

The Cosmological Dimension of the Divine Liturgy

Deacon Valentin Ioan ISTRATI*

* "Al. I. Cuza" University, "Dumitru Stăniloae" Faculty of Orthodox Theology,
Closca Street, No. 9, 700066, Iasi, Romania
E-mail Address: homoliturgeticus@yahoo.com

Abstract

The cosmological dimension of Liturgy – in every Christian confession – has to open to the people the liturgical vision of cosmos. The key to this vision is the rediscovery of the holiness of life. The Saints see the world as a living sacrifice of the heart of God, as a light and icon of His love for us. A rediscovery of the values of Divine Liturgy and of the Christian holiness could restore in the heart of human communities the vision of cosmos as a created matrix for the “sons of God”.

Abrégé

La dimension cosmologique de la Liturgie – dans toute confession chrétienne – doit ouvrir à l’homme la vision vers la dimension liturgique du cosmos. La clé de sens de cette nécessité est la redécouverte de la sainteté de la vie. Les saints considèrent la nature en tant que sacrifice de l’âme de Dieu, lumière et icône de Son amour pour l’homme. Une redécouverte des valeurs de la Divine Liturgie et de la sainteté chrétienne pourrait rétablir dans le foyer des communautés humaines la vision du cosmos en tant que matrice créée des fils du Dieu.

The Liturgy is a cosmos and the cosmos is a Liturgy. This fundamental reality of the Church is the key for a theological understanding of the cosmos as an ecclesial reality. The Church does not replace the cosmos, but opens its vocation, is the fulfilment of the eschatological finality of the cosmos. The cosmic symmetry is the icon of the Church symmetry and harmony, and the universe through its finality heralds the Kingdom of God, the Eternal Church.

The Holy Fathers saw in the order of the universe the theological seeds of the ecclesial society organization, the substantial icon of the Kingdom and the school of humanity¹. The beauty of the world created by God was the key to understand the spiritual sanctuary of the Church, and the Church has taken and transfigured this inclusive and diverse beauty of the world and of the history in order to announce the “world without end” and the meta-history².

This solidarity of sense and vocation between cosmos and Church is the fundament of a more profound understanding of the human person, of the finality of life and creation, but also the way of a theological vision of the world, which must not be exploited and destroyed by human being but transfigured, humanized and assumed by him in the perspective of eternity. Saint Maximus the Confessor affirms the correspondence between cosmos and Church: “The Holy Church is typos and icon of the whole cosmos, composed by visible and invisible beings, having the same unity and distinction as the cosmos”³. Maximus realizes another correspondence between the two realms of being: spirit and matter, and the two compartments of the Church: the nave *ναός* and the Altar: “The nave is sanctuary - *ieration* in potency, initiated and consecrated (...) and the *ieration* is the nave in act”⁴.

In patristic theology, the human being is the priest (*sacerdos/tis* - lat.) of creation and a “mystical Church”⁵. He has to assume her reasons (*λογοί*) and make her human, he has to transfigure the world in hymn of praise brought to the Creator

¹ “When this world was brought to existence, firstly like a school and a learning place of human souls - παιδευτήριον των ανθρωπίνων ψυχών, then as a house suited for those destined to birth and corruption (...) then He brought to existence the flow of time, always hurrying, passes over and does not stop its way”, Saint Basil the Great, *In Hexaemeron*, I, 5, Sources Chrétiennes 26, Greek texts, introduction et traduction de Stanislas Giet, professeur à l'Université de Strasbourg - Deuxième édition revue et augmentée, Editions du Cerf, Paris, 2006, p. 107.

² Saint Maximus the Confessor, *The Church's Mystagogy*, in Maximus Confessor, *Selected Writings*, S.P.C.K., London, 1985, p. 189.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 188.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 195.

of all things; he has to be the vehicle of her becoming, from matter to light. The *Genesis* narrative speaks of the creation through word as a liturgical act, the creative office of God, the Liturgy of His love for the creatures granted with freedom and immortality.

The Orthodox Church preserved and enriched this theological and liturgical vision of creation especially in her *Divine Liturgy*⁶, the Eucharist that is the pulse and the heart of the Church, the theological crossroad in which all her dimensions meet. The Divine Liturgy is the vibrant life of the Church, the place of conjunction of time with eternity, of space with the Kingdom. In this service, which is the centre and source of all the services in the Church, the prayer of thankfulness (ευχαριστία – gratitude in Gr.) is an offering, a gift of the Creator to the creatures as well as a gift of human persons to God. The Divine Liturgy is the transfiguration of the matter in celestial light, in eschatological reality.

The ultimate vocation of the whole creation is to be transformed in new, eschatological creation, “new heaven and new earth” (Apocalypse 21, 1). Or, Divine Liturgy prophetically realizes this transfiguration of the matter in light. The Liturgy takes the matter of the world: bread and wine and through prayer transforms them into the Body and the Blood of the Lord. It receives human ordinary limited food and transfigures it into divine food, in the unlimited “medicine of immortality”⁷. The Church takes a part of the world and transforms it in the Whole Christ. She takes corruptible matter and converts it into incorruptible eschatological matter. The Church takes the creation submitted to death and converts it into a living creation, Christ dead and risen, The Light of the unending life.

⁶ See The Divine Liturgy according to St. John Chrysostom, Saint Tikhon Seminary Press, South Canaan, 1977 (in English) and Η Θεία Λειτουργία του Αγ. Ιωάννου του Χρυσοστόμου [*The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*], Αδελφοτής Θεολογόν Η Ζωή [*Theological Brotherhood The Life*] Αθήναι (Athens), 1995, (in Ancient Greek).

⁷ Saint Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to Ephesians*, 20, 2. Sources Chrétienes 10, p. 76.

The Church is the plerome of cosmos and the “plerome – πλήρωμα of Christ” (Ephes. 1, 23)⁸, present into the heart of the world, the Kingdom that mystically arises in the creation’s life, *eschaton* resting in time. In the Eucharistic Body of Christ, succession becomes simultaneity, corruption becomes immortality, history becomes eternity and the cosmos becomes Church.

We will try to analyze several excerpts from the *Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*, used in the Orthodox Church, in order to articulate the main aspects of the cosmological dimension of Liturgy.

Prothesis

The cosmological dimension of Divine Liturgy could be firstly extracted from the *Prothesis*, the ritual in which the priest prepares the Gifts for Liturgy. The Bread and Wine that will be consecrated, already preserve in themselves – symbolically and mystically – the whole ecclesial universe in the loving life of the Trinity. There is no ordinary bread and wine but every piece of bread tends to be body and every drop of wine waits his becoming into blood through prayer.

Prothesis is the commemoration and actualization of Christ’s life, symbolizing the Nativity of our Lord together with His Sacrifice on the Cross for the salvation of humankind.

On the Holy Paten, the priest places the Prospophora (the Lamb – ἄμνος in Gr.), a loaf of bread sealed with the inscription *IHS HS NI KA* (*Jesus Christ is Victor*) that will become the Body of Christ (Figure 1). Also, on the Paten is present the Mother of the Lord, as a triangular particle placed at the right hand of Christ, and the nine hosts of saints: angels, prophets, apostles, hierarchs, martyrs, hermits, doctors, the parents of Saint Mary and Saint John Chrysostom, the author of the Liturgy.

It follows particles of bread for the Bishop of the place, for the people and for the founders of the Church. Then the priest

⁸ The warm water poured into the Eucharist is called “the fullness of the Holy Spirit” in *The Divine Liturgy according to St. John Chrysostom*, Saint Tikhon Seminary Press, South Canaan, 1977, p. 77 (*The Divine Liturgy...*).

places particles for all the believers, living or departed, remembered at the Divine Liturgy.

Also, the priest pours wine and water into the Chalice saying the words: "One of the soldiers pierced his side and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness and his witness is true"⁹, refers to the unique Sacrifice of the Lord on the Cross.

This ancient preparation emphasizes the universal vocation of the Church and of the Liturgy. In the Eucharistic service it is present the whole ecclesial reality, angels and saints, living and dead, the Kingdom of God and this world, all gravitating together around the Lamb of God, Christ sacrificed once for all for the life of the world. The Paten of the Divine Liturgy is a liturgical and eschatological cosmos where all the ages, places and generations of the integral ecclesial humanity meet together, impregnated, penetrated by the Saving Blood of Christ.

The Church transforms the creation into *eschaton*, because she takes a part of the Church, she prays for her integrity (*pars pro toto*), and receives the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ. The Liturgy is performed in a limited and determined space and time, but she represents the celestial eternal Liturgy of the unlimited Kingdom, the sacrifice on the Cross and the resurrection of Christ for us. The Eucharist is therefore the sacramental and substantial entrance into the eternal reality of the life of Trinity, where the Cross and Resurrection are the permanence of triadic love.

The Liturgy refers to the unitary world, from here and from above, witnessing the eternal life of all those who died "into the hope of resurrection". The Church calls for prayer the earth and the cosmos, the heaven and the Church, the history and the eschaton. She prays also for those in hell, bringing to them love's light and hope and salvation until the universal Judgment, when all our thoughts, intentions and the consequences of our deeds will be judged by Christ.

⁹ *The Divine Liturgy...*, p. 16.

Prothesis is already consecration and prayer. Already the fruits of the earth, the fruits of the earth which are already present on the Holy Paten and in the Holy Chalice have as a supreme vocation their transformation (μεταβολή into Christ's blood and body: "O God, who didst send the Heavenly Bread, the Food of the whole world, our Lord and God Jesus Christ, to be our Saviour, Redeemer and Benefactor, blessing and sanctifying us, bless this offering and accept it upon Thy heavenly altar"¹⁰.

The Liturgy of the Word

The *Blessing* for the beginning of *Divine Liturgy* shows that the Eucharist is performed here on earth, in space and time, but refers to the eschatological reality of the Kingdom of God: "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and forever and unto ages of ages"¹¹.

The future kingdom, already sacramentally and eucharistically present in the Liturgy, is not the kingdom of death, but the kingdom of the Holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The priest blesses this kingdom, entering with all the church into the light of Trinity, in a liturgical procession toward the Eighth Day, the Day without evening. This blessing accedes towards a reality transcending the spatial-temporal categories, because it affirms the presence of Trinity in time, aeon and eternity as Light of time and eternity of Light.

The words "now and forever and unto ages of ages", frequently repeated in the Orthodox Church are the extension of prayer. "Now" is the seal of present and presence, the symbol of the moment, the succession of time and the passing through life. The word "forever" is the seal of aeon, the age after death, when the axiological stability of person¹² is waiting of judgement. The words "Ages of ages" mean the final eternity, the kingdom where Christ will become all in all, the unending

¹⁰ *The Divine Liturgy...*, p. 23.

¹¹ *The Divine Liturgy...*, p. 29.

¹² „The reasons (λογοί) of time rest in God. Time is aeon when it stops from its movement and the aeon is time when is moved and measured”, Sf. Maxim Mărturisitorul (*Saint Maximus the Confessor*), *Ambigua*, (Rom.), Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești (*Fathers and Ecclesial Writers*) 80, p. 161.

ages of divine love, in which the world will enter after the final resurrection.

The Church takes a particular situation, a place, a moment, a person, in order to theologially articulate the mystery of unity, of ubiquity, and the eternity of humankind in love. Christ affirms without equivocate the unique and eternal value of the human person (the lost sheep, the “drahma” – the lost coin (Luke 15, 8), “what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?” (Mark 8, 36). Christ emphasizes the immortal light of every human person in freedom and the presence of the whole in part (*pars pro toto*) as the universal mystery of spiritual world. Everything is present in the living infinite memory of God, every human person is a living universe, every human being preserves in himself the whole human nature, every moment has unique and eternal value, every place means the whole space in an unique perspective, in its unitary vocation, every event is an icon of totality.

The words “now and forever”¹³ show this mystical correspondence between time and aeon, between the moment and the unmoving age, and the words “here and everywhere” show the presence of a point in space and of the whole space in every point, (.) the unique vocation of the particular place is to become church, in which humanity assumes and transfigures the world.

Eucharist is in fact the mystery of this presence of the whole in part (*pars pro toto*) and of God in every moment of history and in every atom of this universe. In Eucharist, the limited bread becomes through prayer christological universe, the Risen Body of Christ, the matter winning the death, passing through space and time with no boundaries and no frontiers, the Body sitting at the right hand of the Father.

This integral and universal vision of the world in the Divine Liturgy is not a loss in universal, theoretical or general. The Church prays for all persons and all things. The Great Litany¹⁴ at the beginning of the Liturgy and all the other

¹³ *The Divine Liturgy...*, pp. 29-31.

¹⁴ *The Divine Liturgy...*, pp. 29-31.

Litanies show this unique diversity of the Church prayer. She prays for “the peace from above”¹⁵, for salvation, for “this holy house” and for all the holy houses, for the present believers and for all the living people, for the faithful and for all *catechumens* (called into the Church), for nations and generations, for “peaceful times”¹⁶, for those who travel, for the healthy and ill, for human life and eternal life.

The Divine Liturgy is not only a hymn of praise brought to God for the life of the world, but also the change of the whole creation in doxology of shared love of the Trinity. The liturgical cosmology is therefore a Eucharistic cosmology where the Eternal Sun, Christ, prophetically symbolised by the physical sun, shines, warms and bring life to all creation, giving Himself in Eucharist as “light of the world” (John 12, 8).

Eucharist is also the supreme offering of humanity. In this service, the whole humanity and every person give themselves totally to Christ: “Commemorating (μνημονεύσαντες) our most holy, most pure, most blessed and glorious Lady Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary with all the saints, let us commend ourselves and each other and all our life unto Christ our God”¹⁷. As Mother of God and the saints orbit in the heavens around the Divine Throne, also the Church orbits around the Altar and passes “from death to life and from the earth to heaven” (Saint John Damascene, *Canon for Resurrection*).

Then, the priest together with all believers prays for the salvation and blessing of the people of God: “save your people and bless your inheritance. Preserve the fullness of Thy church. Sanctify those who love the beauty of Thy house”¹⁸. The ecclesial cosmos that is the Church is an eschatological house and humanity is the family of God, the Eternal Father, Christ, “the first-born among many brethren” (Romans 8, 29), the believers “children of God” (John 1, 13).

The liturgical life is a continuous procession toward the Altar, toward Christ, the “Dawn from on high” (Luke 1, 78). The church beholds the Life rising from the grave. That is why the

¹⁵ *The Divine Liturgy...*, p. 29.

¹⁶ *The Divine Liturgy...*, p. 30.

¹⁷ *The Divine Liturgy...*, p. 31.

¹⁸ *The Divine Liturgy...*, p. 33.

procession of bringing the Gospel on the Holy Table to be read to the people became the procession of entrance of the Church in the mystical and sacramental reality of the Kingdom of God: "Blessed is the entrance of Thy saints, always, now and forever and unto ages of ages"¹⁹. The movement is the fundamental reality of the Church which is ascension toward resurrection, way to God ("I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" – John 14, 6), pilgrimage to the holy places of eternal life.

The priests in the Altar follow the same orbital order around the Holy Table which is The Tomb of Christ and the Throne of the final Judgement of the world. The hierarchical structure of the Church finds itself on the structure of the universe. As cosmic matter responds to the law of gravitation, the members of the Church gravitate around God in the universal law of love, in which Life is uniquely granted to every person.

With the reading of *the Epistle* and of *the Gospel*, the Church enters the meta-historical order of the eternal Word of God. It follows the *Litany of fervent supplication*. The repetition in this prayer (*Lord have mercy*) is the metaphor of the uniqueness of every moment in history, the human person changing continuously. The redundancy of the supplication is the icon of the eschatological vigil.

The *Litany for the catechumens* means the acknowledgement of the human imperfection, the Church waiting always all the people to be in Christ. This Litany is the liturgical symbol of the ever open gate of the Church for every person who wants to live in Christ.

It follows the *Cherubic hymn*, where the Church begins to acknowledge her diaconal vocation and her spiritual consanguinity with the hosts of angels. The community of the Church becomes *synaxis* of Cherubim around the Throne of glory: "Let us who mystically represent the Cherubim ..." ²⁰. The Church devolves herself gradually from the "earthly cares" to

¹⁹ *The Divine Liturgy...*, p. 37.

²⁰ *The Divine Liturgy...*, p. 54.

enter the light Christ's freedom, to feel his sacrifice for the world, to die with him from love and to rise in glory.

The Cherubic Hymn: "That we may receive the King of all who comes invisibly upborne by the angelic hosts. Halleluia" speaks of an invisible surrounding of the celestial Throne by the angelic hosts and the triumphal procession of Christ, the "King of All - των Βασιλέα των όλλων". Christ is glorified as the Emperor of the whole universe, the Spiritual Centre of Cosmos and eternity, present in every corner of the space and in every moment of history. The centre is therefore not the point of meeting for the lines in space, but the axiological concentration, the theological Crossroad of time and space, Christ, the eternal Logos, Creator of all and Target for all.

The centre's ubiquity is one of the greatest mysteries history and infinite cosmos have ever had to deal with, where the matter axiologically and circularly gravitates around the Throne of God. In the infinite loving mind of God, there is no periphery or end, but everything is centre through uniqueness and beginning of life through love. Love is a perpetual beginning and a centre "without end". God does not prefer an individual, but sacrificially loves everybody until the unending end of His love: "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (John 13, 1). The succession of the human life is only the partial and relative view of the creature that passes through time, limited by space and destined to death.

For God, the life of the world is a simultaneous film, infinite in the complexity of freedom given to the human persons and in connection with Him, the Immortality: "it is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light" (I Timothy 6, 16).

The *Cherubic Hymn* is the prelude for the Entrance of the King of Glory in the Church of his humanity together with the entrance of the Holy Gifts in Altar for the sacrifice. This entrance of the Church in the heavens transforms the entire world in Sacrifice and *Prosphora* of Christ, every human person being a particle of bread, a part of Christ, the Eternal and living Bread for the life of the world.

The Liturgy of Eucharist

The *Anaphora* of the Prayer of the Sacrifice is the celebration of this entrance of humanity through Christ into the bosom of Trinity. The ascension of the Church to Christ is suggested by the dialogue: "Let us lift up our hearts. We lift them up unto the Lord"²¹. The preposition "προς"²² translated "unto" shows the continuous tendency of the Church to become who she is in her essence: Christ. The man's heart becomes the nuptial chamber of God with creation, the theological synaxis where the union between the uncreated and the creature takes place, the house of the God's eternity. The eternal life granted to the human person is the extension in time of this liturgical unity and the holiness is this mystical marriage of the man with God becoming spiritual breath. The saints of God gave birth to the heaven in their hearts and gave it to the world, they have been filled with "the unapproachable light"²³ (I Timothy 6, 16) and became light "for the people", "they have concentrated the heaven in their hearts and poured it around them through the art of edification gates of heaven and houses of God"²⁴.

The human being becomes in the Liturgy *homo theologicus* and *homo liturgicus*, because his life receives the new rhythm of eternity. The landmarks of his humanity respond to the calls of the age to come; the propriety becomes communion in love; the differences become way toward the unique diversity. The believer loses his sense of individual, of egoism, of propriety and became macro-cosmos.

The liturgical *Anaphora* is the extended Eucharistic prayer of the Church. Its diversity in the first centuries proves the liturgical freedom of Christian communities. In the *Anaphora*,

²¹ *The Divine Liturgy...*, p. 62.

²² "Ἐχομεν προς τον Κύριον" in *Præx Eucharistica*, Ed. Anton Hanggi, Irmgard Pahl, Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz, 1998, p. 224.

²³ On "απρόσιτον φως" see Saint Dyonisius Areopagyte, *De divinis nominibus* in Al. Golitzin, *Et introibo ad altare Dei*, Patriarhikon Idrima, Thessaloniki, 1994, p. 223.

²⁴ H. E. Daniel, Metropolitan of Moldavia and Bukovina, *The Spiritual Message of the Monasteries in Moldavia*, in "Community of the Resurrection" no. 2, 2002.

the Church remembers the succession of saving events in the life of Christ (,) actualises the Last Supper and invokes the Holy Spirit. In this moment, not only the Bread and Wine became Christ, but every believer becomes a blessed Prosphora who will divide at the proper time for the resurrection. The Church as a whole becomes Eucharist, because she is already, from the Pentecost, the ecclesial Body of Christ. The faithful are the living breads divided on the altar of God's love to discover the Eucharistic vocation of the universe, prophesied by the Eucharist.

An important aspect in the articulation of the cosmological dimension of Eucharist is the frequency in the prayers of the remembrance of Genesis: "who out of nothing hast brought all things into being"²⁵ (three occurrences: at the prayer of *Trisagion*, during the *Cherubic Hymn* and after *Our Father*). The Liturgy proves to be the act of re-creation of the world, the moment of spiritual re-generation and becoming. God re-creates the world in Him, integrates her in His crucified and risen Body and ascends her in love. The ecclesial humanity lives the saving events as being her own time; she feels the pain of the Cross and see the light of Resurrection. The creation in the Liturgy does not presuppose the destruction of the old one, but her change - μεταβολή, under the creative hands of God²⁶.

The prayer of the priest during the hymn "It is meet and right" asserts the vocation of the world to be Mystery of Incarnation²⁷ and House of God: "Thou it was who brought us from non-existence to being, and when we had fallen away, didst raise us up again, and didst not cease to do all things until Thou hadst brought us up

²⁵ *The Divine Liturgy according to St. John Chrysostom*, Saint Tikhon Seminary Press, South Canaan, 1977, pp. 38, 63, 74.

²⁶ The two hands of God are the Son and the Holy Spirit, cf. Saint Irenaeus of Lugdunum: "He has two hands, for from the beginning He has had at His side the Word and the Wisdom, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is through Them and in Them that He has done everything freely and independently" (*Against Heresies* 4, 20, 1).

²⁷ Cf. W. H. Frere, *The Anaphora or Great Eucharistic Prayer*, S.P.C.K., London, 1938, p. 63-68.

to heaven, and hadst endowed us with Thy Kingdom which is to come"²⁸.

After this cosmic vision of salvation, the priest sings loudly: "Singing the triumphant hymn, shouting, proclaiming and saying"²⁹ sealing the Paten with star in the sign of the Cross³⁰. It is the triumphal song of Christ, conquering the death and hell, which rises from the dead and seals the entire universe with the Cross of His love. This song is remembered in the Apocalypse (4, 5) by the Saint John the Theologian.

It follows the *anamnesis* (remembering) of the Last Supper³¹. The Liturgy is a recapitulation of history in the light of the Resurrection³². The death of Christ is not only a crime of the Jewish and Roman authorities, but also the self-giving of God for us: "in the night in which he was given up, or rather gave Himself up for the life of the world"³³. The life of the world is filled with the presence of Christ, became His life, because Christ lives and dies in this life. In Christ dies and rises up the whole universe.

The words of institution: "Take, eat; this is my Body which is broken for you, for the remission of sins"³⁴ show that Christ is broken for us until the consummation of the world. There are the words of divine love, but also the conscience and the pain of the Sacrifice, His unbearable pain to see the millions of innocent dead of the history, all the sufferance of this age and

²⁸ *The Divine Liturgy...*, p. 63.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ On the symbolism of the Cross, see Nadia Julien, *Dictionnaire des Symboles*, Marabout, Allier, 1989, p. 92.

³¹ On the great importance of liturgical memorial in the Divine Liturgy, see Max Thurian, Frère de Taizé, *L'Eucharistie, Memorial du Seigneur, Sacrifice d'action de grace et d'intercession*, Editions Delachaux et Niestlé, Neuchatel, 1963.

³² Saint Dyonisius Areopagyte speaks of the recapitulative sense of the Eucharist, see Alexander Golitzin, *Et introibo ad altare Dei*, Patriarhikon Idrima, Thessaloniki, 1994, p. 196-203.

³³ *The Divine Liturgy...*, p. 64, in Greek in *Prax Eucharistica*, Ed. Anton Hanggi, Irmgard Pahl, Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz, 1998, p. 226.

³⁴ "Λάβετε, φάγετε, τούτ ἐστίν τὸ σῶμα μου" in *Prax Eucharistica*, Ed. Anton Hanggi, Irmgard Pahl, Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz, 1998, p 226.

the unending pain of those who refused and crucified Christ until the end of their life. The liturgical anamnesis of Eucharist remembers not only the institution of the Sacrifice of Christ, but all the innocent sacrifices of history: "Do this in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22, 19).

After the words of institution, the Church added a liturgical formula that could explain all the Eucharistic theology: "Thine own of Thine own, we offer unto Thee, on behalf of all and for all"³⁵. The Holy Gifts belong to God, we belong to God and we offer ourselves although we are already His. The Eucharistic offering is carrying all the cosmos as the total offering of love in Christ.

The bread and the wine become through representation the sacred matter, concentrating in them all the cosmos' vocation to become living body. In the Eucharistic elements, the whole universe receives transformation, a new image and a new substance. The particle becomes whole, and the Body of Christ present throughout the ages on the Holy Tables is not a part of Christ, but the whole Christ, living for ever. This transformation is received only through prayer to the Father as a sign of human freedom. The Eucharist is prayer and invocation – *επικλήσις*, not only liturgical anamnesis. The world is revealed in her essence of prayer which is a creative dialogue of God with the created freedom.

The moment of communion has a special cosmologic and theological significance. At the call of the priest: "Let us attend! The Holy things for the holy" The Church acknowledges the imperfection of her members: "One is holy. One is the Lord Jesus Christ to the glory of God the Father. Amen"³⁶.

Then the priest takes the Body of Christ in his hands and says: "Divided and distributed is the Lamb of God, who is divided, yet not disunited; who is ever eaten yet never consumed, but sanctifying those who partake thereof. Jesus Christ is Victor". This assertion concentrates all the Christology of the Church, where Christ is

³⁵ *The Divine Liturgy...*, p. 65, see *Prax Eucharistica*, Ed. Anton Hanggi, Irmgard Pahl, Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz, 1998, p.226: "τα σα εκ των σων, σοι προσφέροντες κατα πάντα και δια πάντα".

³⁶ *The Divine Liturgy...*, p. 75.

the “Fountain of Immortality”³⁷ who springs all the life of the world. In Christ, all the reasons of the world are transcended, the limit becomes infinity, the moment becomes eternity, the point becomes cosmos, and the division does not diminish but multiplies. The created world is therefore the sequential flashlight of the eschatological mystery of love: the love and giving create life. The matter looses in Eucharist her reductive, limited, relative sense. She becomes Body: the Body of God, infinite, eternal new, evident through the light of faith.

The teaching of the Church of Christ says that salvation is universal. She comprehends the human persons and the nature assumed by him. That is why the human person has to love the nature that feeds and supports his life. The liturgical expression of this universal responsibility is to be found in the Service of Easter. After all the believers – in the midnight – receive light from the Altar, the Grave of Life, all the people go out of the Church singing. The river of light inundate the deep night. The Church remains totally empty, symbolizing the empty Grave of creation. The resurrection is poured, pervades in the whole universe, not only in the Church. After the Gospel of Resurrection is read, the ecclesial community surrounds the Church with lights in their hands, singing: “Christ is risen from the dead” in a liturgical and cosmic dance of Resurrection. In some places of Orthodoxy, the believers receive light, and then go to the graveyard, to enlighten the tombs of their dear ones. The graveyard becomes a cathedral of light, is not anymore a *necropolis* with *sarcophagi* (=meat eaters), but cemetery (κοιμητήριον) the place of sleep of those waiting for the Resurrection, guarded by the Cross of Christ³⁸.

The Church is the transfigured cosmos, renewed and enlighten by Resurrection, and the Christian community is not an esoteric chaste of initiated members, but the ever open vocation of humanity to become immortal and to fulfill the power of love for ever.

³⁷ *The Divine Liturgy...*, p. 81.

³⁸ On the centrality of the paschal mystery in the Liturgy, see Cardinal Giacomo Lercaro, *L'Eucharistia nelle nostre mani, Liturgia e Catechesi*, Edizioni Dehoniane, Bologna, 1968, pp. 261-265.

Conclusions

Eucharist, in its patristic and ecclesial sense, is the only answer of the Church facing the profound crisis of human society in an era of technology and globalisation. The human person lost in front of his own creations forgets his vocation of immortality and replaces it with a surrogate of comfort, body worship and image. The death is denied, anesthetised and postponed. The speed of communication replaces the need for communion. The power of human mind becomes discretionary in a vicious suicidal circle. The human society chaotically consumes the reserves of nature, condemning the future to a symbolical painful death. The man destroys the creation and destroys himself in his neighbour, spiritually killed or exploited. The consequences of global warmth are only the top of an iceberg of the breakage of man of himself and of God.

Eucharist is the fundament of a christological vision of nature, consecrated and renewed through the Sacrifice on the Cross and through the Resurrection of Christ. In this vision, every element of nature, every natural force is a drop of the great love of God for the world. Everything is a divine gift, and life is the Liturgy of these unending gifts.

The human being has to return to this eucharistic vision of creation, where the nature is Liturgy of divine love, where human person assumes and transcends in him the world, as a priest of creation, takes her as an offering of Trinity. The nature yearns to become human through love. The bread and fish multiplied by Christ, the marvellous fishing, all these miracles show the fundamental vocation of the nature to offer herself to the human being, to become Eucharist of love.

The cosmological dimension of Liturgy – in every Christian confession – has to open to the people the liturgical vision of cosmos. The human being has to learn again to see nature in the light of its doxological finality, to glance at the world with the eyes of Adam enlighten by the Holy Spirit in the dawn of history. The key to this vision is the rediscovery of the holiness of life³⁹. The Saints see the world as a living sacrifice of the

³⁹ Patriarch Bartholomew I-st affirms the necessity of a theological-ecological dialogue: "The careless and self-indulgent use of material

heart of God, as a light and icon of His love for us. A rediscovery of the values of Christian holiness could restore in the heart of human communities the vision of cosmos as a created matrix for the “sons of God”. The diversity of creation is the icon of the diversity of unity in the age to come. Ecology without God is a symptomatology without any means of cure, is a moral impulse that could not explain to the world the reasons to save the earth⁴⁰. The failure of the majority of environmental associations owes to the lack of logical foundation of the ecologist precepts understanding the world as propriety of humanity, wresting the man from the nature and placing him above her, in a discretionary dominance of the world.

The human being has to become, from a destroyer of nature, a priest of nature, assuming the creation in Liturgy. The Christian Church has the duty to get down from the pedestal the human being as discretionary power and to explain that human is part of the universe and God is its axiological centre.

creation by man, with the help of scientific and technological progress, has already started to cause irreparable destruction to the natural environment. The Orthodox Church, not being able to remain passive in the face of such destruction, invites through us, all the Orthodox, to dedicate the first day of September of each year, the day of the beginning of the ecclesiastical year, to the offering of prayers and supplications for the preservation of God's creation and the adoption of the attitude to nature involved in the Eucharist and ascetic tradition of the Church” (Excerpt from the Message of the Primate of the Orthodox Church Regarding the Church's Position on the Protection of the Natural Environment, Phanar, Sunday of Orthodoxy, 15 March 1992).

⁴⁰ Philip Sherrard, in *Human Image. World Image*, Ipswich: Golgonooza Press, 1992, Ch. 7, says that the ecological crisis is in fact a theological crisis.

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Caption for Figures

Figure 1. Holy Paten, the priest places the Prosphora (the Lamb - $\alpha\mu\nu\omicron\varsigma$ in Gr.), a loaf of bread sealed with the inscription *IIS HS NI KA* (*Jesus Christ is Victor*) that will become the Body of Christ.

Figure 1.

