

TRANS-ECCLESIAL EUCHARIST? AN EXPLORATION OF SOME CRITIQUES OF EUCHARISTIC ECCLESIOLOGY AND THE OUTLINING OF POTENTIAL NEW PATHS

Theodor Avramov
„Saint Kliment Ohridski”, Sofia University, Bulgaria

Abstract: *Eucharistic ecclesiology has emerged during the 20th century as the ecclesiology of the Orthodox Church. Its roots can be traced back to the generation of Russian émigré theologians, but its current state has been mainly influenced by the work of Metropolitan John of Pergamon (Zizioulas). During the more than fifty years that have passed since his initial formulation of the idea, it has also managed to accumulate quite a number of supporters, as well as critics. In this text, I will not try only to systematize some of the critiques, but also to suggest that the key is not understanding the Church, but the Eucharist, while trying to avoid the objectification that the Sacrament of Sacraments has been subjected to. I do this while using the ecumenical work on ecclesiology and its reception by the Orthodox as a guideline.*

Keywords: Eucharistic ecclesiology, Zizioulas, monosacramentality, personhood, limits of the church.

In the period of the Ecumenical Councils (4th-8th centuries) the main controversies concerned the nature of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and the Trinity in general. Later in the period of perpetual fragmentation of Christians, almost the first half of the second millennium, the biggest problems revolved around the practical aspects of life in the churches and its influence on theology. One among the problems concerning the two big separations in the 11th and 16th centuries was the issue of the authority of the primates of the churches, both of Rome's pope and Constantinople's patriarch. This remains an issue until this day.

During the 20th century, with the growth of the Ecumenical Movement, the desire for Christians to unite raised a fundamental question, that was not addressed systematically in the last two thousand years. How can Christians unite? Naturally, the answer must give both a practical and a theological justification. The crossroad between those two is ecclesiology.

The emergence of ecclesiology as a separate field of theological inquiry is heavily influenced by ecumenical engagement: dialogues, and even more often opposition. For the Roman Catholic Church and the

Eastern Orthodox Church Eucharistic ecclesiology became, and to some extent still is, preferred.¹

First expounded by Nicolas Afanasiev² it grew to be widely accepted, after its refinement from some of the most influential theologians of the 20th century.³ It concretized the celebration of the Eucharist as the constitutive motion of a church. Developing alongside a liturgical renewal in almost all historic churches brought about a re-discovery of the identity of the churches and their members.

Within the ecumenical engagement, out of which this has emerged, it has also led to a border between the churches which hold the Eucharist as central and constituting, and those who do not.⁴

In an age where more walls are being built than demolished the goal of this paper is to take a fresh look at the Church as constituted in the Eucharist, with an emphasis on the Eastern Orthodox view, especially the work of Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon (b. 1931) and the Orthodox response to the latest ecclesiological engagement of the WCC's Commission on Faith and Order, at the same time also addressing new critiques of Zizioulas' theology and finally taking a new look at the Eucharist and its implications for ecclesiology which could open new paths for encounter beyond, but leading towards the Table.

Faith and Order's Ecclesiological engagement

The question of ecclesiology lies at the core of the ecumenical movement since its beginning, although not explicitly. At the first World Conference on Faith and Order in Lausanne (1927) the concept

¹ For the Roman Catholic Church see: Joseph Ratzinger, „The Ecclesiology of Vatican II”, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 23/01/2002, p. 5. While for the Eastern Orthodox see: Georges Florovsky, „Eucharist and Catholicity”, in *Collected Works, volume XIII, Ecumenism I, Doctrinal Approach, Church and Catholicity*, Belmont, Nordland Pub. Co., 1979, pp. 46-57.

² Nicholas Afanasiev, *The Church of the Holy Spirit*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 2007 (orig. Nicholas Afanasiev, *Tserkov Duhha Sviatogo* Paris, YMCA Press, 1971).

³ Although every one of these theologians, whose names will be mentioned below, takes another approach and emphasizes different things, for all the Eucharist stands in the center.

⁴ Thomas FitzGerald E., *The Ecumenical Movement: An Introductory History*, Westport, Praeger Publishers, 2004, p. 159.

of the Church as „*living organism*”⁵ was elaborated. This reflection was deepened, and ecclesiology began to be re-viewed and projected through different lenses⁶ like Christology,⁷ Trinity,⁸ sacrament,⁹ conciliar fellowship,¹⁰ *koinonia*.¹¹ The *koinonia* concept seems to be the preferred one.¹² All this work led to the eventual publication of the convergence document „*The Church. Towards a Common Vision*”.¹³

The road to the „*The Church*”: As a convergence text *The Church* follows in the tradition of *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry*,¹⁴ which was a document that emerged from the work of the Commission on Faith and Order aimed at finding convergence on crucial issues, previously viewed as dividing. BEM had as its goal not only to elaborate the points where there is convergence but also to initiate a conversation. It was sent to all member church of the WCC at that time, as well as to the Roman Catholic Church. Their responses and critiques later were crucial for *The Church* document. After the discussions on baptism, Eucharist and ministry, the need for more research into ecclesiology surfaced¹⁵ and were undertaken by the Faith and Order Commission.

The Church is „*the [latest] common statement*”¹⁶ and the second convergence document after BEM. I will not compile a résumé of the

⁵ H. N. Bate (editor), *Faith and Order: Proceedings of the World Conference, Lausanne, August 3-21*, London, Student Christian Movement, 1927, p. 133.

⁶ While some were not explicitly elaborated as ecclesiological they do pertain to the envisioned and awaited unity of the Church.

⁷ H. N. Bate (editor), *Faith and Order*, p. 463.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ *Minutes of the Faith and Order Commission and Working Committee, St Andrews, Scotland, 1960 (Faith and Order Paper No. 31)*, p. 25.

¹⁰ „Concepts of Unity and Models of Union”, in *The Ecumenical Review*, volume 26, 1974, p. 37.

¹¹ *The Unity of the Church: Gift and Calling-the Canberra Statement, 20 February 1991*. WWC, Commission on Faith and Order, www.oikoumene.org/en, accessed in 05.12.2017.

¹² Silke-Petra Bergjan, „Ecclesiology in Faith and Order Texts”, in *The Ecumenical Review*, volume 46, 1994, p. 58.

¹³ *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (Faith and Order Paper No. 214)*, Geneva, WCC 2013 (hereafter referenced to as *The Church*).

¹⁴ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Geneva, WCC, 1982 (hereafter referred to as B. E. M.).

¹⁵ Witnessed to by the Orthodox who advised that the Commission on F&O should „concentrate on ecclesiology” („Inter-Orthodox Report on BEM”, in *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, no. 30/2, 1985, p. 264, quoted in Emmanuel Clapsis, „BEM-20 Years Later: An Orthodox Contribution”, in *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift: neue Folge der Revue Internationale de Théologie*, 2002, pp. 225-234 (www.e-periodica.ch, accessed in 14.12.2017).

¹⁶ *The Church*, p. 46.

text here due to volume limitations but being *the* ecclesiological statement of the F&O Commission, it is necessary that the problematic areas for the Orthodox be identified.

Reception and critique: the Orthodox

After the publication and submission to the churches, the same process of reception as with BEM was encouraged. The Orthodox response came three years later in an inter-Orthodox consultation in Paralimni, Cyprus.¹⁷ While welcoming *The Church* and its emphasis on a mission as „*a joyful privilege*” (§6)¹⁸ the Consultation emphasizes that the recognition between churches (TCTCV§9&10) „*cannot be solved by avoiding it and assuming that churches already do recognize one another as a church[§11]*”. The main problem of recognition between the churches immediately becomes clear and its solution lies only at the end of the ecumenical journey. *The Church* is a step towards that end, but the Consultation highlighted that there are irreconcilable positions between the text and the Orthodox understanding. To make a further step will necessitate outlining the problematic areas before moving on to an effort of reconciling them. I will not focus on all the critiques of the Consultation but only on the three, that is concretely linked to the eucharistic ecclesiology of Zizioulas.

Limits of the Church: The first issue that emerges for the Orthodox is the question of the *limits* of the Church. Referring to the holiness of the Church in TCTCV§35 the Consultation affirms that the Church is holy but also that „*distortions in faith and order led to separation*” (§25) which immediately raises the question of the „*limits of the Church*” and present it as a still „*unsettled question*” (§26), while referring to the threefold division of heresies, schisms and, unlawful congregations¹⁹ as „*canonical norms that have been in place since the late fourth century*” (§26).

Episcopé/Primacy: In the Consultation’s response the questions of épiscopé and primacy remains only marginal, receiving only two, short consecutive paragraphs (§32&34). The first one asserts that „*there is no épiscopé without the bishop*” while the second simply states that the

¹⁷ „World Council of Churches Inter-Orthodox Consultation for a Response to the Faith and Order Text *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Paralimni, Cyprus, 6-13 October 2016”, in *Review of Ecumenical Studies Sibiu*, volume 8, Warsaw, De Gryuter Open, 2016, pp. 433-445 (hereafter referred to as *The Consultation*).

¹⁸ All references to paragraphs (§) are to the *Inter-Orthodox Consultation* paragraphs. Paragraphs in the TCTCV are referred to as (TCTCV§).

¹⁹ Cf. Basil the Great, *Canonica Prima*, available at: www.goo.gl, accessed in 17/11/2017.

Consultation has „*reservations concerning the historical description*” of the questions of primacy, synodality and conciliarity while pointing to TCTCV§55. There the historical presence of primacy as „*a personal ministry of oversight over an area much wider than that of their individual ecclesiastical provinces*” is outlined as being applied by the five ancient patriarchates.²⁰ TCTCV also states that since the beginning „*the various ministries of primacy were plagued at times by competition between Church leaders*”.

Although not fundamentally relevant for the Orthodox, this question concerns the future ecumenical movement due to some churches who consider primacy to be a constitutive element of the Church.²¹ With all of this in mind a look at the presuppositions becomes necessary.

Identifying and addressing the barriers

Presuppositions: Eucharistic Ecclesiology: There are both profound confusion and interplay between *communion* and *eucharist*, on the one hand, and *church* and *liturgy* on the other. It is almost unquestionable that to „*take*” communion is to participate in the Eucharist and that when you go to church you go to liturgize. Albeit not fully comprehended an understanding of the Church as a worshipping, eucharistic community/communion is discernable. The search for the constituting element of the Church has been interpreted in many ways during the historical journey of the people of God, yet, practically²² at least, the Eucharist has always remained in the centre.

The understanding that the Eucharist is *the event* of the Church came to prominence during the 20th century, with the recovery of the patristic sources both West²³ and East.²⁴ Although it can be assumed as an invention or „*...new hermeneutical instrument to reinterpret the structures of*

²⁰ Alexandria, Antioch and Rome being historically the first and then Jerusalem and Constantinople following.

²¹ The Roman Catholic Church being one amongst other. Cf. Paul McPartlan, „The Church-Towards a Common Vision: A Roman Catholic Response”, in *Ecclesiology*, volume 12, 2016, Brill, Leiden, 2016, p. 311.

²² The Eucharistic Celebration/Lord’s Supper/Mass has remained in most churches if not the occasion, at least an element of the gathering as the Church.

²³ Jürgen Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie-New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II*, London, T.&T. Clark, 2010.

²⁴ Georges Florovsky, *Collected works of Georges Florovsky Ways of Russian theology*, volume 1&2, Belmont, Nordland Pub. Co., 1979.

*the church*²⁵ it is also firmly rooted in the liturgical texts of the first four centuries and is more correctly labelled as a re-discovery.

John Zizioulas affirmed the notion that the Church is to be found in the eucharistic gathering. He follows in a long line of theologians who worked on this topic but was the first to articulate the connection between Eucharist, church, and bishop.²⁶ Yves Congar (1904-1995) referred to him as „*one of the most original and profound theologians of our time*”²⁷ which makes a look at his theology necessary, not only for identifying the ecumenical barriers emerge for the Eastern Orthodox, but also for looking for a way beyond this. It is exactly his presuppositions that underline some of the barriers. For Zizioulas the limits of the Church are drawn by a baptismal ontological change²⁸ while primacy is defined by the Trinitarian emphasis on *monarchia* of the Father,²⁹ which is then linked to the bishop through his presiding over the Eucharist. These themes will be developed in more detail below.

Limits of the Church/Personhood and baptism: Personhood lies at the centre of Zizioulas’ theology, being strongly influenced by personalism. The person, understood as an individual transformed through relationship with other individuals and thus becoming a relational being,³⁰ is founded in the understanding of the Trinity. The core principle of eucharistic ecclesiology is easily discernable when he states: „*It is not by accident that the church has given to the Eucharist the name of ‘Communion’. For in the Eucharist we can find all the dimensions of communion: God communicates himself to us, we enter into communion with Him, the participants of the sacrament enter into communion with one another, and creation enters through man into communion with God*”.³¹

Despite this all-encompassing view of communion, the mechanism that is necessary for it, i. e. baptism, immediately drives a sharp and unbridgeable border between the baptized and the

²⁵ Cyril Hovorun, *Scaffolds of the Church: Towards Poststructural Ecclesiology*, Eugene, Cascade Books, 2017, p. 130.

²⁶ John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, Crestwood, NY, SVS Press, 1985, p. 24.

²⁷ Idem, *The One and the Many. Studies on God, Man, the Church and the World Today*, Alhambra, CA, Sebastian Press, 2010, back cover.

²⁸ Idem, *Being as Communion*, p. 58.

²⁹ Idem, *The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity*, p. 49.

³⁰ Idem, *Being as Communion*, pp. 27-49.

³¹ Idem, *Communion and Otherness*, London, T&T Clark, 2006, p. 7.

unbaptized³² because for Zizioulas „*there is no true being without communion*”.³³

He also establishes a dual hypostatic existence—a biological hypostasis and an ecclesiological hypostasis or person. Affirming „*Baptism as a new birth ... precisely an act constitutive of hypostasis*”³⁴ he outlines being baptized as the very reality of a person when biological necessity is transcended to personhood.³⁵ To follow this logic, Jonathan Ciraulo argues, that „*without an ecclesial hypostasis a human is simply an individual who must exist, and whose only free, ontological decision is suicide*”.³⁶ The danger that arises is that the ecclesial hypostasis might be considered in almost quantifiable terms, a kind of „*salvation-meter*”. The solution proposed by the same author is a dialectic tension between the life of a person and the biological hypostasis and its transcendence.³⁷ This notion is not excluded by Zizioulas who also affirms that participation in the Church is recognized only eschatologically and retroactively.³⁸ An ecclesial hypostasis, or personhood, is established by a fore taste of the *eschaton* and palpably in the Eucharistic celebration taking place, or rather residing in, the *eschaton*. The importance of this question is monumental, considering the implications it has for the ethical behavior of the baptized towards the unbaptized, who would be considered as *non-persons*. To follow Zizioulas’ argument logically leads to drawing the borders of the Church sacramentally.

While affirming this, another way to elaborate it would be to view the Church as Sacrament, one Sacrament—the Body of Christ as an eschatological reality, the participation in which is preceded by a pre-liturgy (sacrifice/death/baptism) and continued by a meta-liturgy (love). These are essentially the same and their temporal dimensions are not relevant, since their culmination lies in the Kingdom. Due to the reality that we exist in we experience both as the same thing, love as suffering.

Taking this into consideration the borders of the Church are indeed set by the Sacrament. Thus identifying the Sacrament would be a solution to the question of the „*limits of the church*” question.

³² Idem, *Being as Communion*, p. 58.

³³ *Ibidem*, pp. 48-49.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 53.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 54.

³⁶ Jonathan Martin Ciraulo, „Sacrament and Personhood: John Zizioulas’ Impasse and a Way Forward”, in *The Heythrop Journal*, 2012, p. 2.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

³⁸ John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, p. 62.

Hierarchy: Putting an equation sign between Eucharist and communion, vertical and horizontal communion, Zizioulas establishes that „[t]he Church is not just an institution... but a way of being”.³⁹ This naturally also makes the Trinitarian relationship as *the relationship* on which the Church is to model itself. The relationship of *being* and *otherness* then become an essential element to the ontology of the Church⁴⁰ because of the tension between the gift and the goal. It goes without question then that the organization of the Church must reflect exactly the ontology of the Church or „incarnate the eschatological nature”.⁴¹

His neopatristic synthesis of the Cappadocian Fathers’ defense of the Trinity reveals God’s „being as communion”,⁴² with the Father as the *arche* and beginning and emphasizing that it is not necessitated by nature that the Trinity is triune, but of a „free event of love caused by a free and loving person, the Father”.⁴³ This principle he names *monarchia*. When reflecting on primacy this is his starting point.

The role of the bishop, in the most basic and fundamental sense, is that of a *servant of communion*. With this, the question of a universal servant emerges. Although affirming this possibility I will not go into it immediately but rather move on to the hierarchical understanding, as outlined by Zizioulas, being a widely accepted principle and look at its critique, without searching for a new synthesis but simply establishing observed problems.

Within a flexible system⁴⁴ hierarchy emerges with the limiting of access to resources. In the institutionalization of *charismata* in Church’s history the same principle is observed.⁴⁵ Zizioulas applies Triadology in the case of a hierarchy, understanding it to be inherent to the Church, which is imprinted on the ministry of the bishop.⁴⁶ While guarding the primacy this position has been critiqued by Cyril Hovorun as over

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 26.

⁴³ Idem, „The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: The Significance of the Cappadocian Contribution”, in Christoph Schwobel (editor), *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Being and Act*, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1995, pp. 49-50.

⁴⁴ Here „flexible” stands for any system that isn’t strictly mechanical, where there is the possibility of a transformation of order, without the stopping the system’s processes.

⁴⁵ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God*, New York, Crossroads, 1990, pp. 66-67.

⁴⁶ John Zizioulas, „Primacy in the Church: An Orthodox Approach”, in James F. Puglisi (editor), *Petrine Ministry and the Unity of the Church: „Toward a Patient and Fraternal Dialogue. A Symposium*, Collegeville, Liturgical Press, 1999.

emphasizing the Father in the Holy Trinity leading to a distortion of the true equality of the persons.⁴⁷ Ralph del Colle has even referred to it as a „*new development*” in the appropriation of the theology of the Fathers.⁴⁸

There is also difficulty in applying this hierarchical blueprint onto the bishop on a local level, but also on a universal one. In both cases, this juxtaposition of the „*one*” and the „*many*” is not applicable without another condition, as it is in the trinitarian relationship,-that the „*one*” be the source of the „*many*” as Miroslav Volf has pointed out.⁴⁹ Although hierarchically incoherent maybe this could be better understood in the iconic perspective in which „*the bishop in the local church... is the expression [icon] of the eternal primacy of Christ in the eschatological assembly*”.⁵⁰ In this case, the iconic understanding of the bishop, along with the priesthood, is eschatologically understood. The image of the recapitulation of everything in God⁵¹ would indeed imply a radical transcendence, which in turn is to be expected of the eucharistic assembly entering the Kingdom.

This „*hyper-realized eschatology*”,⁵² critiqued by Volf, does indeed need to be balanced with the institutional approach. He proposes an institution modeled after the Trinity „*because the Trinity itself is in a certain sense an 'institution'... [considering] institutions as a stable structure of social interaction*”.⁵³ A balanced vision of the Church then is an eschatological reality with established structures for preserving communion, modelled on the Holy Trinity, but open to change, due to the structure’s human nature.

On the other hand, while the monarchy of the Father „*secures the unity of [the] God*”⁵⁴ it is also „*conditioning the personhood of the Holy Spirit*”⁵⁵ the same cannot be said about the role of the bishop and applied to primacy. The logical confusions that follow are substantial as Andrei

⁴⁷ Cyril Hovorun, *Scaffolds of the Church*, p. 131.

⁴⁸ R. Colle, „*Person and Being in John Zizioulas' Trinitarian Theology: Conversations with Thomas Torrance and Thomas Aquinas*”, in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, no. 54 (1), 2009, pp. 70-86.

⁴⁹ Andrey Shishkov, „*Metropolitan John Zizioulas on Primacy in the Church*”, in *IKZ* no. 104, 2014, p. 219.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 215.

⁵¹ Cf. 1 Cor. 15:28.

⁵² Gaëtan Baillargeon, *Perspectives orthodoxes sur l'Église-Communion, L'Œuvre de Jean Zizioulas, Brèches théologiques 6*, Paris, Mediaspaul, 1989, p. 256.

⁵³ Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998, p. 235.

⁵⁴ Cyril Hovorun, *Meta Ecclesiology, Chronicles of Church Awareness*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p. 134.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

Shishkov points out.⁵⁶ That the entire Eucharistic assembly is structured as an „already, but not yet” dialectic or a „gift-goal” tension⁵⁷ should also be visible in this dynamic—the one fulfilling the ministry of *episcopus* is sacramentally and iconically hierarchical on the local level, but only as a servant of communion. Primacy then is attributed to communion awaited and expected.

Episkopé: A complete historical tracing of the development of the role of bishop and the ministry of *episcopus* is not feasible within this paper so instead just a short excursion into the beginning would suffice to investigate whether the two can really be treated as inseparable, as it was stated above. Cyril Hovorun offers the following overview.⁵⁸

Presbyters were the first ministerial institution.⁵⁹ Their origin is traced by most to the Jewish elders (*zaqenim*), present in every synagogue,⁶⁰ while some maintain it has Greek roots,⁶¹ associated with the *gerousia* (γερούσια). Characteristic about both was that they had consultational and sacramental functions, exercised collegially which can be assumed also for their Christian descendants.⁶² For the sake of administration among them, one started fulfilling the function of overseeing the life of the community, probably on a rotational principle in a way that „*episkopos* (ἐπίσκοπος) was an adjective, not a noun”.⁶³ Only later it turned into a permanent establishment. Ignatius of Antioch (ca. 50-117) was the first proponent of „mono-episcopacy”.⁶⁴ This language later became endowed with hierarchical and even political connotations.⁶⁵ This elevation in power and its theological justification continued and while it was a model necessary for the confrontations with heresies, it widened the gap between clergy and laity.

⁵⁶ Andrey Shishkov, „Metropolitan John Zizioulas on Primacy in the Church”, p. 214.

⁵⁷ Philip Kariatlis, *Church as Communion, The Gift and Goal of Koinonia*, Redfern, NSW, 2016.

⁵⁸ Cyril Hovorun, *Scaffolds of the Church*, pp. 70-91.

⁵⁹ F. A. Sullivan, *From Apostles to Bishops: The Development of the Episcopacy in the Early Church*, New York, Newman, 2001, p. 16.

⁶⁰ Raymond Edward Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind*, New York, Paulist 1984, pp. 32-33.

⁶¹ Alistair Stewart-Sykes, *The Original Bishops: Office and Order in the First Christian Communities*, Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2014, p. 8.

⁶² Cyril Hovorun, *Scaffolds of the Church*, pp. 150-151.

⁶³ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁴ Robert Haigh, *Christian Community in History*, volume 1, New York, Continuum, 2004.

⁶⁵ „Didascaaliaapostolorum (CPG 1738) 9.3-4”, in Cyril Hovorun, *Scaffolds of the Church*, p. 153.

It naturally follows that the *ministry* of *episcopate* was always present, but as a ministry, not as an individual possession, or object.⁶⁶ The bishop is the one practising the ministry of *episkopé*, putting the ministry of the bishop, at least the one of oversight in the „scaffolding” of the Church⁶⁷ and thus not inherent to her nature. The bishops' ministry is indeed presiding over the Eucharist, in the collection and offering up of everybody and everything, unifying the *charisms*, making sure that they are used for communion, rather than division.⁶⁸ The bishop is a *servant of communion*. Although this changes nothing in the current ecclesial structures it does allow for the consideration of ministry of *episcopate* apart from the bishop. Putting communion at the centre the Eucharist as this communion itself is in the centre.

New way to approach the question

The Eucharist has usually been confined to a specific eucharistic liturgy in which several key historical moments are remembered and actualized. Regardless of the vast amounts of controversies that emerged from its practice and comprehension there is one thing that has always stayed the same – that the historical emphasis, at least in the liturgical celebration itself, has been always on the final meal that Christ and the apostles shared. This fundamentally led to a radical objectification of the Eucharist to the point that now, at least in the Slavic Orthodox churches you „take” Communion, rather than „commune”. The widespread understanding that the Eucharist happens within the *eschaton*⁶⁹ means that also participation in it is *eschatological*. The Body is the eschatological Body, but it is not only received but it is taken part *in*, not only *of*. Such a participation then is always two-sided. The „partakerin” needs to be adjusted to the „partaken in”. That Christ is a person means that this participation is first a personal participation⁷⁰ and second that it is a participation of two-sided personhood affirmation. The nature of this personhood is then the core of the

⁶⁶ Cf. the notion of *potestas*, later developed as *plenitudo potestatis* under Pope Innocent III. Brian Tierney, *Foundations of the Conciliar Theory*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1955, pp. 144-149.

⁶⁷ Cyril Hovorun, *Scaffolds of the Church*, pp. 145-163.

⁶⁸ John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, p. 153.

⁶⁹ Very clearly emphasized by both Georges Florovsky and Alexander Schmemmann throughout all their work.

⁷⁰ This point is strongly emphasized by the entire corpus of work of John Zizioulas.

mentioned problems as it is the one in which the Eucharistic participation is fulfilled.

What is the Eucharist? Although reductionist it can be said that the basic goal of the Eucharist is revelation and communion. The story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:13-35) is the perfect example—they recognize Christ in the opening of the Scriptures and the breaking of the bread. It is getting to *meet* and *participate in* God's existence. Going back to Genesis with this in mind, the story of Adam and Eve can be seen as one of „*getting to know*” through the partaking in the gifts given to them, in turn offering their gratitude and establishing a relationship of praise.⁷¹ This relationship had as its goal the full communion which is referred to as *deification/theosis*, achieved in *thanksgiving*. This was jeopardized with the untimely partaking of the „*tree of knowledge*”. Grasping too soon for what was to be its through gratitude humanity became unable to partake of the tree of life. Created as a project and untimely ‘*getting to know*’ through taking, it sentenced itself to a life devoid of gratitude, communion and consequently to a life always ending in death. What was left afterwards was an expectation of the fulfillment of the project, the revelation of what it means to be *human* and the death of death.

Personhood or Humanhood? The search for what it means to be human may seem like a relatively modern, even post-modern concern due to the necessity of a sustained self-reflection. Irenaeus of Lyons (ca.130-202) was among the first theologians of the Church and the one who used probably the most striking and well-known language regarding this maintaining that „*the glory of God is a living human being (vivens homo)*”.⁷² To appreciate this as more than a poetic statement would require the apprehension of the way in which Irenaeus uses the word *homo*.

Ignatius of Antioch (35-108) born in Smyrna and most likely a member of the Johannine community along with Polycarp, who was Irenaeus' bishop, gives the background of Irenaeus' statement while writing to the Christians in Rome, on the way to his martyrdom, he warns them: „*The birth pangs are upon me. Forgive me, brethren; do not obstruct my coming to life - do not wish me to die...suffer me to receive pure light. Once I*

⁷¹ On this „*eucharistic*” reading of the creation story see p. 17 below.

⁷² *Gloria enim Dei vivens homo*, Irenaeus, *Adv. Her.* 7.34:4.

arrive there, I shall be a man [ἄνθρωπος]. Permit me to be an imitator of my suffering God".⁷³

The only way to understand this is hidden in the Gospel of John, which begins where the Synoptics end.

The fourth Gospel echoes Genesis since its beginning. From its perspective the anthropological statements above can be interpreted only in the context of Pilate's words „*Ecce Homo; Ἰδοὺ ὁ ἄνθρωπος*” (John 19:5). The human being that both Irenaeus and Ignatius are writing about is revealed. The project began in Genesis „*is finished*” (John 19:30) with the words uttered by Christ on the Cross.⁷⁴ These are the words of institution of John's gospel, which are lacking in the context of his retelling of the Last Supper. In the Synoptics we see Jesus Christ as „*he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me'*” (Luke 22:19). The Cross in John is the Supper of the Synoptics where the „*body is given for*” all human beings. But only with all four Gospels in mind can the parallel between the Cross and Thanksgiving be seen.

This might seem like a forced diachronic reading of the Passion but a look at the *thanksgiving* before the breaking of the bread is not just a new interpretation that rejects the Eucharist but rather interpreting the Eucharist, from the Cross. Eucharist and Passion coincide. The Passion is Eucharist and Eucharist is thanksgiving.⁷⁵

On the Cross, we see not only what it means to be God, but also what it means to be truly human. On the cross humanity is revealed not as *homo sapiens*, but as *homo eucharisticus* and as *homo adorans*.⁷⁶ Only in thanksgiving and praise can all that is received be referred back to God, transformed as communion.

Through this, the Eucharist is shown to be broader, not only a moment, but a period, and with John the Baptist's proclamation *Behold the Lamb of God* in the beginning of the fourth gospel it's expanded to an entire cross-oriented, eucharistic life.

⁷³ ὁ δὲ τοκετός μοι ἐπίκειται.. σύγγνωτέ μοι, ἀδελφοί: μὴ ἐμποδίσητέ μοι ζῆσαι, μὴ θελήσητέ με ἀποθανεῖν: τὸν τοῦ θεοῦ θέλοντα εἶναι κόσμῳ μὴ χαρίσησθε, μηδὲ ὑληέξαπατήσητε: ἄφετέ με καθαρὸν φῶς λαβεῖν: ἐκεῖ παραγενόμενος ἄνθρωπος ἔσομαι. Ignatius of Antioch 6:2-3, „Letter to the Romans”, in J. Kleist, *The Epistles of St. Clement of Rome and St. Ignatius of Antioch*, New York, Paulist Press, 1946 p. 83.

⁷⁴ John Behr, *Becoming Human: Meditations on Christian Anthropology in Word and Image*, Crestwood, SVS Press, 2012 (this whole line of thinking is followed in Behr's book but is not applied to the Eucharist).

⁷⁵ Εὐχαριστέω meaning „to give thanks” from which „eucharist” is derived.

⁷⁶ Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, Crestwood, SVS Press, 1973, p. 15.

Thanksgiving being the crucial word here, not sacrifice. Humanity truly manifested in Christ but an eschatological expectation for everybody living, is revealed as love (giving for the other) and gratitude. Humanity, instead of Zizioulas' personhood, established in this cross-centered way, shows the „*limits of the church*” to be much broader than assumed, drawn by *grateful suffering* making the Eucharist a meta-liturgical reality. As a way of life, this is also shown as *the Orthodox spirituality*, a „*spirituality of suffering, or rather, more accurately, of co-suffering love. It is the way in which a person is made perfect for it is the way in which Christ Himself was perfected in His humanity*”.⁷⁷

Conclusion: Trans-ecclesial Eucharist?

The Eucharist Event (the Last Supper, Cross and Resurrection inseparable) establishes the Church, with Baptism and Eucharist related in a way similar to quantum entanglement,⁷⁸ with an eschatological „*already, but not yet*”. But also suffering and gratitude, with the same eschatological projection as Baptism and the Eucharist lead to a maybe unconscious, communion with the Suffering Servant. Grateful suffering is understood as *eucharistic events*. Their recognition is only a question of liturgical participation, which cannot be passed over, but is nonetheless eschatologically fulfilled.

The story of St. Blandina's martyrdom,⁷⁹ probably authored by Irenaeus of Lyons, shines more light on this. After being tortured, at the moment of her utmost weakness, she is identified with Christ on the Cross.⁸⁰ In this case, suffering becomes communion and it is her

⁷⁷ Thomas Hopko, *All the fullness of God*, New York, Athens Printing Company, 1982, p. 47.

⁷⁸ Quantum Entanglement is a physical phenomenon exhibited by subatomic particles that are related to each other despite barriers in space, and time. Most strikingly once measure they exhibit results that are connected to the other particle in the pair and this happens even if they are galaxies apart. The contradiction is that this communication is faster than the speed of light, something that is not possible in the current model used in physics. Cf. „Quantum Entanglement and Information”, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (www.plato.stanford.edu/entries).

⁷⁹ The letter is preserved in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* (H.e.) 5.1-3. Ed. and trans. K. Lake, Lobe Classical Library, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1980. Cited in John Behr, „Older than all Creation”, in *Communivatorum: a theological journal*, no. 3, 2013, pp. 237-254.

⁸⁰ „*Blandina, hung on a stake (ἐπί ξύλου), was offered as food for foe wild beasts that were let in. She, by being seen hanging in the form of a cross, by her vigorous prayer, caused great zeal in foe contestants, as, in their struggle, they beheld with their outward eyes, through the sister, him who was crucified for*

desire to participate that builds this communion. If thanksgiving implies the recognition of a gift⁸¹ and consequently that this gift is not possessed or owned, than their acceptance of a gift, in this case suffering, is in a relational way thanksgiving. Suffering and gratitude as the two components of the Eucharist open communion even to those outside the churches.

Volf argues that if Eucharist is the Whole Christ, realized eschatologically, then there can be absolutely no exclusion of anybody in the eucharistic gathering, because that would mean that the eucharistic gathering is not a Eucharist.⁸² Continuing this logic a church that excludes is no church at all, due to the eschatological dimension of the eucharistic liturgy. This would also imply that either only the baptized are eschatological beings and thus „*saved*” or that from „*no-one excluded*” we must move to a radical inclusivity, beyond baptized and non-baptized. Although this is never even referenced to by Zizioulas, it fits his understanding of the Church as a *way of being*⁸³ and also this radical expansion of the borders of the Church, transforming them into frontiers.⁸⁴

These frontiers are not all-encompassing though. Here I am not proposing an all-inclusive eucharist. As noted above the „*key*” is gratitude and suffering, or more precisely grateful suffering together. Freedom here is crucial as thanksgiving necessitates freedom. Zizioulas, on this point as mentioned above,⁸⁵ criticizes the humanist absolute notion of freedom suggesting that it naturally leads to nihilism and the negation of ontology. I would like to suggest an even further limiting of the notion of freedom, at least with the eucharist events in mind, that *the free choice that anybody could make is to choose, not to live. As Christ „delivered Himself up for the life of the world”*⁸⁶ so is humanhood

them, that he might persuade those who believe in him that everyone who suffers for the glory of Christ has for ever communion with the living God. ...the small and weak and despised woman had put on the great and invincible athlete, Christ, routing the adversary in many bouts, and, through the struggle, being crowned with the crown of incorruptibility” (H.c. 5.1.41-2) quoted in John Behr, „Older than all Creation”, p. 243.

⁸¹ The „*gift*” here is not to be understood as a *present*, but as something given.

⁸² Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness*, pp. 103-104.

⁸³ John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, p. 15.

⁸⁴ Cyril Hovorun employs this image to speak of the borders of the church as porous, permeable lines that facilitate travel, rather than isolate. Cf. Cyril Hovorun, *Scaffolds of the Church*, p.178.

⁸⁵ Cf. Footnote 37 and the related argument by Jonathan Ciraulo.

⁸⁶ The prayer before the words of institution in the anaphora of the liturgy of St. John Chrysostom. See: www.goarch.org, accessed in 06.12.2017.

affirmed by dying for oneself, living for the other, which is communion with the one, who did the same.

A final point that may be a stumbling block for the whole argument is with the above-mentioned reading of Genesis 1 and 2. The proposed vision of Eden as a eucharistic existence may be seen as non-biblically based. The diachronic reading proposed here is not new though. Returning to St. Irenaeus we find a startling statement: „*Since he who saves already existed, it was necessary that he who would be saved should come into existence, that the One who saves should not exist in vain*”.⁸⁷

Rather than considering this in the context of debates regarding necessity in God’s free creation of the world this is best seen exactly as atypical way that Creation was seen by the bishop of Lyon, as John Behr clarifies.⁸⁸ This reading of Genesis, sees first the Jesus, the Nazarene, in whose image Adam was made. The Crucified and Exalted one is where time starts and flows backwards and forwards. The grateful suffering, the Eucharist proper is where everything is centered and even, as John Behr asserts, „*creation begins with the Passion of Christ*”.⁸⁹ Eucharist, Passion, and Creation coincide.

⁸⁷ Cum enim prae existeret salvans, oportebat quod salvare turfieret, uti non vacuum sit salvans. Irenaeus, *Adv. Her.* III.22.3

⁸⁸ „*In Adam, the Word sketched out in advance what would be revealed and established in the Son of God, Christ himself. The description of Adam as a ‘type’ implies the prior existence of the one of whom he is a type. As such, the one who was to come exists before Adam; it was by him and for him that Adam came into existence, and, furthermore, as he exists as the Saviour, Adam came into existence to be saved by him. Thus, though only appearing at the end, this one is, nevertheless, the true beginning*”. John Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons: Identifying Christianity*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013 pp. 146-147.

⁸⁹ We can only speak of creation as having been brought into being by and for its savior Jesus Christ, and its whole history as having been providentially by him, from the moment that he is revealed within its history, as the Passion. Theologically speaking, creation and its history begins with the Passion of Christ and from this „*once for all*” work looks backwards and forwards to see everything in this light, making everything new. Christian cosmology, elaborated as it must be from the perspective of the Cross, sees the Cross as impregnated in the very structure of creation: *stat crux dumvolvitur orbis*—the Cross stands, while the earth revolves. The power of God revealed in and through the Cross brought creation into being and sustains it in existence. Just as the date of the Passion in antiquity was considered to be 25 March (which was the basis for calculating the date of his nativity, nine months later), so also in antiquity 25 March was considered to be the very date of creation, the Creation which revolves around the axis of the eternal, immovable Cross. As paradoxical as it might sound, one can say, theologically, that creation and salvation were effected simultaneously on that day, 25 March, A. D 33, when Christ gave himself for the life of the world. John Behr, *The Mystery of Christ, Life in Death*, Crestwood, SVS Press, 2006, pp. 90-91.

What has developed above certainly challenges many preconceived notions about the Church and her nature. It is in no case a definitive solution but offers another perspective, which has implications for both our sacramental view of the Church, as well as her mission to the world are striking. The radical expansion of the borders of the Church, reshaped by *grateful suffering*, outlined above as „*trans-ecclesial eucharist*” leaves us with no clear answer of the borders of the Church. More importantly, it doesn't allow for any limiting. While this may seem like admitting the non-baptized to participation in the Eucharist I again refer to Baptism (death, suffering) and Eucharist (thanksgiving) as two sides of one Sacrament.

The location of the Church then becomes a question of locating not her borders, but her foundation, her essence.

Accepting that certain structures of the Church are scaffolding, but not her essence, it would be wise not to construct the Church as scaffolding on top of other scaffolding but rather on the Cross that stands, while the world turns.⁹⁰

Based on this I propose, in unison with the voices of the Paralimni Consultation, to „*encourage further theological reflection on the notion of the Church as mystery (mysterion)*” (§26). The mystery of the broken, exalted Body of Christ.

⁹⁰ Stat crux dumvolvitur orbis (lat.) The Carthusian Order's motto.

