacrificial and pastoral and, therefore, the Church and the Holy Eucharist cannot be separated, as they unite to form a sacrament, a liturgical act of communion with the Holy Trinity and communion among people. This has led to the Eucharist being oftentimes considered the most important of all Church Sacraments. It is the central and fundamental nexus of the Church's entire liturgical system, but the relation between the Eucharist and the other sacraments is not of absolute domination. In truth,

¹⁹ N. Cabasilas, *A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*, trans. J.M. Hussey and P.A. McNulty, (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), p. 81.

²⁰ D. Stăniloae, *Teologie Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, (vol. 3, București: IBMBOR, 1997), p. 72.

this importance is drawn from the fact that all Church Sacraments are connected to the idea of sacrifice. In all sacraments, and particularly in the Eucharist, the Church already lives in an eschatological context, where “to think” from a divine perspective means to assign an all-encompassing meaning to Christ’s sacrifice. To achieve this, the Orthodox Church administers the first three sacraments (the Baptism, the Chrismation and the Eucharist) in one liturgical rite that includes not only the Christian initiation, but also the eschatological perspective of redemption. In uniting this triad, the Baptism, the Chrismation and the Eucharist, the Church celebrates a true iteration of the whole Sacrament of Christ.

Therefore, the Orthodox Church does not treat the Sacraments individually, but in connection to Christ’s sacrifice, the source of their epiclesis, as well as in connection to each other, as each sacrament is a step to the next sacrament. It is because of this reason that there is no possible comparison between the liturgies in the Orthodox Church. Each liturgical segment is part of the great liturgical system that the Orthodox faith calls the worship of the Holy Trinity.

But what makes the Eucharist the summit of the ecclesiastical liturgical celebration? The answer to this question arises from the fact that in the Orthodox faith, there is no ecclesiastical body without the Eucharist and no Eucharist without its sacramental dimension, the Sacrament of Church Sacrifice, a community act that manifests itself through the Divine Liturgy. This is the only manner to overcome Communion being regarded as an individualistic act.

3 The Administration of the Eucharist in the Orthodox Practice and Its Relation with the Holy Confession²¹

The Eucharist is the holy Sacrament that caps off the Baptism and the Chrismation, according to the Orthodox Church. In the Orthodox rite, the newly baptized, the new Church member, marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit is immediately called to fully commune with Christ through the communion with the Lord's Body and Blood. In this communion with Christ lies the believer's further sacramental penance, due to a wrong path towards understanding the meaning of life. From this point of view as well, the Eucharist is not only the summit, the reward for penance and conversion, but also the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Forgiveness. Communing with the Body and Blood of Christ provides substance to the act of reconciliation in the Holy Confession through the paschal dimension of both sacraments. Both adopt an eschatological perspective on the afterlife²².

The Orthodox liturgy states that Christ offered his body and blood as sacrifice under the form of the Eucharistic bread and wine for the forgiveness of the sins of all who believe in Him. The words "*for the forgiveness of sins*" are found only in

²¹ The relation between the Eucharist and the Holy Confession was extensively discussed by theologians, particularly of Western origin. This relation was analysed in the 1960s by the Catholic theologian Jean-Marie Roger Tillard in several studies: J.M. R. Tillard, *L'eucharistie, sacrement de l'esperance ecclesiale*, in: *Nouvelle revue théologique*, 617 (1961), pp.561-592; pp. 673-695; Idem, *L'Eucharistie purification de l'Église peregrinante*, in: *Nouvelle revue théologique*, 516 (1962), pp. 449-474; pp. 579-597; Idem, *L'Eudharistie, Pâque de l'Église*, (Paris: du Cerf, 1964); Idem, *Penitenza ed eucaristia*, in: *Aspetti e problemi dopo il Vaticano II*, (Assisi: Citadella Editrice, 1968), pp. 130-157; Idem, *Il pane e il calice della riconciliazione*, in: *Concilium*, 1 (1971), pp. 57-77;

²² R. Falsini, *Penitenza. Rito e catechesi*, (Milano: Edizioni OR., 1990) p. 93.

Matthew's Gospel and they refer to the Lord's Blood sacrifice (Mt. 26. 28). At the end of his Gospel, Mark mentions nothing of the reason behind the apostles' communion with the Body of Christ, but he mostly refers to the Blood of Christ "...which is poured out for many" (Mk. 14. 24). At the end of Luke's Gospel, there is a reference to the communion with Christ's Body "...which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me" (Lk. 22. 19). Saint Paul the Apostle addressed Christians from Corinth, writing that the Saviour uttered these words even after the apostles' communion with the Body and Blood of Christ: "*This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.*' In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, '*This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.*'" (1 Kor. 11. 24-25).

The same is stated in the Orthodox Divine Liturgy, in the second part of the anamnesis of the Anaphora Prayer of Saint Basil the Great, for example, where Christ's Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection ultimately aim at the "forgiveness of sins", while also reiterating the ontological dimension of the redemption brought about by Christ. While Matthew's Gospel emphasizes, as already mentioned, the fact that the Lord offers his apostles His Body under the form of bread and His Blood under the form of wine for the "forgiveness of sins" - in other words, the purpose of His Sacrifice is the forgiveness of sins -, the Anaphora Prayer of Saint Basil the Great provides an ontological interpretation of Christ's redemption as renewal and resurrection of the human nature²³. These two aspects must always be viewed as connected. Redemption does not consist only in the ontological renewal of human nature, first in Christ and then in all other persons who believe in Him, but also in the forgiveness of sins²⁴.

How do the two aspects reconcile?

²³ *Liturgia bizantino-slava*, (Reggio Emilia: Edizioni Collana S. Giorgio, 1986), p. 67.

²⁴ D. Stăniloae, *Spiritualitate și comuniune*, p. 276.

The solution is unique and it lies in God's love for the human kind. God's Son sacrificed himself for the forgiveness of our sins and the vanquishing of man's selfness. As man, Jesus Christ showed us through His sacrifice for us what self-renunciation at its highest truly means, so that we may draw from His Sacrifice the same force and power to renounce all selfness up to self-sacrifice²⁵.

The Christians' communion with the Body and Blood of Christ represents the peak of liturgical tension in the Orthodox liturgy. At this moment, the priest performing the liturgy reminds the believers that the Communion is administered "*for the forgiveness of sins and for life eternal*". It is a special emphasis, where, unlike in any other Church Sacrament, the purpose is comprised in the direct character of the sacrament. The forgiveness of sins is a fundamental condition to enter the Kingdom of God. The acknowledgement of a sinful life weighs heavy on the person coming to receive the Eucharist, drawing on the acknowledgement of the greatness of the God he is communing with. All the canon's prayers before the Eucharist and the Orthodox liturgy express the acknowledgement of this sinful nature of human life as necessity for confession and penance for sins. These moments of the Liturgy witness the believer's ultimate acknowledgement of the sinful life led so far, before the greatness of a God that renounces Himself. Therefore, if we receive the forgiveness of sins during the Holy Confession, prior to the Eucharist, we now understand our own ontological pettiness and we acknowledge the fact that we are not entirely worthy of communing with the Body and Blood of the Lord²⁶. We are now in the position to understand how the Holy Sacraments, the Eucharist and the Confession, are not antithetical in nature and do not overlap, but they remain

²⁵ Ibidem, p. 279.

²⁶ Ibidem, p. 341.

separated, yet complementary, the Eucharist as sacrifice made together with Christ and the Holy Confession as the sinner's path towards redemption and conversion²⁷.

The two sacraments remain separated not only in the form, but also in the manner used to forgive sins. This distinction must be well understood, otherwise, it would result in a liturgical redundancy.

The Eucharist is also the sacrament that embodies man's reconciliation with God, an act capped off by the attainment of eternal life, and the forgiveness of sins. From this perspective, it is not an addition to the Baptism and Confession, but an encompassing fulfilment as well as a basis for the two sacraments abovementioned. The Holy Confession remains, however, the fundamental sacrament performed for the forgiveness of sins, which is why we cannot even consider that the Eucharist may forgive sins indirectly or conditionally to those who have not confessed their sins through the Holy Confession, because such an opinion would undervalue Christ's Sacrifice and turn the Eucharist into a mere duplicate of the Holy Confession.

The Church defined the redemptive nature of the Eucharist²⁸ not only in the sense that its main effect would be the forgiveness of sins, but also the ontological renewal of human nature through the sacrifice of Christ. Receiving the Body and Blood of Christ under the form of bread and wine, the believer participates in the sacrificial dimension of the Crucifixion. His sins are forgiven. Therefore, the Eucharist is the Sacrament of forgiveness as much as it is real Sacrifice on the Cross²⁹. Consequently, the Eucharist simultaneously achieves two effects: a positive effect, namely, that of consolidating the Church through its most intimate sacrament of the life

²⁷ R. Falsini, *Penitenza. Rito e catechesi*, p. 102.

²⁸ J.M. Tillard, *Penitence et Eucharistie*, in: *La Maison Dieu*, 90 (1967/ 2), p. 119 (103-131).

²⁹ Idem, *Il pane e il calice della riconciliazione*, p. 67.

communion between God and human kind through Jesus Christ, a source of communion among people as well, and a negative effect, related to redemption and the forgiveness of sins. The two effects do not follow one another, but they represent two sides of the same reality³⁰.

The Holy Confession's specific reconciliation suggested by the Eucharist as well entails an extremely important human step: man (the prodigal son)'s decision to return to the house of His Father and brothers, to fall at the feet of the Father and ask Him to bestow His love onto him once again. Such a step is specific for the tension that the believer feels during Confession and before the Eucharist.

In the Church's liturgical and pastoral tradition, the relation between the Confession and the Eucharist is viewed in various manners. Both in the East and the West, the two sacraments are considered part of the twofold system consisting of Confession and Communion, which resulted in the subordination of Confession to the Eucharist, a thing harmful to both concepts. As premise or preparation for the Eucharist, the Confession unquestionably has particular advantages. Oftentimes, Confession becomes "the permit" for the Eucharist – believers confess their sins in order to receive the Eucharist, without actually repenting for their sins. On this line, Confession has become an automatic and hasty act.

The Eucharist has also achieved the status of Sacrament of the pure or the saintly ones, thus, pushing away many Christians. Furthermore, sometimes it is understood as mere communion, separated from the sacrifice of Christ³¹.

This standpoint on the relation between Confession and the Eucharist has led to the birth of two attitudes within the Christian world. In the Catholic Western world, the

³⁰ Idem, *L'Eucharistie, Paque de l'Eglise*, p. 112.

³¹ R. Falsini, *Penitenza. Rito e catechesi*, p. 95.

classification of sins into mortal and venial sins allows Catholics to receive the Eucharist without always confessing prior to this, thus, highlighting the forgiveness-related aspect of the Eucharist, and the Eucharist more or less becomes a duplicate of Confession. Conversely, in the Orthodox East, that abusively subordinates Confession to the Eucharist, the Eucharist is an act difficult to perform and reserved to the pure and saintly.

As far as the first attitude is concerned, the question that arises is the following: who distinguishes between the mortal and the venial sins, the believer, or the Church through a hierarchy? If the distinction is made by the believer, then it is difficult to overcome the subjectivity of human judgment. If the Church does make the hierarchy, then the Holy Confession must be considered a premise for the Eucharist.

As regards the Eastern view, we must state that the rigour imposed through the Holy Confession has cast away many believers from Sunday's Communion. Oftentimes, on Sundays, the Communion with the Body and Blood of Christ is only performed by the priests performing the liturgy, while the gathering of believers is meant to witness without participating. In both cases, the issues can be solved through the institution of the confessor who is familiar with his parishioners' degree of repentance. From this viewpoint, the Orthodox Church is one step ahead, as the penitent does not change his confessor during his earthly life (with the exceptions stated by the canons).

In the life and spirituality of the Orthodox Church, the Eucharist has a special significance. The Communion is the most important moment in Christian life, because of the complete and utter faith in the real presence of the Body and Blood of Christ during the Eucharist. However, the Orthodox faith is divided on matters and practices regarding the administration of the Eucharist, but, regardless of the form, none of these practices absolutely excludes Confession as spiritual premise and preparation, or conversion before the Eucharist. The

confessor plays a crucial role in the rightful acknowledgement and proper understanding of both sacraments.

Stepping away from the Eucharist or the possibility to receive it is not achieved in the Orthodox faith through neglecting the Holy Confession. It is not the believer's place to decide whether a sin is mortal and must be confessed and repented for or non-mortal and allows for the Eucharist only. Through the Holy Confession, the believer is helped to see what he is and what he must become. The person who truly wishes to become a bearer of Christ (christopher) through receiving the Communion, must become fully aware of the fact that his sins, regardless of their names or nature – great or petty, mortal or venial – are sins and must be confessed and repented for³².

Viewed as such, the Holy Confession shall always precede the Eucharist.

Conclusions

The entire argument of this study clarifies the fact that, according to Orthodox opinion, the forgiveness of sins through the Holy Confession, regardless of their nature, is essential before receiving the Eucharist. The failure to take into account this aspect may lead to a situation encountered in the practices of other Christian denominations, namely the removal of Confession from its worship practices.

The true relation between Confession and the Eucharist must be considered a relation of complementarity or interdependence. Both Confession and the Eucharist are Church sacraments that grant believers the forgiveness of sins in their own manner. The Eucharist proclaims and grants the

³² N. D. Necula, Cum trebuie să ne pregătim pentru primirea Sfintei Împărtășanii, in: *Vestitorul Ortodoxiei*, 153 (1-15 April, 1996), p. 7.

forgiveness of sins to the extent that it directly reiterates the communion with God, in Christ and the Church. For that purpose, the Eucharist reiterates in the Church the reconciliation, meaning victory over sin, derived from Christ's Resurrection (Easter) and passed on to all sinners as gift though the Holy Confession.

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