ICOANA CREDINTEI
International Journal of Interdisciplinary Religious Studies
No. 23, Year 12/2026
https://www.ifiasa.com/ifijisr E-ISSN 2393-137X, p-ISSN 2501-3386

https://doi.org/10.26520/icoana.2026.23.12.20-30

THE EUCHARISTIC THEOLOGY OF COMMUNION AND DEIFICATION: THE MYSTICAL, ECCLESIOLOGICAL AND SOTERIOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST WITHIN THE ORTHODOX TRADITION

Rev. Marius BALABAN[1], **Rev. George Daniel PETROV**[2],
[1]PhD. Student, Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Ovidius University of Constanța,
[2] PhD. Professor, Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Ovidius University of Constanța, ROMANIA,
E-mail: marius.balaban@stloc.org, petrovgeorgedaniel@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The present work analyzes in depth the theological, ecclesiological and mystical dimension of the Holy Eucharist, regarded as a central act of the life of the Church and the summit of man's communion with God. Starting from Scriptural, patristic and liturgical sources, the study highlights the ontological character of the union of the believer with Christ through communion with his Body and Blood, while emphasizing the Trinitarian and communitarian dimension of the Eucharistic act. In the Byzantine tradition, the Eucharist is seen as a synthesis of the entire economy of salvation and as an eschatological anticipation of the Kingdom of God. The text also examines the contemporary crisis of Eucharistic participation and the need to rediscover the original meaning of the Mass as an act of sacrifice, anamnesis and full communion. Through an integrative reading of the Holy Fathers – from St. Ignatius Theophorus to St. Nicholas Cabasila – the work reaffirms the fact that the Eucharist is not only a Mystery among others, but the very life of the Church, the "source and summit" of Christian existence, the place where man becomes a sharer in the deification and living presence of Christ in the world.

Keywords: *eucharist; sacrifice; communion; church; communion; communion; ontology; deification;*

INTRODUCTION

The Mystery of the Eucharist – also called the Mystery of Communion with the Holy Mysteries or of Communion (cf. Luke 22:19–22; I Cor. 11:23-27) – occupies an axial place in the theological and existential structure of the Church, constituting the center of divine worship and the culmination of ecclesial life. It is essentially distinguished from the other Mysteries, Hierurgies and Liturgical Services, since it does not imply merely a symbolic or mysterious sharing of divine grace, but a real, ontological union with the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the Eucharist, the believer participates in the very reality of the crucified and risen Christ, partaking of the "burning coal" that consumes sin, of the "heavenly bread" offered for the forgiveness of sins, for communion with the Holy Spirit and for eternal life.

This meaning is expressed in depth in the Didache (X, 2): "Thou hast given food and drink to men for pleasure... and you have given us, through your Son, spiritual food and drink and eternal life."

ICOANA CREDINTEI
International Journal of Interdisciplinary Religious Studies
No. 23, Year 12/2026
https://www.ifiasa.com/ifijisr E-ISSN 2393-137X, p-ISSN 2501-3386

1. THE THEOLOGICAL AND MYSTICAL FOUNDATION OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST

In Byzantine theological thought, the Eucharist represents the point of convergence of the entire salvific economy, the act by which the communion between God and man reaches its fullest form of fulfillment. St. Nicholas Cabasila, in his work Life in Christ (IV), captures with mystical subtlety and finesse the unique and irreducible character of this Mystery, showing that in it Christ no longer works only ad extra, but gives Himself fully to man, transfiguring his being: Undoubtedly, Christ is in all the mysteries – He, Who is also the anointing, and baptism, and our nourishment – and is present in those who participate in the celebration of the Holy Mysteries, sharing with them His gifts. However, in each Mystery He makes Himself felt in a different way. He cleanses the baptized from the defilement of sin and reprints His image; in those who are anointed He makes the energies of the Holy Spirit, Whose treasure is His Body sanctified by anointing. But when the believer is brought to the Holy Table and partakes of His own Body, the Savior transfigures his interior, giving him His own life and personality. Thus, the clay that receives the royal dignity no longer remains clay, but is transformed into the Body of the Emperor; A happier state than this cannot be conceived. That is why Holy Communion is the greatest Mystery, because beyond it one can no longer go or add anything. After Holy Communion there is no longer room for climbing, but only the call to keep the treasure acquired until the end.

This Cabasilian perspective reflects the depth of a mystical theology of the Eucharist, in which not only grace but divine life itself is imparted to the believer. On the soteriological level, the Mystery of the Eucharist becomes the supreme act of man's participation in the life of Christ, the hypostatic union at the level of uncreated divine energies. It is not only a symbolic prefiguration of the Kingdom, but its real anticipation in time, a space of transfiguration and deification, where the creature unites with the Creator "not metaphorically, but in a true and life-giving way".

The Eucharist is therefore a synthesis of the entire salvific plan, a pleroma of grace and communion, the place where the whole liturgical life finds its meaning and perfection. In it the ultimate goal of divine economy is fulfilled: the restoration of man in Christ and his full union with God, in a communion of love and eternal life.[1] The offering and sanctification of Eucharistic gifts has a sacrificial character, but the Eucharistic Liturgy does not represent a repetition of the unique Sacrifice on the Cross offered by Jesus Christ. He is "the living and unsacrificed sacrifice," the One who "once offered Himself as a sacrifice to His Father, He always slaughters Himself." In the interval between the two comings of Christ the Lord, the local community offers, through its bishop or priest, this "spiritual and bloodless sacrifice", as an actualization of the Lord's Passover, His death and Resurrection (cf. Luke 22:19), but also as a proclamation of the Kingdom of God: "As often as you eat of this bread and drink of this cup, proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes" (I Cor. 11:26).[2] With regard to the sacrificial character of the Eucharistic Divine Liturgy, the following theological considerations can be added: Jesus Christ Himself affirms, at the Last Supper, that the bread is His Body, and the contents of the chalice are His Blood (Matthew 26:26–28). The Eucharist, therefore, is the only Mystery in which the gifts brought — the matter of the sacrifice — are really transformed into what they mean. In other Mysteries, the material elements remain symbols of grace, without transforming themselves into the very substance of the divine reality they represent. Thus, at Baptism, water does not become the Holy Spirit, although it is the bearer of the sanctifying power of grace.

[1] Fr. Prof. Ion Bria, *Communion*, Theological Studies, no. 3-4/1997, p. 22
[2] Nicolae Cabasila, *On Life in Christ,* translated into Romanian by Rev. Prof. Univ. Dr. Teodor Bodogae, Bucharest, 1989, p. 115.

IFIJISR
ICOANA CREDINTEI
International Journal of Interdisciplinary Religious Studies
No. 23, Year 12/2026
https://www.ifiasa.com/ifijisr E-ISSN 2393-137X, p-ISSN 2501-3386

St. Ignatius Theophorus clearly explains the nature of this mysterious transformation: "The Eucharist is the Body of our Savior Jesus Christ, the Body that suffered for our sins and which the Father, in His goodness, resurrected" (To the Smyrneni, VII, 1). This confession expresses the ontological dimension of Christ's presence in the Eucharist: not a symbolic or metaphorical presence, but a real, living and fulfilling one. Precisely to emphasize the uniqueness of the Sacrifice of Christ, the Church has maintained the rule that only one Mass is celebrated on a liturgical day, at the same altar and within the same parish community. Communion with the Body and Blood of the Lord does not imply a physical consummation of His Body, but a real, spiritual communion, in the form of bread and wine, which, through transformation, become the Body and Blood of Christ incarnate, crucified, risen, exalted and glorified. They belong to the Son and not to the Father or the Holy Spirit, although the entire Eucharistic work is accomplished through the cooperation of the Holy Trinity. The Son is the One who brings Himself and offers Himself, the Father is the One who receives the Sacrifice, and it is the Holy Spirit who sanctifies it. Therefore, after communion, the faithful can say: "I have received the heavenly Spirit", because through union with Christ they receive at the same time the grace of the entire Trinity. In the Sacrament of Communion, Christ gives Himself whole to every believer, without dividing Himself or diminishing Himself, remaining fully in each of those who share in Him. Instituted by the Savior Himself on Holy Thursday, during the Last Supper with the Apostles, the Eucharist is celebrated today on Sunday — the day of the Resurrection of the Lord. As St. Justin the Martyr and Philosopher testifies: "Sunday is the day on which God, changing darkness and matter, created the world, and Jesus Christ, our Savior, rose from the dead on the same day" (Apology I, chap. From the first decades of the Church in Jerusalem, Christians left the Jewish cultic calendar and no longer kept the Sabbath as a day of sacrifice and rest, but gathered on the "first day of the week" to celebrate the Eucharist, that is, "Thanksgiving", as a weekly revival and updating of Christ's Passover.

According to the testimony of Justin the Martyr, the apostolic rule forbids participation in the Eucharist by those who are not fully united with the Body of Christ through faith and ecclesial life: "No one can take part in the Eucharist except he who believes that what we preach is true, who has passed through the bath of forgiveness of sins and rebirth, and who lives as Christ taught us" (Apology I, LXVI). For this reason, the Orthodox Church does not admit to communion Christians who belong to communities that do not profess the same full faith, especially with regard to the dogma of the Eucharist and the Priesthood.

The central and holiest moment of the Divine Liturgy is the recitation of the great Eucharistic Prayer, called the Anaphora. In its structure, this prayer is unitary, even if, for practical reasons, it has been divided into several sections. By analyzing the Anaphora, we understand more deeply the theological meaning and spiritual value of the "royal food". The anaphora is based on a profound meditation on the Being of God, on His omnipotence, goodness and love for the world. It expresses, through doxological and anamnestic language, the Church's gratitude for the entire economy of salvation, from creation to redemption. Within this prayer, the faithful unite in offering the spiritual sacrifice, which becomes the actualization of the unique sacrifice of Christ, the real presence of the Lord in the midst of His people and the pledge of the future kingdom.[3]

We will briefly analyze the content of the two anaphora of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom and that of St. Basil the Great. In the first part of the Eucharistic prayer, the recognition and justification of giving thanksgiving to God is expressed, the One who is God unspeakable,

[3] Fr. Prof. Dr. P. Vintilescu, *The Missal Explained*, Publishing House of the Biblical and Mission Institute of the ROC, Bucharest, 1998, p. 236

ICOANA CREDINTEI
International Journal of Interdisciplinary Religious Studies
No. 23, Year 12/2026
https://www.ifiasa.com/ifijisr E-ISSN 2393-137X, p-ISSN 2501-3386

incomprehensible, invisible, inadequate, always being the same, You and Your Only-begotten Son and Your Holy Spirit.[4] All these expressions represent the fundamental attributes of God, which reveal His infinity, completeness and imchangeability, as well as the unity of the Persons of the Holy Trinity. In the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great, this prayer acquires a broader development and an increased theological depth, being enriched with new formulations that define more precisely the attributes of the divine nature: It is You who have given us the knowledge of Your truth... Lord of all, Lord of heaven and earth and of all creatures, visible and invisible, Who sits on the throne of glory and looks into the depths, Who without beginning, invisible, inadequate, incomprehensible, unchangeable, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... Our Saviour, Who is the icon of Thy goodness, the righteously imagined seal, Who shows Thee, the Father – being the Word, true God, Wisdom before the ages, Life, Holiness, Power, the true Light, through Whom was revealed the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of Truth, the gift of the Resurrection, the pledge of the inheritance to come, the beginning of eternal goodness, the Life-giving Power, the source of holiness, by which every rational and understanding creature is strengthened and serves You, bringing You unceasingly songs of glory. For the Angels, the Archangels, the Thrones, the Lordships, the Beginners, the Dominions, the Dominions, the Powers, and the Cherubim with many eyes praise You; and the Seraphim, those with six wings, stand round about You, covering themselves with two faces, with two legs, and with two flying, they cry out incessantly, one to the other, with voices of praise without silence.[5] In its content, theological prayer, in both liturgical variants, is theocentric par excellence, all praise being directed to God, the One and Supreme Reality, eternal existence and the transcendent Creator of the entire cosmos.[6]

Although theocentric in content, this prayer nevertheless expresses the attributes that concern all the Persons of the Holy Trinity. In essence, both in the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom and in that of St. Basil the Great, the Trinitarian character of the Eucharist is revealed.[7] At its beginning, prayer expresses a form of knowledge of God in an apophatic way, that is, through negation, recognizing the limits of human reason in the face of the divine mysteries. In this regard, Father Dumitru Stăniloae emphasizes that our thought wants to rise to an existence that it can no longer understand. It is inwardly obliged to think about the existence of a reality beyond its comprehension. God is apophatic or unspeakable, but not darkness, but the source of all light, therefore of all consciousness. He comes into contact with us through His Son, and through His Spirit He makes Himself felt to us, enlightens us inwardly, sanctifies us and fills us with life, with the Son's feeling for the Father. The higher it is, the more He descends; and the more He descends, the more difficult it is for us to understand, even though we are living the living experience of His life-giving presence.[8] And we, overwhelmed by the greatness of the Godhead and by all the benefits bestowed upon us, give thanks to God "for all that we know and do not know, for Thy benefits, both shown and unshown, which have been done to us." Thus, the Eucharistic prayer becomes a confession of universal gratitude, which embraces the entire economy of salvation, visible and invisible, conscious

[4] Liturghier, Publishing House of the Biblical and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bucharest, 1980, p. 136
[5] ***Liturghier *Saint Liturgy of St. Basil the Great,* pp.196-197
[6] Fr. P. Vintilescu, *The Missal Explained...*, p. 240
[7] Fr. P. Vintilescu, *The Missal Explained...,* p. 241
[8] Fr. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Spirituality and Communion in the Orthodox Liturgy*, Orthodox Biblical and Mission Institute Publishing House, 2004, pp. 262-265

IFIJISR
ICOANA CREDINTEI
International Journal of Interdisciplinary Religious Studies
No. 23, Year 12/2026
https://www.ifiasa.com/ifijisr E-ISSN 2393-137X, p-ISSN 2501-3386

and mysterious, showing that man can never exhaust in word or thought the multitude of divine works.[9]

The clue to the knowledge of God, says Father Alexander Schmemann, "is thanksgiving, for true knowledge – communion is thanksgiving... Knowing God turns our life into thanksgiving, and thanksgiving turns eternity into eternal life." In this perspective, the act of thanksgiving becomes not only a liturgical response, but an ontological attitude of man towards existence, a "recognition of the world as the world of God". In the end, contentment constitutes the fulfillment of knowledge, the moment in which man comes to live the authentic freedom of his dependence on God – a dependence that does not limit, but founds being, being an absolute and undeniable truth of the ontological order.[10]

Theological prayer first evokes the act of creation, recalling the direct work of God, who *made us partakers of Existence*, that is, He gave us not only what springs from Him, but also communion with His presence, with His light, wisdom and love. Subsequently, the prayer highlights man's fall into sin and the Redemption accomplished through the Savior's Sacrifice: "And when we fell, you raised us up again." [11] Christ has accomplished the work of redemption objectively, and man appropriates this salvation subjectively through thanksgiving to God. If in Heaven man was dissatisfied with his own state, desiring *to be like God*, now, through gratitude and humility, he gives thanks for all that he is, desiring to be deified by grace. This attitude of thanksgiving becomes the sign of the desire to personally assume the redemption offered by Christ. And the closeness to Holy Communion is the guarantee that man is on the path to the realization of the Kingdom of God.[12]

2. SACRIFICE AND ANAMNESIS – LITURGICAL EXPRESSIONS OF DIVINE COMMUNION

The theological meaning and ontological purpose of the celebration of the Divine Liturgy consist in the effective communion of those present – clergy and faithful alike – with the Holy Body and Blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The entire content of the liturgical text is directed towards this culminating moment of Eucharistic communion, in which the full encounter between God and man, between the Creator and creation, takes place. Explicitly, this meaning is expressed in the Eucharistic prayer: "And grant, O God, also to those who pray with us, growth in life, in faith and in spiritual understanding. Grant them to serve You always with fear and love, in innocence, and without condemnation, to partake of Your Holy Mysteries and to be worthy of Your heavenly kingdom." This liturgical formulation reveals the mystical essence of the Eucharist, which is not merely a commemorative symbol, but a real, ontological and personal participation in the Sacrifice of Christ. In the Liturgy, the saving sacrifice of the Lord is not repeated historically, but is sacramentally actualized, becoming present and active in a mysterious way for those who receive communion in faith. Thus, the Liturgy is not a mere remembrance of a past event, but a sacramental anamnesis, an actualization of the entire economy of salvation in the liturgical present of the Church.

The Anaphora of St. Basil the Great, one of the most profound expressions of patristic Eucharistic theology, emphasizes that the Sacrifice of the Savior was performed "for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life," constituting the supreme act of divine love, through which humanity is purified, restored, and sanctified. Communion with the Holy Mysteries is not granted by virtue of a

[9] ******Liturghier*, p. 136
[10] Alexander Schmemann, *The Eucharist The Mystery of the Kingdom*, translated by Priest Boris Rădulescu, Anastasia Publishing House, Bucharest, 1999, p. 180-185.
[11] Alexander Schmemann, *The Eucharist The Mystery...,* p. 189.
[12] ***Liturghier, *Liturgy of St. Basil the Great*, pp. 198-200.

IFIJISR
ICOANA CREDINTEI
International Journal of Interdisciplinary Religious Studies
No. 23, Year 12/2026
https://www.ifiasa.com/ifijisr E-ISSN 2393-137X, p-ISSN 2501-3386

human dignity, but by participation in the divine grace that flows from the Eucharistic Sacrifice. Sacramental communion, therefore, is the expression of the synergy between God's grace and the believer's response in faith, repentance and love. In the Eucharistic act there is a true recreation of man, a restoration of his original image and an anticipation of his deification. Man is ontologically united with Christ, becoming "a partaker of the divine nature" (II Peter 1:4), and the Eucharist becomes, in this sense, the mystery in which the divine life is communicated to human existence in a real and full way. Through the re-actualization and sacrificial experience of Christ in each Divine Liturgy, the faithful participate in the transfiguring dynamic of salvation, through which sin is overcome, death is defeated, and man is renewed in Christ. Thus, the Divine Liturgy is constituted not only as a soteriological commemoration, but as an ontological act of communion and deification. It represents the center of the Church's life and the highest expression of ecclesiality, in which the Eucharistic community becomes "the body of Christ" and every believer, through the communion of the Holy Mysteries, partakes of eternal life and the pledge of the Kingdom of God.[13]

The text of the Eucharistic Prayer in the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great expresses with particular theological depth the entire economy of salvation, from the creation of man to the institution of the Holy Eucharist. In this prayer the whole dynamic of the relationship between God and man is revealed, based on love, justice and mercy. Thus, God is presented as the Creator who, "taking the dust from the earth and in Your image, O God, honoring it, You placed it in the paradise of delight", shows the ontological dignity of man as a being created "in the image of God". Man's fall is the consequence of his disobedience to his Creator: "But by disobeying You, O True God, You cast him out with Your righteous judgment." However, in this expulsion is manifested not absolute condemnation, but the pedagogy of divine love: "For you did not return to the end from your creation...", which expresses God's unwavering fidelity to his own creation. The central moment of the divine economy is the Incarnation: "And when the fullness of time came, You spoke to us through Your Own Son, through Whom You also made the ages. Who, being the brightness of Thy glory and the Image of Thy hypostasis... and from the Blessed Virgin, becoming incarnate, He humbled Himself, taking the form of a servant, making Himself like the image of our humble body, to make us like the image of His glory." These liturgical formulations encompass the entire Christological content of the Christian faith: the divinity of the Son, his de-being with the Father, his incarnation in the Virgin Mary, the reality of his humanity and the soteriological purpose of this incarnation – the deification of man.[14] The institution of the Eucharist is related as the supreme moment of this work of salvation: "taking bread into His holy and most pure hands, showing it to You God the Father, giving thanks, blessing, sanctifying and breaking, He gave His Holy Disciples and Apostles to His Holy Disciples and Apostles, saying, 'Take, eat, this is My Body, which is broken for you, for the forgiveness of sins... As well as the glass... drink of this, all of you, this is My Blood of the new law, which is poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins." At this moment, the Sacrifice on the Cross is anticipated and, at the same time, sacramentally made permanent, so that the Church can live and actualize it until the end of time. The words of the Saviour – "Do this in remembrance of Me, for whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you will proclaim My death, you will confess My Resurrection" – express the anamnetic function of the Eucharist, through which the salvific past is brought into the liturgical present of the Church, becoming a living and working event. The Eucharist is, therefore, the "living memorial" of Christ's Sacrifice, a real and effective participation in His saving work.

[13] Nicolae Cabasila, *On Life in Christ...*, p. 114.
[14] Fr. prof. dr. Ene Braniste, *General Liturgy*, Partener Publishing House, 2008, p. 33.

IFIJISR
ICOANA CREDINTEI
International Journal of Interdisciplinary Religious Studies
No. 23, Year 12/2026
https://www.ifiasa.com/ifijisr E-ISSN 2393-137X, p-ISSN 2501-3386

The prayer continues with the invocation of ecclesial unity as the fruit of Eucharistic communion: "And unite us, all of us, who partake of one bread and one cup, by sharing in the same Holy Spirit." This formulation shows that the Eucharist is not only an individual act of sanctification, but a communitarian act, constitutive of the life of the Church, which becomes the Mystical Body of Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. The liturgical call "Let us take heed, O Holy of Holies" has a profound theological meaning: it expresses the reality that the "Saints" (i.e., the sanctified Eucharistic Gifts) are given to the "Saints" – to those who, through repentance, faith and love, prepare themselves to participate in communion with God. In the same way, the exhortation of the deacon or priest: "With the fear of God, with faith and with love, draw near" represents the concrete, living and ecclesial call addressed to every believer, in response to the divine invitation of Christ Himself. The prayers of thanksgiving that follow communion find their basis in the very act of Eucharistic communion. The whole Church gives thanks to God for the unspeakable gift of the Eucharist: "Righteous, having received the divine, holy, most pure, immortal, heavenly and life-giving, fearful mysteries of Christ, let us worthily give thanks to the Lord." From the whole liturgical text emerges a profoundly realistic understanding of communion: it is not a mere subjective mystical experience, but a real and objective communion with the crucified and risen Christ. The believer drinks "from the chalice of Jesus Christ" not as a symbolic act, but because Christ "gave himself for the life of the world" (Jn 6:51). The bread on the disc and the wine in the chalice are the sacramental expression of the incarnation, the Cross and the death of Christ, but also the anticipation of His victory over death."[15]

For the primary community of Jerusalem, the continuous communion of the Body and Blood of the Lord constituted the center and foundation of the Christian life, as the text of the Acts of the Apostles testifies: "And every day they persisted in one mind in the temple, and breaking bread in the houses, they took food with joy and with a pure heart" (Acts 2:46). The Eucharistic act was not perceived only as a ritual practice, but as the very expression of the true communion of the faithful with the crucified and risen Christ and, through Him, of their fraternal communion in the body of the Church. This tradition of frequent communion was preserved in the following epochs, albeit in forms adapted to the ecclesial and spiritual context. St. Basil the Great, in his canonical epistles, gives a testimony of great importance regarding the practice of communion in the fourth century: "Of course, daily communion and the determination to receive daily the Holy Body and Blood of Jesus Christ is a good and useful thing, for He Himself says clearly and clearly: 'He who eats My Body and drinks My blood has eternal life' (John 6, 54). However, we receive Holy Communion only four times a week: Sunday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday, as well as on other days when a special saint is commemorated." This witness shows the theological and pastoral balance of Saint Basil: he recognizes the ideal character of daily communion, but also the reality of ecclesiastical discipline, which links communion to an adequate spiritual preparation and to the liturgical context of the community.

St. John Chrysostom deepens his reflection on the meaning of frequent communion, rejecting the idea that approaching the Holy Mysteries would be an act of boldness or impudence: "It is not boldness and impudence to receive Communion often, but to receive Communion unworthily, even if only once a year. [...] Why, then, should we use Holy Communion with the measure of time? The best time to commune is a clear conscience. [...] Which one should we love? Those who receive Holy Communion only once a year? Or those who receive Holy Communion often? Or those who

[15] Fr. Dr. Gheorghe Petraru, *Eucharist – The Mystery of the Unity of the Church and of Salvation in Christ*, in rev. "Mitropolia Moldovei şi Sucevei", Year LIX, No. 10-12, October-December (1983), p. 642.

ICOANA CREDINTEI
International Journal of Interdisciplinary Religious Studies
No. 23, Year 12/2026
https://www.ifiasa.com/ifijisr E-ISSN 2393-137X, p-ISSN 2501-3386

receive communion rarely? No! We do not praise those who receive Communion often, nor those who receive Communion rarely, but we praise those who receive Communion with a clear conscience, with the party and the unhealthy life; those who are like this should always receive communion, and those who are not so once a year are not worthy to receive communion." With these words, Chrysostom establishes the essential criterion of communion: not the external frequency, but the inner disposition of the heart. A clear conscience, an irreproachable moral and spiritual life, love of God and neighbour constitute the true preparation for the reception of the Eucharist. Thus, he situates communion not on the level of a formal exercise, but in the dimension of a real experience of holiness and union with Christ.[16]

Therefore, both St. Basil the Great and St. John Chrysostom, although they express different shades of emphasis, converge in the same theological perspective: the Eucharist is the center of ecclesiastical life and of Christian existence, but access to it presupposes continuous spiritual preparation. Frequent communion thus becomes not a mere disciplinary practice, but an act of full and conscious communion with God, a source of eternal life and an expression of the spiritual maturity of the believer in the living body of the Church. For Christians in the first millennium, participation in the Holy and Divine Liturgy was inextricably linked to actual communion with the Body and Blood of the Lord. In the consciousness of the early Church there was no alternative between "receiving Holy Communion" or "not receiving Holy Communion" – participation in the Eucharist naturally and fully presupposed sacramental communion. Those who, for a legitimate reason, could not receive the Holy Mysteries left the liturgical assembly with the catechumens, unable to remain passive witnesses of the Sacrament of Communion.

This practice clearly expresses the ecclesial understanding of the Liturgy as an act of complete unity: only those who were in full communion with Christ and with the Church could participate in the Eucharist to the end and receive communion. Only grave sin, which brought upon the person the state of public penance, could constitute a temporary impediment to communion.

Disciplinarily, the canonical order of the ancient Church confirms this perspective. Participation in the Divine Liturgy without communion was considered a deviation from the ecclesiastical order, since the Eucharist was not a simple act of personal devotion, but the constitutive act of ecclesial communion. The 9th Apostolic Canon, for example, establishes that "all believers who enter the church and listen to the Scriptures, but do not remain in prayer and Holy Communion, are to be excommunicated, as those who bring disorder into the Church." This regulation shows that communion was not an optional gesture, but a sacramental duty of every Christian present at the Liturgy.

The Holy Apostle Paul, in the First Epistle to the Corinthians (11:28-29), formulates the fundamental criterion of Eucharistic worthiness: "Let man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks unworthily eats and drinks, despising the Body of the Lord." The Apostle, however, does not put communion under the sign of choice, but under the sign of discernment and inner preparation. The Christian is obliged to receive Holy Communion, but in a state of repentance, faith and purity of soul.

Therefore, for the early Church, frequent communion was not a matter of individual piety, but the expression of real belonging to the Body of Christ, which is the Church. Not receiving Holy Communion, yet remaining at Mass, meant an ecclesiological contradiction – a separation between external participation and inner communion. In the light of this tradition, the Holy Eucharist appears

[16] Fr. Prof. Univ. Dr. Ene Branişte, *Participation in the Liturgy,* "România Cristiana" Publishing House, Bucharest, 1999, p. 66.

ICOANA CREDINTEI
International Journal of Interdisciplinary Religious Studies
No. 23, Year 12/2026
https://www.ifiasa.com/ifijisr E-ISSN 2393-137X, p-ISSN 2501-3386

as the central act of ecclesiastical life, the source of the unity and holiness of the Christian community. Participation in the Liturgy without communion was considered a "disorder" because it broke down the coherence between sacrifice, anamnesis and communion, which constitutes the mystical essence of the Eucharistic celebration. In the consciousness of the early Church, the believer who prays, hears the Word and brings the gifts, but refuses communion, participates only formally, not existentially, in the Sacrifice of Christ.[17]

In contemporary times, the liturgical situation in the Church has changed profoundly in relation to the Eucharistic practice and consciousness of early Christianity. With the exception of more spiritually alive communities, communion among believers has become a rare act, usually limited to one or two occasions a year—usually during the great fasts or on royal feasts. On the rest of Sundays and feasts, the liturgical call of the priest: "With the fear of God, with faith and with love, draw near" often remains unanswered, and the Holy Chalice remains untouched by those who participated in the Eucharistic sacrifice. More seriously, there are also situations – rare, but symbolically significant – in which even some priests do not receive Communion in the Divine Liturgy, even though this is, by its nature, the full act of Eucharistic communion. Such practices denote a rupture between the liturgical celebration and its ultimate goal: real union with Christ through communion with His Body and Blood.

This reality is the sign of a profound liturgical and Eucharistic crisis, which affects not only the Orthodox Church, but also the whole of Christendom, including the Roman Catholic confession and, in radical forms, the Protestant traditions that have almost completely lost the sacramental dimension of worship. It is a crisis not only of practice, but also of theological conscience: the distance between formal participation in the Liturgy and real communion with Christ has widened, and the original Eucharistic meaning of the church assembly has faded.

Father Professor Ene Branişte lucidly diagnosed this crisis, emphasizing the sacrificial and teleological dimension of the Liturgy: If the Liturgy is a sacrifice, it is self-evident that only through its consummation is the ultimate goal of any sacrifice fully achieved, that is, the realization of communion with the Divine. We insist on this fact and emphasize this precisely because, in current practice and mentality, it is almost completely lost sight of. Today, when only the Divine Masses usually receive Communion at the Divine Liturgy, the communion of the faithful is no longer a permanent purpose, but an occasional and therefore secondary one of the Liturgy. At its origin and in its institution, however, the Divine Liturgy cannot be conceived without the communion of the faithful, certainly of the prepared and worthy. With these words, Fr. Branişte reiterates a fundamental truth of liturgical theology: The Liturgy is not an act of contemplation or assistance, but an act of full participation. The Eucharistic sacrifice achieves its purpose only to the extent that the faithful unite themselves to Christ in a real and personal way, through the communion of the Holy Mysteries. The fact that, in many contemporary communities, Communion has become an exceptional event and not a constant practice indicates an alteration of the original meaning of Eucharistic worship. In the early Church, the Liturgy and the communion formed an indivisible whole – the one who participated in the Liturgy, also participated in the Chalice; today, on the other hand, participation has often been reduced to a symbolic presence, devoid of the real communion that the Eucharist achieves.

The distancing from the Holy Chalice reflects not only a lack of piety, but also a weakening of the ecclesiological conscience: the Eucharist is the constitutive act of the Church, the source and summit of her life (fons et culmen Ecclesiae). To refuse to participate in communion, while

[17] Fr. Prof. Univ. Dr. Ene Branişte, *Participation ...,* p. 68.

ICOANA CREDINTEI
International Journal of Interdisciplinary Religious Studies
No. 23, Year 12/2026
https://www.ifiasa.com/ifijisr E-ISSN 2393-137X, p-ISSN 2501-3386

maintaining a passive presence at the Liturgy, is to transform communion into a spectacle and sacrifice into a ceremony.[18]

Overcoming this crisis presupposes a rediscovery of the theological and existential meaning of the Eucharist: spiritual preparation must not become a pretext for absence from communion, but the condition for a deeper and more responsible communion. As the entire patristic tradition shows, the faithful are called not only to attend the Divine Liturgy, but to unite themselves with Christ, the "Bread of Life," who offers Himself for "the forgiveness of sins and eternal life." Only through this full participation does the Liturgy fulfill its ultimate purpose: man's communion with God and the anticipation of the eternal Kingdom8[19].

In addition to the generalized absence from the Holy Chalice, the crisis was also manifested by the individualistic understanding of communion with the Body and Blood of the Savior Jesus Christ, while the canons mentioned above (2 Apostolic; 2 Antioch) emphasize the ecclesiological character of communion even outside the Divine Liturgy. Father Professor Ene Branişte saw in this one of the causes of the weakening of the ecclesiological, ecclesiastical consciousness of the faithful; therefore, "In order to restore the true and authentic meaning of the act of communion, however, it is necessary to follow a custom, which tends to become a custom, because of weakness or lack of understanding, of which many priests are guilty, namely: that communion should no longer be administered as an individual act isolated from the Divine Liturgy, that is, performed whenever it may be or after the Divine Liturgy, as some priests are accustomed to, for example at Holy Easter, under the pretext of order, discipline and good order in the Church. Communion is to be administered only in its normal and natural setting, in other words, in the place where it has always been provided for in the order of the Divine Liturgy, namely, when the call resounds: "Draw near with the fear of God, with faith and with love"[20].

CONCLUSION

The mystery of the Holy Eucharist constitutes the beating heart of the Church's life, the source and summit of the whole of ecclesial existence. In it is concentrated the entire economy of salvation, from the creation of the world and the incarnation of the Word to the final restoration of man in the Kingdom of God. It is not a simple commemoration of the Savior's Sacrifice, but a real, working and sanctifying actualization of it, through which Christ offers Himself unceasingly to the world, transfiguring and deifying those who unite with Him in faith, repentance and love.

Theologically, the Eucharist is the full act of Trinitarian communion, since the Son is brought to the Father through the Holy Spirit, and the faithful, by partaking of his Body and Blood, become partakers of the life of the entire Trinity. On the ecclesiological level, it is the constitutive event of the Church, because through the Holy Chalice the community is transformed into the Mystical Body of Christ. Without real communion, the Liturgy remains unfulfilled, devoid of its ontological finality – the concrete union of man with God.

Therefore, participation in the Divine Liturgy naturally and necessarily implies communion with the Holy Mysteries, since sacrifice, anamnesis and communion are inseparable moments of the same salvific act. In the early Church, the believer who did not receive communion was considered

[18] Father Hieroschimonk Paisie Olaru *from the Sihla Hermitage*, in the volume *"Contemporary Romanian Confessors",* Byzantine Publishing House, Bucharest, 1999, p. 214.
[19] Fr. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Spirituality and Communion*..., p. 46.
[20] Fr. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Spirituality and Communion*..., p. 48.

ICOANA CREDINTEI
International Journal of Interdisciplinary Religious Studies
No. 23, Year 12/2026
https://www.ifiasa.com/ifijisr E-ISSN 2393-137X, p-ISSN 2501-3386

a stranger to the life of the community, for the Eucharist was not an act of assistance, but of full participation. This Eucharistic awareness must be rediscovered today, in a context in which communion has often become a rare and formal gesture, detached from its communitarian and soteriological dimension. The contemporary crisis of communion – characterized by distancing itself from the Holy Chalice and reducing the Mass to an external ceremonial – expresses a loss of the mystical consciousness of faith. Overcoming it presupposes a renewal of liturgical life and a rediscovery of the spiritual meaning of the Eucharist as an act of ontological union with Christ. The believer is not only called to contemplate the Sacrifice, but to live it, to make himself "Eucharist", that is, a being of thanksgiving, of giving and of communion.

In the light of patristic theology and the teaching of the Holy Fathers – from St. Ignatius Theophorus to St. Nicholas Cabasila – the Eucharist is not only a Mystery among others, but the Mystery par excellence, the "pleroma" of grace, the place where God fully communicates Himself to His creation. It eschatologically anticipates the Kingdom of God, already mysteriously offering us the pledge of eternal life.

Thus, the ultimate meaning of the Eucharist is not only the sanctification of the individual, but the deification of the whole creation, the restoration of universal unity in Christ. In each Liturgy, the Church relives the Lord's Easter, bringing His death and Resurrection into the present, so that the world may be transfigured by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

The Eucharist, therefore, is the centre of the being of the Church and of every Christian: the mystery of divine love which unites heaven and earth, God with man, history with eternity. Only through conscious and living communion with the Body and Blood of Christ does the believer truly become a "Eucharistic being", witnessing through his entire existence the presence of God in the world and the hope of eternal life.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

[1] ***Liturghier, Publishing House of the Biblical and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bucharest, 1980.
[2] Braniste Rev. prof. dr. Ene, General Liturgy, Partener Publishing House, 2008.
[3] Branişte Rev. Prof. Univ. Dr. Ene, Participation in the Liturgy, "România Cristiana" Publishing House, Bucharest, 1999.
[4] Bria Fr. Prof. Ion, Communion, Theological Studies, no. 3-4, 1997.
[5] Cabasila, Nicolae, On Life in Christ, translated into Romanian by Rev. Prof. Univ. Dr. Teodor Bodogae, Bucharest, 1989.
[6] Olaru Father Hieroschimonk Paisie from the Sihla Hermitage, in the volume "Contemporary Romanian Confessors", Byzantine Publishing House, Bucharest, 1999.
[7] Petraru Fr. Dr. Gheorghe, Eucharist – The Mystery of the Unity of the Church and of Salvation in Christ, in rev. "Mitropolia Moldovei şi Sucevei", Year LIX, No.10-12, October-December, 1983.
[8] Schmemann Alexander, The Eucharist the Mystery of the Kingdom, translated by Priest Boris Rădulescu, Anastasia Publishing House, Bucharest, 1999.
[9] Vintilescu Rev. Prof. Dr. P., The Liturghier Explained, Publishing House of the Biblical and Mission Institute of the ROC, Bucharest, 1998.

ICOANA CREDINTEI
International Journal of Interdisciplinary Religious Studies
No. 23, Year 12/2026
https://www.ifiasa.com/ifijisr E-ISSN 2393-137X, p-ISSN 2501-3386

ICOANA CREDINTEI
Icon of Faith. International Journal of Interdisciplinary Religious Studies

IFIJISR- IISSN 2501-3386; ISSN-L 2393-137X| https://doi.org/10.26520/icoana
Frequency: 2 issues/year, with possible supplementary issues.

About IFIASA

Ideas Forum International Academic and Scientific Association (IFIASA) is a cultural-educational organization of distinguished members engaged in academic and scientific research. IFIASA is a publisher, open access journals since its establishment in 2015.

IFIASA Publishing House
Târgoviște, Dâmbovița, Romania
https://www.ifiasa.com/
Email: ifiasa@yahoo.com

About IJTPS

IFIJISR, is a journal published and promoted at international level by IFIASA in collaboration with members of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology and Education Sciences, "Valahia" University, Târgoviște. Icon of Faith is a Scientific, Open Access journal, with the main aim to promote a high level of Christian Theology in an intercultural context.

www.ifiasa.com/ifijisr
Email:
iconfaith_journal@yahoo.com

Abstract & Index

ERIHPLUS;

Ceeol;
CrossRef; Doi;
Ezb; WorldCat;
Google Scholar;
Philpapers;
Scilit; PubMed;
OpenAlex; Fact;
Sudoc; Ifiasa-Red;

CNCS - B CATEGORY;