



THE TYPOLOGY OF THE EASTER SACRIFICE AND ITS EUCHARISTIC FULFILLMENT IN THE SOTERIOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS OF THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

The Sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb in the Old Testament and Its Full Actualization in the Christian Eucharist. Starting from the patristic exegesis of the Old Testament texts, the study highlights the prophetic dimension of the Paschal rite, in which the sacrificed lamb, blood, unleavened bread and evening take on Christological meanings, anticipating the Sacrifice of the Savior Jesus Christ. The analysis sheds light on how the Holy Fathers – among whom St. Cyril of Alexandria, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, St. Isidore the Pelusiote and St. Justin the Martyr stand out – interpret the Paschal Lamb as a prefiguration of Christ, "the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world." In the second part, the text explores the Eucharistic dimension of Christ's presence in the Church, as a living and salvific reality, emphasizing the role of the Divine Liturgy as a place of personal and community encounter with God. In the Eucharist, the believer lives full communion with Christ, becoming a partaker of His death and Resurrection and anticipating the eschatological glory of the Kingdom. Thus, the study demonstrates that the Paschal Sacrifice and the Eucharist are part of a single line of the divine economy, expressing the passage from shadow to truth, from symbol to reality, from the slavery of sin to the freedom of grace.

Keywords: *Eucharist; Patristic Christology; Old Testament Symbolism; Sacramental Theology; Liturgy; Salvation;*

INTRODUCTION

The sacrifice of the lamb on the 14th of Nisan, which marks the beginning of the Jewish Passover, was instituted by God, which attests to its divine origin (Exodus 12:1–11). At the first Passover feast, each Israelite took some of the blood of the lamb and anointed with it both doorposts and the upper threshold of the house, where he was to eat the roast meat, along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs (Exodus 12:8). As for the age of the animal, it is specified that it had to be one year old, that is, not too young or too old; at the same time, it had to be on the male side and without any bodily defect (Exodus 12:5–6).¹

1. THE SACRIFICE OF THE PASCHAL LAMB AS A PROTOTYPICAL PREFIGURATION OF CHRIST'S SACRIFICE IN THE CONTEXT OF OLD TESTAMENT REVELATION AND PATRISTIC EXEGESIS

The sacrifice of the lamb on the 14th of Nisan, which marks the beginning of the Jewish Passover, was instituted by God, which attests to its divine origin (Exodus 12:1–11). At the first

¹ PhD candidate Ion Caraza, *The Eucharistic Doctrine of Saint Cyril of Alexandria*, in *Theological Studies* 1968, no. 7-8, p. 536.



Passover feast, each Israelite took some of the blood of the lamb and anointed with it both doorposts and the upper threshold of the house, where he was to eat the roast meat, along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs (Exodus 12:8). As for the age of the animal, it is specified that it had to be one year old, that is, not too young or too old; at the same time, it had to be on the male side and without any bodily defect (Exodus 12:5–6).² Upon leaving the slavery of Egypt, a goat was allowed to be offered as a sacrifice in place of the lamb — a practice that the Jews did not continue after entering the Holy Land (Leviticus 23:12). From the prescriptions concerning the preparation and consumption of the Passover sacrifice it is clear that this sacrifice plays an essential role in the Jewish Passover feast, which is celebrated in the first of the twelve months of the year (Exodus 12:1). The commandment that every family of the children of Israel should have, on the tenth day of the month of Nisan, a lamb of the first year (Exodus 12:2) emphasizes the obligatory nature of offering the sacrifice. On the night of Nisan 14, the blood of the lamb was to be the distinctive sign of a Jewish dwelling (Exodus 12:13), and the houses thus marked were to be bypassed by the Lord, Who would not allow the losing angel to strike them (Exodus 12:23).

The moment of the sacrifice of the lamb precedes the liberation of the Israelites from the slavery of Egypt, a context dominated by the Egyptian polytheistic faith. St. Cyril of Alexandria interprets this fact as a prefiguration of Christ, stating that without this sacrifice there would have been neither the deliverance from Egypt nor the sparing of the firstborn of the Jews. The same Holy Father adds that those who participate in the "mystical blessing" become conquerors over spiritual death.³ The sacrifice of the lamb is profoundly linked to the feast of Easter, which marks the beginning of a new life and the birth of a people freed from slavery (Exodus 14:4). The choice of this animal was ordained by God, because the lamb, by its image and nature, expresses meekness and innocence — virtues that St. Gregory of Nazianzus emphasizes with justified admiration. The same Holy Father shows that the unblemished garment of the lamb prefigures the incorrupt body of the Messiah, and the biblical specification that the animal was to be on the male side symbolizes both the expiation of Adam's error and the prefiguration of the Son of the Virgin, announced by the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 7:14).

St. Gregory of Nazianzus offers a particularly subtle exegesis on the Old Testament texts, interpreting the ritual details of the Paschal sacrifice in a Christological key. Thus, the age of one year of the lamb represents the fullness of life and anticipates the redemptive work of Christ, and the bodily integrity of the animal indicates the perfection and purity of Him who will bear the sins of the world.

The same Holy Father interprets the moment of the evening, prescribed for the sacrifice of the lamb, as a prefiguration of the hour of the Lord's Crucifixion on Golgotha, at the "fullness of time". Also, the fact that the lamb was to be roasted in fire symbolizes the strength and truth of the messianic teaching, the doctrine of the "Paschal Lamb" being, according to his word, just and immovable (St. Gregory of Nazianzus, Oratio XLV in Pascha, in *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 36, col. 640–652). If the Holy Fathers saw in Moses' account of the rite of the paschal lamb a prophetic anticipation of Christ's saving work — the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world (Isaiah 1:29; John 1:29) — some modern theologians have disputed the originality and historical authenticity of these scriptural data. They tried to link the Passover lamb sacrifice and the Jewish

² PhD candidate Ion Caraza, *The Eucharistic Doctrine of Saint Cyril of Alexandria*, in *Theological Studies* 1968, no. 7-8, p. 536.

³ Fr. Prof. PhD. Emilian Cornișescu, *Romanian Folk Traditions and Customs*, Mitropolia Oltenia, year LIX, no. 9-12, 2007, p. 97.



Passover holiday to older pagan holidays, considered to have been imitated by the Jews, thus denying their revealed character.

However, such similarities are only external and formal, with no substantive connection. Unlike the pagan rites, the paschal sacrifice was instituted by the true God, Jehovah, and was not intended to worship a deity, but to commemorate a concrete act of salvation — the liberation of the chosen people from the slavery of Egypt and the foundation of a new existence in the freedom of faith.⁴

With the people of Israel, Jehovah made a special covenant on Mount Sinai, preparing them for the fulfillment of His plan to save the world, freeing it from the condemnation of sin. In remembrance of the deliverance of the firstborn of Israel from Egypt, God ordained that they should be dedicated to Him (Exodus 13:11–12) and be redeemed by the payment of five shekels of silver at the holy place.⁵ The first sacrifice of the Passover lamb was offered by the entire people of Israel, which signifies the call of all to the new life and their belonging to the chosen people of Jehovah. According to the divine commandment, each family had to eat the Passover lamb without crushing its bones, and the remaining meat could not be saved for the next day. All that remained was to be burned in the fire (Exodus 12:10).

The entire ritual of the paschal lamb has its origin in the revelation of God to Moses; therefore, any attempt to interpret this practice as a pagan heritage contradicts the biblical account and divine inspiration of the Pentateuch, whose author, Moses, recorded these ordinances under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The Paschal Sacrifice was first brought to Egypt, and was then performed during the forty years of the pilgrimage through the wilderness of Sinai. It will experience a new stage with the entry into the Holy Land, being maintained until the Babylonian slavery (587 î.Hr.), and after the return from exile (538 î.Hr.) the ritual will continue, enriched with certain customs introduced under the influence of the rabbis.

The liberation of the Israelites from the bondage of Egypt took place in the month of Abib – also called the "month of ears of corn" – corresponding to spring, when the grain reached ripening. In this month the feast of Easter was celebrated, during which the sacrifice of the lamb of the first year was offered (Exodus 12:6), and in the sanctuary incense was incensed and lamps were lit (Exodus 30:8). The appointed time for the slaughter of the Easter lamb was in the evening, approximately between 18:00 and 19:00.⁶

According to the Book of Deuteronomy, the time of the sacrifice of the paschal lamb was ordained after sunset (Deut. 16:6), a specification that will be faithfully observed by the following generations of the children of Israel. The Samaritans, in their tradition, set the time of offering the sacrifice between the moment the sun sets and until complete darkness sets in.

In the rabbinic interpretation, the interval of the sacrifice of the lamb is fixed between 15:00 and 16:00, according to the testimony of the historian Joseph Flavius (*De bello iudaico*, VI, 9, 3) and the tradition recorded in the Mishna (*Pesach* 5:3).⁷ Some theologians believe that the sacrifice of the paschal lamb would have taken place in the interval between dusk and nightfall, that is, between the hours before and after sunset. Along with this feast, the Holy Supper was celebrated, lamps were lit and the evening sacrifice was offered (Exodus 29:41). Other theological interpretations claim that the Passover lamb was slaughtered around 3:00 p.m. — a moment that

⁴ Fr. Prof. Dr. Vasile Tamavschi, *Biblical Archaeology*, Chernivtsi, 1930, p. 647-649.

⁵ PhD. Mircea Chialda, *The Sacrifices of the Old Testament*, Caransbes, 1945, p. 355.

⁶ V. Tarnavschi, *Commentary on the Exodus*, Chernivtsi, 1913, p. 48.

⁷ V. Tarnavschi, *Commentary...*, p. 48.



corresponds, typologically, to the hour of the death of the Savior Jesus Christ on the Cross, thus fulfilling the prophetic meaning of the Passover sacrifice.⁸

The time of the Easter holiday is established every year in spring, during the period of ripening of the ears of wheat. Hence the name of the month Abib ("of ears of ears"), which, in the post-exilic period, was replaced by the name Nisan, taken from the Babylonian nisanri and adopted by the Jews returned from Babylonian slavery.

The date of Nisan 14, set for the celebration of Passover, was rigorously observed by the Jewish people of biblical times and continues to be preserved to this day. With the same fidelity, the order of preparation of the paschal lamb was maintained: the meat had to be roasted entirely, together with the head and entrails, which were first cleansed of all impurity (Exodus 12:9).

St. Justin the Martyr and Philosopher offers a special symbolic interpretation of this ritual, mentioning that the lamb was roasted on the fire in the shape of a cross, and its blood was used to anoint the lightweights of the houses of the Jews — a prophetic sign of salvation through the Sacrifice of Christ and an image of the dwellings of the souls of believers sealed by divine grace.⁹ To these meaningful interpretations is added the interpretation of Lactantius, who states that the Jews anointed the lights of the houses in the image of the Holy Cross, a gesture by which the mystery of salvation through the Sacrifice of Christ was anticipated. He also emphasizes that, through Moses, God commanded the people of Israel to celebrate the Passover as a prophetic prefiguration of the true Passover, the one fulfilled in Christ. For this great Christian thinker, the paschal lamb becomes the symbol of the Savior, the One who would suffer for the salvation of the world, thus bringing the full fulfillment of the meaning of the Old Testament sacrifice.¹⁰ In the thought of the Holy Fathers, the Paschal sacrifice is interpreted in the messianic key of Revelation, being a prophetic pre-representation of the Sacrifice of Christ the Savior. The sacrifice of the lamb was performed in the evening, as it anticipated the Sacrifice of Christ, the true Lamb and Shepherd, Who offered Himself willingly to cleanse the sins of all mankind.

The end of the day, followed by evening and night, becomes in patristic theology the symbol of death and rest, states that prepare for the rebirth and renewal of life. It was precisely in this interval of the passage from light to darkness that the sacrifice of the paschal lamb was offered, a sign of the Messiah, the One who would overcome death through death.

The sacrifice was performed at the time of the full moon, because this full light of the night star symbolizes the presence of divinity, and the lunar body, subject to changes, prefigures the humanity of Christ. Just as the moon illuminates the night and dispels darkness, so Christ enlightens the souls of those in the shadow of sin and restores the whole of human nature.¹¹

Therefore, it is not by chance that God ordained that Christ's death should take place at the time of the full moon: this bears the theological significance of the victory of light over darkness, grace over sin, and life over death, fully fulfilling the paschal symbolism of the Old Covenant.¹² A deeper meaning of the roasting of the paschal lamb is offered by St. Isidore the Pelusiote, who interprets this act as a mystery of the incarnation of the divine fire. He sees in the Paschal rite a prefiguration of the offering of the Sacrifice of the Lamb of God, in which the fire of the Godhead is mysteriously united with the human body, in order to bring forgiveness and the blotting out of sin

⁸ Ph.D. V. Szmigelski, *The History of the Old Law*, vol. I, Blaj, 1905, p. 142

⁹ St. Justin the Martyr and the Philosopher, *Dialogue with the Jew Tryphon*, in P.G. 6, col. 561-564, in. Ph.D. V. Szmigelski, *The History...*, p. 142.

¹⁰ Lactantius, *Divine institute*. 6, in P. G. 6, col. 530-531, in. Ph.D. V. Szmigelski, *The History...*, p. 143.

¹¹ Petre Vintilescu, *The Liturghier Explained*, Publishing House of the Biblical and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, 1998, p. 24.

¹² Fotius, *Ad. Amphilochium quaest. CCXLV*, in P.G. 101, col. 1128, in., Ph.D. V. Szmigelski, *The History...*, p. 144.



to the world. Thus, the roasting of the lamb over the fire becomes a symbolic image of the union of the divine nature with the human nature in the Person of Christ, a union through which the salvation of the human race is accomplished.¹³

After roasting the meat, the Passover supper followed, during which lamb was eaten together with unleavened bread (unleavened bread, matzoh) and bitter herbs (Exodus 12:8). At the first Passover feast, God commanded the Israelites to eat "in haste" (Exodus 12:11), and this commandment caused the bread to be prepared without leavening. However, the use of unleavened bread is not only explained by the haste of the exodus from Egypt, but has a profoundly theological significance: it expresses the sacredness of the feast and symbolizes holiness and purity of heart. For this reason, the uncircumcised (Exodus 12:43) and those in a state of bodily impurity were excluded from the Passover sacrifice and supper (Num. 9:9).

Unleavened bread is also called "the bread of sorrow" (Deut. 16:3), an expression that evokes the memory of the suffering of the people during Egyptian slavery, a period of four hundred years of oppression, but also the contrast between the pain of the past and the joy of liberation. At the same time, it becomes the symbol of the joy of salvation, according to the words of the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 53:7), who sees in the sacrificed Lamb the prefiguration of Christ, the One who takes away the sin of the world.

After entering the Promised Land, the Israelites continued to offer the sacrifice of the paschal lamb, strictly observing the holy order. The ritual included two essential moments: the slaughter of the lamb at the Holy Tabernacle or, later, at the Temple in Jerusalem, and the bringing of the "sheaf of barley from the harvest first fruit" on the day after Easter, as an offering of gratitude to God for the fruits of the earth.

For the Jewish people, the consummation of the Passover lamb represented a renewal of the covenant with God. The Passover Supper was an annual confession of belonging to Jehovah's holy and pure people, and through it the Israelites expressed their gratitude for their deliverance from bondage. The month of the Passover holiday, Abib (later called Nisan), has its roots in the term 'eb, which means "greenery" – a symbol of life, renewal and joy. It is set as the first month of the religious year, marking the beginning of the new and holy life of Israel and inaugurating the fulfillment of God's economic plan in the history of the chosen people.

Within the Paschal ritual, the blood of the lamb has a central meaning. According to Scripture, "the life of the body is in the blood" (Lev. 17:11), and the blood has the power to cleanse and sanctify the soul. The atoning character of blood is manifested in every sacrifice, but especially in the paschal sacrifice, through which man's communion with Jehovah is mediated. The Paschal Supper thus becomes the expression of this sanctifying communion, in which the idea of purification, sanctification and peace between God and His people are intertwined.

A moment of great symbolic depth is the anointing of the doorposts and the upper threshold of the houses with blood. Through this gesture, the purification of the entire dwelling was expressed, but also, in a figurative sense, the cleansing of the human body – the "dwelling place of the soul" – from any defilement. In this way, the blood of the lamb became the visible sign of divine protection and the passage from death to life, foreshadowing the Sacrifice of the Lamb of God, Christ, through Whose blood the world would be redeemed.¹⁴ As is well known, the Mosaic Law provided that a biblical text should be placed on the doors, which had to be strictly observed by all the members of the house, that is, by the whole family (Deut. 6:9).

¹³ Isidor Pelusiotul, Epistola 7, 1 in P.G. 78, 320-321, in Fr. Prof. PhD. Vasile Tamavschi, *Commentar...*, p. 648.

¹⁴ St. Justin the Martyr and the Philosopher, *Dialogue...*, col. 561-564, in PhD. V. Szmigelski, *The History...*, p. 147.



If in the Old Testament the paschal lamb symbolically united all believers with Jehovah, in the New Testament, through the transfigured bread and wine, all Christians are really united with the same God. The Holy Eucharist thus becomes the communion table of Christians, through which they effectively commune with God, having at the same time a sacrificial, atoning character and a living connection with the Lord.¹⁵

From the testimonies of the Old Testament the profoundly religious character of the Paschal rite is clear, in which the sacrifice of the lamb preceded the liberation of the people from the bondage of Egypt and was followed by the miraculous passage of the Israelites through the Red Sea.

Having an obvious prefigurative character, this ritual finds its full fulfillment in the New Testament, in the person of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, whose atoning sacrifice is followed by the water of Baptism. Just as in the Old Covenant, beyond the Red Sea, the salvation and sanctification of Israel were accomplished through the sacrifice of the paschal lamb, so in the New Covenant, beyond the water of Baptism, Christ clothes us in the grace of salvation, making us children of God.

The sanctification of Israel was therefore closely linked to the sacrifice of the paschal lamb, by which the chosen people separated themselves from the idolatrous world of Egypt, full of vain beliefs and customs alien to the true, monotheistic religion. From that moment on, Israel entered into a holy communion with God, who would guide them to the Promised Land – Canaan – where they were to keep the true faith and become, by their very existence, a people preparing all humanity for the coming of the Messiah.

Therefore, the sacrifice of the paschal lamb has an undeniable religious character and remains the most telling prefiguration of Christ's saving sacrifice. God ordained that, through this sacrifice, not only the firstborn of the Israelites would be delivered, but the entire community of the chosen people, freed from the slavery of Egyptian polytheistic desires and beliefs.

This ancient ordinance finds its full fulfillment in the sacrifice of Christ, through whom a new people is born – the new Israel – embracing the whole of humanity and calling them to faith in God, the source of true love and brotherly communion among men.

2. THE EUCHARISTIC ACTUALIZATION OF CHRIST'S SACRIFICE IN THE CHURCH: ONTOLOGICAL, LITURGICAL AND ESCHATOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE REAL PRESENCE

In the Divine Liturgy, as in all the Holy Mysteries, the Savior Jesus Christ makes Himself present and contemporary with every believer, regardless of time or place, spiritually impressing Himself on the life of each one, mysteriously suffering and resurrecting with him, constantly pursuing all those who will be saved, "in order to conquer them" through His saving love. Through the Liturgy, the eternal and divine meaning of our salvation is revealed, that is, the continuous work of Christ in history and in the life of every person. In this regard, Father Dumitru Stăniloae emphasized that the church place is the central space of Christ's salvific work, because the heart of the Liturgy that is celebrated in it is the Divine Eucharist — the mystery of the transformation of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of the Savior Jesus Christ and the communion of the faithful with them — as an eschatological projection of man's full union with God.¹⁶

Therefore, in the sacred space of the Church, the supreme encounter of the faithful with Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit – the One who transformed the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of the Lord, filling them with His presence – and with God the Father, the One who receives the

¹⁵ V. Tarnavschi, *Commentar...*, pp. 645-647.

¹⁶ Fr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Theology of the Eucharist*, in "Orthodoxy", no. 3, 1969, p. 343



Eucharistic sacrifice, is fulfilled. Within the Church, and especially during the Divine Liturgy, man lives full communion with the Holy Trinity. Thus, in the Church – that is, in the living community of all believers – the divine Logos, the Bread of eternal life, gives Himself to men both in word and in the Eucharistic (sacramental), partaking of Himself to them through His Body and Blood and dwelling within them.¹⁷ Every Christian, as a living member of the Church – the communitarian Body of Christ – is called to be aware of His presence and to partake of Him in the Divine Liturgy in two ways, united in a peri-horetic way: on the one hand, in an understanding (Gnostic) way, by enlightenment of the mind and spiritual participation, and on the other hand, sacramentally, through effective communion with the Body and Blood of the Lord.¹⁸ The Eucharist represents the mystery of the fullest presence and of the most active and saving work of Jesus Christ in the Church and, through her intercession, in the world. It expresses the mystery of the living relationship between Christ, the Church and the world – a true spiritual "equation" of His presence. It can therefore be said that the Church becomes the centre of convergence of heavenly and earthly realities, the place where the mysterious union between the divine and the human, between eternity and history, takes place.¹⁹

He is present in the Eucharist through His body taken from the Virgin Mary, the same body that was crucified on the cross, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father. His real presence is shown in His Body and Blood, in the image of the bread and wine, which, through the work of the Holy Spirit, are sanctified and transformed into the Body and Blood of the Lord during the Divine Liturgy.²⁰

Through this, He works the extension of salvation, the source of which is found in His very incarnation: assuming a human body like us, Christ impressed upon it the disposition of the supreme sacrifice, which He brought to the glory of the Father; he has given him the incorruptible life of the resurrection and the glory of the exalted humanity, which sits at the right hand of the Father and with whom he will come again to judge the living and the dead, to eternal life or damnation. Christ is truly present in the Eucharist to partake of all that has been accomplished in His body and of the fruits thereof, which endure in Him to this day and forever and ever. He now communicates them to us in a real and working way, to the extent that we can receive them in this life, but in this present communion there is, virtually and mysteriously, all that we will be able to fully receive in the age to come.²¹ In the Eucharist, John Meyendorff affirms, our entire salvation is concentrated, so that each believer can make it his own personally. Through Eucharistic communion, uniting ourselves with Christ, we become like Him: the capacity for sacrifice, the power of resurrection and eternal glory are imprinted on us. All this makes up a perfect unity, an integrity of the state of salvation, which is communicated to us through the Eucharist both virtually and in a current and dynamic way.

Through the Eucharist, by becoming intangible with Christ (Ephesians 3:6), the work of salvation, the state of resurrection and the glory that Christ accomplished in the very humanity that he assumed are prolonged and actualized in us.²² We live life in Christ when we receive Him into our personal existence, and He, through the warmth of His divine love, gradually transfigures us,

¹⁷ Hieromonk Mihail Stanciu, *The Meaning of Creation – The Actuality of the Cosmology of Saint Maximus the Confessor*, Settlement Publishing House, Slobozia 2000, p. 45

¹⁸ Hieromonk Mihail Stanciu, *The Meaning of Creation...*, p. 46

¹⁹ Fr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Theology of the Eucharist...*, p. 345

²⁰ Fr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Theology of the Eucharist...*, p. 346

²¹ Fr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Spirituality and Communion in the Orthodox Liturgy*, EIBMBOR Publishing House, 2nd edition, Bucharest 2004, p. 578

²² John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, translated from English by Rev. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Alexandru I. Stan, EIBMBOR Publishing House, Bucharest 1996, p. 255



leading us to "the measure of the perfect man" (Ephesians 4:13). Nicholas Cabasila states: "If Christ received in Himself flesh and blood undefiled, and, being God by nature from the beginning, deified the very human nature which He assumed, and in this human body the Son of God died and rose again, then he who desires union with Christ must partake of His Body, to taste His divinity and to bind his life to the death and resurrection of the Lord. That is why we nourish ourselves with the Most Holy Communion and drink from the divine chalice, in order to unite ourselves with the Body and Blood Himself that Christ took upon Himself from the womb of the Virgin. In this way, indeed, we become one with Him who became incarnate and became deified, with Him who died and rose for us." Therefore, we become Christophores, bearers of Christ, but this mysterious union does not abolish our personal identity, but perfects it, transfiguring it in the light of divine communion.²³ In the early Church, the celebration of the Eucharist was understood as an anamnesis — a living commemoration of Christ's death and resurrection — but also as a means of real union of the faithful with the present Christ and as a hopeful expectation of His future coming. Today, the Eucharistic understanding has deepened: the Eucharist is not perceived only as an isolated moment of consecration of the gifts, but as a holy dialogue between Christ and the community of the faithful. It represents Christ's living response to the Church's praise and thanksgiving for His saving work in the past, as well as to the request to be present and a worker in her midst now and until the end of time. The Eucharist is, therefore, God's response to the glorification and gratitude of the ecclesial community: a continual renewal of the presence of Christ, who gave himself for men and women and who reveals himself, through the images of the bread and wine, as the pledge of perfect communion in eternal life. It is the celebration of Christ "who was, who is, and who is to come" (Revelation 1:8) — the Lord of history and eternity. Christ is not only the object of a liturgical commemoration, but its living subject, the One who still works today in a real and saving way on those who believe and partake of his Body and Blood.²⁴ The perfect eschatological union with Christ, which the faithful await in the fullness of the Kingdom, is already anticipated and implicit in their present union with Him through the Eucharist. Christ's present presence is not essentially different from the one to come, but only in the way in which he is shared with us: in the present, he gives himself to us through the images and symbols of bread and wine, as a pledge of full communion that will be revealed in the age to come.

St. Maximus the Confessor clearly expresses this mystery, describing the entire Divine Liturgy as a spiritual ascent of the faithful to the summit of union with Christ, which is fulfilled at the moment of communion. He writes: The grace of the Holy Spirit, who is always present invisibly, works in a special way during the Holy Synaxis, truly transforming, transforming and reshaping each of those present, leading them to an ever more divine state, according to the measure of each one. Even if one does not feel this work, being still a child in Christ and not being able to penetrate the depths of what is being done, the grace that is hidden under the divine symbols of salvation works in him unceasingly, guiding him from the nearest realities to the perfect end of all. Thus, Eucharistic communion is not only a symbolic foretaste of the age to come, but a living and transforming reality, through which Christ works in the faithful, gradually raising them to full union with him in his endless Kingdom.²⁵

The same truth is emphasized by Nicholas Cabasila, who states: "The Lord, when He entered the Holy of Holies and offered Himself sacrifice before the heavenly Father in our place, He also took with Himself those who wished to be partakers of His burial. He did not ask them to die

²³ Nicolae Cabasila, *Life in Christ*, EIBMBOR Publishing House, Bucharest 1997, p. 134

²⁴ Fr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Theology of the Eucharist...*, p. 346

²⁵ Hieromonk Mihail Stanciu, *The Meaning of Creation...*, p. 45



naturally, like Him, but only to confess His death, either by Baptism, or by Anointing with Holy Chrism, or by partaking of the Holy Mysteries performed on the altar of the Church, where, mysteriously and beyond human understanding, the faithful are nourished by the Body of the One who died and rose again." Cabasila, therefore, shows that participation in the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ is not a mere symbolic memory, but a real communion in the mystery of his death and his new life. Through Baptism, Chrismation and the Eucharist, man is introduced into the paschal dynamics of Christ, becoming a partaker of His death for sin and His resurrection to eternal life²⁶.

CONCLUSION

The entire theological and symbolic journey of the sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb and its Eucharistic actualization in the Church reveals a profound unity between the Old and New Covenants, between prophecy and fulfilment, between sign and reality. The Passover Sacrifice, instituted through Moses, is not only a historical commemoration of Israel's liberation from the slavery of Egypt, but a foreshadowing of the universal liberation brought by Christ through His Sacrifice on the Cross. The Paschal Lamb thus becomes the prototype of the Lamb of God, Who sacrifices Himself for the life of the world, and the blood that saved the firstborn of Israel prefigures the Blood of Christ, which washes away the sins of all humanity. In the interpretation of the Holy Fathers, every detail of the Paschal rite – the age of the lamb, the moment of sacrifice, the unbreakable bones, the roasting in fire, unleavened bread and bitter herbs – becomes an anticipation of the Christological mystery. This typological exegesis shows the continuity of the divine plan of salvation and the transition from historical significance to sacramental reality. The old Easter prefigured the new Easter, and the covenant of Sinai is perfected in the Eucharistic covenant of the Church, in which the People of God is no longer an ethnic one, but an ecclesial and universal one. At the center of this continuity is the Eucharist, the mystery through which the crucified and risen Christ makes Himself a real and active presence in the life of the Church. Through the transformation of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of the Lord, the history of salvation is constantly updated, and believers become partakers of the life, death and resurrection of the Savior. The Eucharist is not a mere commemoration, but a living anamnesis, a real participation in the one sacrifice of Christ, which transfigures the whole of human existence. Just as the Paschal Lamb was the sign of the passage from slavery to freedom, so the Holy Eucharist is the passage from death to life, from sin to holiness, from the fallen condition to communion with God. It is in it that the entire economy of salvation is concentrated, being the point of convergence between heaven and earth, between the historical past of redemption and the eschatological fullness of the Kingdom.

For the Fathers of the Church, the Liturgy is the place where Christ continues to give Himself to the world, and man is called to respond to this gift with faith, repentance and love. In this dialogue of love, man becomes a "Christophore", a bearer of Christ, and is deified by participation in the Body and Blood of the Lord. Thus, through the Eucharist, the whole of creation is recapitulated in Christ and oriented towards the eschatological perfection of the Kingdom of Heaven.

In conclusion, the sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb and its actualization in the mystery of the Eucharist express the same divine mystery: the passage from shadow to truth, from symbol to reality, from death to life. In Christ, the Lamb of God, the whole of history finds its meaning, and the Church, His mysterious Body, becomes the place of God's living and saving presence in the world. By participating in the Divine Liturgy, the faithful not only remember the redemptive sacrifice, but actually live it, mysteriously anticipating the joy and unfading light of eternal Easter.

²⁶ Nicolae Cabasila, *Life in Christ...*, p. 146



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