EUCHARIST – THE RE-CREATION OF THE WORLDTHEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS ON THE COSMOLOGY OF THE LITURGY

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Abstract:Searching for the deep theological meanings of the Liturgy in the Orthodox Church, the scholar encounters several times the mention of the creation of the world, the beginning of things, through the power and love of God. This mentions are not fortuitous, because the entire theology of the Church leads to the conclusion that the Divine Liturgy is the re-creation of the world, a rebirth of the human being into the grace of God through the Holy Spirit that is poured upon us from the Pentecost, which is not only a historical event, but the permanency of the Church.

Keywords: Eucharist, Liturgy, anthropology, sacrifice, body

The scientists seem to agree that this universe had a beginning, calling it Big Bang, the great stir et caetera. Anyway, the biblical account on the creation of the world in seven days is not mocked anymore by positivist thinking. In fact, many biblical truths came to be scientifically discovered and proved. The spiritual world of the mind and soul is still unchartered and the human reason cannot dive deep enough into this fountain of being. The science came with replicas of the biblical truths, trying to confer a mathematic certainty to deep abyssal realities. The science of the soul was replicated with psychology, which still is very far away from any chart of thinking.

In the Christian Church, which is the Body of Christ in a communion of souls and bodies, and the chosen people of God, the world is not looked upon as a map of matter, but as a universe of thoughts, beings and realities. The Church tries to change the world with all its iniquities and obsessions for death. The theology understands the absolute limit of death to all earthly lives, and preaches the eternal life of all. But, the Church does not hide under the veil of eternity, leaving this world unattended. The Church is the nation of eternal love, but tries to change this life, in order to be alike the one we desire.

This enormous quest of changing the life of humans is already successful. Les us consider the huge difference between our world of today and the world of two thousand years ago. Compare the Christian piety, pity and love with the revenge of other religion where barbarism is the law and murder is an honour. The evolution exists, but unfortunately not as Darwin conceived it, from apes to humans, but from human beasts to human beings. It is enough to travel the world, to see cannibalistic civilizations (sic!), decapitations for minor crimes, child warriors, restaurants with human foetuses, gangs in El Salvador and you will realize how the Church of Christ tries to change this world.

This change is made not only by preaching, Gospel, Christian kerigma transmitted to all citizens of the world. The persuasion of the Church must come from something else, different from this world, with much more power from above, in order to change the beast into being. This power of change the world from deceiver to helper, from hate to love, from theft to pity, from death to life is the Eucharist, the Mystery of the Church, where Christ becomes present in the community and in the being of the believer until the consummation of the ages. This Mystery, given to us by Christ at the Mystical Supper, is His death and Resurrection, shared to us in the Church[1]. The community led by a priest asks from God the

[1] Tomas Spidlik, *Spiritualitatea Orientului Crestin*, Manual systematic I, Deisis, Sibiu, 1997, p. 189.

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Father to re-enter into the reality of the last Supper, to send into this world the Holy Spirit and to transform (less than proper word) the bread and the wine into the Body and the Blood of Christ. This is not a metaphor of self-giving, is not an allegory of death, is not a symbolism of the Cross, because Christ said: "This is my Body. This is my Blood" (Mathew 26). So Eucharist is not a liturgical icon of the Passion, as minimalist residual reformed theology states. It is indeed the material fact that Christ, God and Man is present among us and in us in all ages of history, until the Kingdom, that will be the final unification with Him.

Every other religion of the world offers a teaching, a style of life, a kerigma, a way of thinking. That is it. Christendom offers to the people God himself, incarnated in Christ, present in the chalice, united with our souls and bodies, becoming one with us. The Church does not offer something, but somebody, the One, Christ the Saviour. So the allegiance of the people of God is not as others: based on belief, language, and thinking[2]. The allegiance for Christ comes from the communion of blood with Him, from the brotherhood of blood we share with him through the Eucharist. He becomes through the Eucharist our relative, our blood, our brother, our self. So the Church is a family, not a gathering of belief. She is the people of God sharing and being alive through the living shedding of the Blood of Christ. The reformed theology failed to understand this blood communion, so it destroyed the Eucharist, transforming it into a symbolic supper, performed once a year or more often, without its spiritual meaning and substance. Without the divine Blood, the community starved to spiritual death, fell to the ground in front of all philosophical sophisms, and became a barking ideology or a society of social impact. An organism lacking its blood dies for good.

The Eucharist is therefore the liturgical act of nurture for human soul, and sustains the divine life into us. The Baptism is the birth into this new world of the Spirit and of the Kingdom. We – as Christians – are diving into the death of our sin and rise from the waters of the Red Sea, which is the Blood of our Saviour[3]. The Baptism is the beginning of a new creature belonging to the Kingdom of God. This species united with God lives only by God, being nurtured by his blood, as the pregnant mother nurtures his unborn child through her blood. This dependence of the human children to God is manifest through the Eucharist, which conquers death in us.

The church is a society of eternal life, escaping death through the living Blood of Christ. If this blood is no more, the ecclesial organism fades away, catches anaemia and dies. The biblical metaphor is clear: we are parts of the Body of Christ, cell from his organism, crumbs from the Bread of life. The liturgical ritual of Eucharist is therefore this re-integration of the believers into this organism life giving. The breath of this organism is the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity.

Through the Eucharist, the head of the Church, that is Christ, God and Man, acquires to himself the people, uniting himself with them forever, nourishing them and giving them the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This is the reason why the Eucharist is so important in the Orthodox Church[4]. The ecclesial community is not only a society governed by the same principles, but an organism, a body, governed by the head, living through the life of God. That is why Saint Paul the Apostle could say to Philippians: "For you have died and your life is hidden, with Christ, in God" (Phil. 3, 3). The Church celebrates the death of the old human being, corrupted by the sin and condemned to death, and the birth of a new man, united with

[2] On language and logic, see Carl F.H. Henry, *Dumnezeu, revelatie si autoritate*, vol. III, Editura Cartea Crestina, Oradea, 1996, pp. 289-311.
[3] L.M. Chauvet, *Approche antropologique de l`Eucharistie*, in "Eucharistia, Encyclopedie de L`Eucharistie", ed. Maurice Brouard, Editions du Cerf, Paris, 2002, p. 21-32 .
[4] For the importance of Liturgy in the first three centuries, see Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene Braniste, *Liturgica speciala*, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., Bucuresti, 1980, pp. 174-181.

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the Holy Spirit, member of the Church of Christ, which is incorruptible after the earthly death and meant to the eternal life.

The role of nourishment into the human life is essential. Feeding himself from the living nature of the earth, the human person understood that his life is vulnerable to death, that he must eat the life of other animals in order to survive his own, and that eating death he acquires death in a matter of decades. Receiving his energy from the sacrifice of animals and plants, the human being understood the necessity of eating and drinking water, as a boundary of his earthly being. Into the realm of the Holy Spirit, into the Mystery of the Kingdom of God, the reality is different: the human being is nourished from the body of Christ, as a newborn baby eating from the breast of his mother. In this Eucharistic food, the human receives life, strength and immortality. So the goal of the Incarnation of Logos into the world was the unity between himself and the people he came to save, through his body and his blood that he gave for us. The Cross is not anymore, in this true understanding, the instrument of death, but the spring of life, from where all human people receive the immortal food, the blood of our Lord.

In the ritual of Eucharist, called the Divine Liturgy, in the orthodox Church, the preparation of the Holy Gifts include several times the remembrance of the creation of the world, exactly because the Eucharist is the re-creation of the world, the birth into immortality and the Mystery in time of the eternal Kingdom of God. Three times, in the prayers the priest uses during the Liturgy, the address to God the Father is that of Creator of heaven and earth, the one who from non-being to being brought everything. So the Liturgy accedes to the beginning of time and to the birth of the universe, through the sacred Mystery, to acknowledge the infinite love of God for the world, the cause of the existence of the universe. Moreover, into the Passion of Christ, we enter through the Liturgy, this infinite love was over exceeding, so the Father gave his only Son, to teach us on earth, to die for us and rise again. So, the act of birth of the universe is not an explosion of nothing into something, but the burst of infinite divine love that took form into the realm of being. Life itself is the expression of the infinite life of the Trinity, and human being is "kat eikon", from the image of God and toward the likeness of him. The Trinity is communion, dialogue, embrace into love and full understanding. So the human kind was created in communion, in order to talk to God and to love each other. The Liturgy is therefore not only the re-creation of the world, but a new spiritual paradise, where the new born baby of God by grace, the Christian person, speaks to God through prayer, walks with him into the breath of the evening and nourishes himself with the body of Christ, that is the Eucharist, for the remissions of sins and eternal life.

In the "Anaphora", that is the great prayer of sacrifice, the culmination of the Liturgy, the priest, and together with him the entire Church prays to God the Father, to send the Holy Spirit and to transform the Eucharistic Gifts, from bread and wine to the Body and the Blood of Christ[5]. This prayer, composed by Saint John Chrysostom based on the old manuscripts of the Liturgy of Saint Jacob, the first patriarch of Jerusalem, is an invocation and a remembrance[6].

After the blessing "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all" of the Saint Paul the Apostle, and the exortation "Sursum corda" ("Le us lift up our hearts"), the priest prays[7]:

"It is proper and right to hymn You, to bless You, to praise You, to give thanks to You, and to worship You in every place of Your dominion. For You, O God, are ineffable,

[5] On the unity between bishop, priest, and the community, see John Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church, The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist, and the Bishop during the first three centuries*, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline, Massachusetts, 2001.

[6] Petre Vintilescu, *Liturghierul explicat*, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., Bucuresti, 1998, pp. 13-19.

[7] https://www.goarch.org/-/the-divine-liturgy-of-saint-john-chrysostom

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inconceivable, invisible, incomprehensible, existing forever, forever the same, You and Your only-begotten Son and Your Holy Spirit. You brought us out of nothing into being, and when we had fallen away, You raised us up again. You left nothing undone until you had led us up to heaven and granted us Your Kingdom, which is to come. For all these things, we thank You and Your only-begotten Son and Your Holy Spirit: for all things we know and do not know, for blessings manifest and hidden that have been bestowed on us. We thank You also for this Liturgy, which You have deigned to receive from our hands, even though thousands of archangels and tens of thousands of angels stand around You, the Cherubim and Seraphim, six-winged, many-eyed, soaring aloft upon their wings"[8].

We notice that in this remembrance of the entire history, there is the creation of the world: "You brought us out of nothing into being, and when we had fallen away, You raised us up again". The starting point of the universe, out of the love of God is important, because the Liturgy is exactly the recreation of the world, into the grace of God, through the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

"Άξιον και δίκαιον σε υμνείν, σε ευλογείν, σε αινείν, σοι ευχαριστείν, σε προσκυνείν εν παντί τόπω της δεσποτείας σου. Συ γαρ ει Θεός ανέκφραστος, απερινόητος, αόρατος, ακατάληπτος, αεί ων, ωσαύτως ων, συ και ο μονογενής σου Υιός, και το Πνεύμα σου το Άγιον. Συ εκ του μη όντος εις το είναι ημάς παρήγαγες, και παραπεσόντας ανέστησας πάλιν και ουκ απέστης πάντα ποιών, έως ημάς εις τον ουρανόν ανήγαγες, και την βασιλείαν σου, εχαρίσω την μέλλουσαν. Υπέρ τούτων απάντων ευχαριστούμέν σοι, και τω μονογενεί σου Υιώ και τω Πνεύματί σου τω Αγίω. Υπέρ πάντων, ων ίσμεν, και ων ουκ ίσμεν, των φανερών και αφανών ευεργεσιών, των εις ημάς γεγενημένων. Ευχαριστούμεν σοι και υπέρ της λειτουργίας ταύτης, ην εκ των χειρών ημών δέξασθαι καταξίωσας, καίτοι σοι παρεστήκασι χιλιάδες Αρχαγγέλων και μυριάδες Αγγέλων, τα Χερουβείμ και τα Σεραφείμ, εξαπτέρυγα, πολυόμματα, μετάρσια, πτερωτά".

So the act of bringing the universe from the nothingness "Συ εκ του μη όντος εις το είναι ημάς παρήγαγες" to being is the archetype of the Divine Liturgy. The Big Bang of creation is performed out of the love of the Most Holy Trinity, so it is the Liturgy that gives eternal being to the community of believers. The creation of the world was the burst of light (created originally in the first day) creating matter, the Liturgy is the burst of divine light, that is the grace of the Holy Spirit, creating eschatological matter, that is the Eucharist. The first creation was the flow of diversity of mineral, vegetal, animal, human regna, the second creation realised by the Resurrection of Christ and the pouring of the Spirit in Pentecost means diversity of the gifts of the Spirit, and the eternal embrace of God to all creatures, through Christ, real human and real God[9].

The Liturgy is not the ritualistic way of doxology in the Church, but the ontological embrace of the created universe with the Uncreated One. Inside the Divine Liturgy, it is operated the definitive union between spirit and matter, eternity and time, world and the Kingdom of God. That is why all the liturgical texts celebrate this Today of salvation, the entrance into the biblical universe and the contemporaneousness of our time with the eternity of the love of God.

The Divine Sacrifice celebrated in all the Churches is not a memorial of things from the past, is not a remembrance of dead time, but a door to the eternal love of God, a present of grace upon the believers and a source of life coming from the Cross of Christ and nourishing His Church.

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[9] Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene Braniste, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

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