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**The Eucharist – the Mystery of a Gathering,
the Kingdom and Unity.
Around Alexander Schmemmann’s Theology of the Eucharist**

The Eucharist is the source and summit of all Christian life, a summary and a round-up of all our faith (cf. CCC 1324, 1327). The cult of the Holy Sacrifice is the centre of the Church’s life, which is realized in the Eucharist and, at the same time, around this “the Sacrament of sacraments”(cf. CCC 1330) it concentrates all its salvific activities (cf. Kiernikowski 2000). This truth applies equally to both the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. Polish Orthodox theologian Father Henryk Paprocki in his unique work *Mystery of the Eucharist* emphasizes that what distinguishes the spirituality of the Orthodox Church is its liturgical character (cf. Paprocki 2010, p. 7). In the understanding of Orthodox theology, all nature participates in the cosmic liturgy, in which every creature fulfills its proper function, praising the Creator with their being. Only man was called, as a rational and free person, the king and the priest of all creation, to give to God a sacrifice of praise and glory (cf. Kiejkowski 2016, p. 219-222). A special place in this cosmic liturgy is taken up by the Eucharist. The whole created world was sanctified by the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ. Then the eternal Triune God revealed Himself to the world, sanctifying the entire cosmos. Holy is also the time of the Eucharist, when Jesus Christ returns in the Eucharistic parousia and heaven becomes physically present in the place where the Lord’s Supper is celebrated (cf. 1 Cor. 11:24). Each Eucharist is an anticipation of the joy of eternal life (cf. Paprocki 2010, p. 8).

Only those who participate in the Eucharistic mystery and accept Christ’s invitation: “Come and see” (John 1:46) can understand what the Church is. A Christian is a man waiting in hope for the gift of eternal life, for the newness

of the Kingdom of God, for the gift of unity and communion with the Triune God and in Him with brothers and sisters. These gifts come with the Risen One, in the incarnate Son who is present and active in the Holy Liturgy. The Eucharist is a salvific event that has the character of a certain “dramatization” (cf. Evdokimov 2003, p. 259-260). It is a mysterious action and drama that takes place on the sacred scene of an Orthodox temple and engages through its action a gathering of believers (cf. Dalmais 2010, p. 5.5). For the Orthodox Church, the Eucharist is the mystery of the coming Kingdom of God and the sacrament of unity – this was emphasized by an outstanding Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann, whose chosen eucharistic themes this text is devoted to.

I. Alexander Schmemmann – theologian and priest

Alexsander Schmemmann is one of the most important contemporary Orthodox thinkers active in exile in France and the United States¹. He was born on 13 September 1921 in Reval (now Tallinn) in Estonia to a family of Russian émigrés. In 1928 he moved with the whole family to Paris. The Russian milieu in France in the twenties and thirties was quite hermetic. It consisted of intellectuals, artists, thinkers, clergymen and aristocrats deprived of their wealth. These people kept in their memory the image of pre-Bolshevik Russia and tried to preserve their traditions, living in accordance with the rhythm of Orthodox Church holidays. They missed their beloved Saint Petersburg or Moscow, and at the same time they enjoyed the beauty of Paris, living in a world marked by the ideas of Voltaire, Proust, Hugo. It was there that Alexander discovered in the Orthodox Church the context of his life, serving first as an altar boy, subdeacon and then as a priest. The church-liturgical experience left an indelible imprint on his entire life. He always felt Russian at heart, loved Russian literature, dreamed and worked on the spiritual rebirth of his homeland.

After studying literature at the Sorbonne, A. Schmemmann went on to read theology at St. Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris, which at that time enjoyed the presence of prominent figures such as Father Sergius Bulgakov, Bishop Kiprian Kern and Nikolai Afanasyev. In 1944, A. Schmemmann embraced the position of assistant at the Institute. He conducted highly-rated classes on the history of the Eastern Church. At the same time, he was more and more interested in the problem of the presence of the Church in the modern world. He was inspired by Nikolai Afanasyev’s ecclesiology. He obtained

¹ Cf. I collected biographical information based on: Przesmycki (2006, p. 308-320); Kiejkowski (2017, p. 182-184); Matreńczyk (2017).

a doctorate in theology in 1958 on the basis of a thesis devoted to liturgical theology. He followed the way from historical to theological and liturgical studies. This intellectual path inscribed itself in reformative trends in the Roman Catholic Church inspired by the terms “return to the source” and “liturgical movement”. Rediscovering “liturgical theology” or “paschal mystery” was associated with such great Catholic theologians as Jean Daniélou, Louis Bouyer, Odo Casel and Romano Guardini. These quests had an unquestionable influence on the Russian theologian.

In 1951, following the suggestion of Father Georges Folorovsky, Alexander Schmemmann and his family moved to New York, where he was asked to run lectures in theology at St. Vladimir’s Theological Seminary (currently Theological Institute of St. Vladimir). At that time, our theologian was heavily influenced by Folorovsky, who impressed him with his brilliant mind, a bold vision of the Orthodox mission in the modern world, roots in his own tradition, and openness to new theological ideas present in the Western Churches. After some time, the young theologian was followed by other lecturers from St. Sergius Institute in Paris, inter alia, Sergey Vierchovskoy and then Father John Meyendorff. Together, they contributed to the development of Vladimir’s Seminary.

The activity of Father Alexander in America, which lasted thirty years, was carried out at three complementary levels, as rector of the seminary, a theologian and an Orthodox activist. He served as rector from 1962 until his death caused by cancer in 1983. In his time, St. Vladimir’s Seminary was reputed to be one of the best centres of Orthodox theology in the Western world. Schmemmann lectured at many American universities, including Columbia University and New York University. He received the honoris causa doctorate from many universities (including Butler University, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, Iona College). The main field of his scientific research was the history of the Church, ecclesiology and liturgical theology. Most of his books and articles were written in the United States. In the years 1962-1965, Alexander Schmemmann participated as an Orthodox observer in the proceedings of the Second Vatican Council. He also took part in the work of the “Faith and Order Commission” of the World Council of Churches. For more than twenty years, he gave weekly conferences broadcast by “Radio Liberty” for Soviet Russia. He was also actively involved in work in the structures of the Orthodox Church.

A characteristic feature of the Orthodox Church is the close connection of liturgy, theology, morality and spirituality (cf. Evdokimov, 2012, p. 13-21; Łoski, 2017, p. 13-27). These four harmoniously cooperating dimensions of Christian existence arise from the original understanding of Christian theology – theology understood as the experience of the mystery of the Triune God,

a mystery which, if possible, is expressed through words. When this is not possible, then theology silently admires the inexpressibility of the mystery of God (cf. Przesmycki 2006, p. 314; Evdokimov 1996, p. 13-23). Christian theology derives first of all from the life of the Church led by the Holy Spirit. It is firmly rooted in tradition and liturgy, especially in the Eucharist. This way of practising theology is found in the Russian thinker's best-known book entitled *For the Life of the World*, which appeared in 1963 in New York. The book originated as a result of conversations led with students about the place of Christians in the contemporary, secularized world. It was a time of searching for the identity and mission of the Church in view of the challenges of modern times (cf. Schmemmann 1988, p. 94).

The last work of our outstanding thinker was a book *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom* completed in November 1983, a month before his death. The book is testimony to over thirty years of work of this Orthodox priest and theologian. It is a series of reflections devoted to the Eucharist, showing the importance of *lex orandi – lex credendi – lex vivendi*. The author admits that the Holy Liturgy was the centre of his Christian and priestly life. The question about its place in the Church and the world had inspired him since his youth. The Eucharist and reflection on its mystery were a source of joy, but also a sorrowful conclusion that the contemporary crisis of Christianity is significantly connected with the Eucharistic crisis. Similarly, the rebirth of the Church will come with the rediscovery of the Eucharist, the mystery of the coming Kingdom of God (cf. Schmemmann 1997, p. 6). In this text we will show three selected themes from his Eucharistic theology. First, the Eucharist is where the Church is realized as a gathering called in by the Risen Lord. Second, the Holy Liturgy is the mystery of the Kingdom of God. Third, the Eucharist is the sacrament of unity.

II. The Eucharist as a gathering of the Risen Lord

Alexander Schmemmann had an unusual ability to show the most important mysteries of Christianity in a simple and existential way². In our world, marked with sin, the passover of the Incarnate Word is still happening. Jesus Christ was and is still being rejected and killed by the world. In killing the Savior the world died/is dying, for it lost its last chance to participate in what

² It should be remembered that the most important works of Alexander Schmemmann were created in the 1960s and 1980s, which was a period of discovering the great patristic thought, mutual opening and learning about the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, and therefore transgressing certain stereotypes and prejudices. The texts of our author are a testimony to this process, both the opening and the simplifications typical of the Orthodox Church in the understanding of Catholic thought.

God created it for – that is to live in Paradise. And although people still “believe in progress”, the possibility of an infinite improvement of the world, the rejection of Jesus Christ by the world means its end (cf. Schmemmann 1988, p. 8). Unfortunately, as our theologian observes with a tinge of irony, some modern Christians seem to think that it would be enough today to want or try more and the crucifixion of the Lord and offending Him and His love would not be the case. Christians think that they are to engage in this world to make it more just and human. Yet, the identity of the disciple should be shown by standing at the Cross. And it still testifies that the world judged itself by killing the One who is the true “I” of the world (cf. Schmemmann 1988, p. 18-19; cf. John 1:10). Thus, they are witnesses of the end of the world’s self-satisfaction, the end of utopian optimism³. At the same time, Christianity from the very beginning has proclaimed the Gospel of the only joy possible in our world, the one born out of meeting the Risen One. The end at the Cross was transformed into the beginning of eternal joy. Without the proclamation of this joy, Christianity does not exist. It is only thanks to this joy that the Church conquered the world and that is why, when Christians lose joy, the Church also loses the world to which it was sent (cf. Schmemmann 1988, p. 19). This joy is not made up, it is a free gift received by participating in the Eucharist which is the mystery of joy.

The Eucharistic liturgy is not just one of many services celebrated in the Orthodox or Catholic Church. It is not to fulfil the religious needs of man, to “escape” from everyday life, to experience a spiritual-aesthetic emotion, it is not just a kind of worship in the context of misunderstood sacrality (cf. Schmemmann 1988, p. 21). Liturgy, in its primary meaning, is above all a joint action through which a concrete group of people implements its mission, fulfils its task, becomes the tool and space of God’s action in the world. In this perspective, the Church appears as a liturgy whose centre is the Eucharist, a joint work in the service of the world.

The Church is the Eucharist. In it, it realizes its identity in the fullest way. It is the pilgrim people of God which ascends into heaven, where the Risen Jesus Christ already remains and took our humanity. Specifically, this ascent begins when faithful Christians leave their flats and houses to gather in the Church. It is the Lord Himself that gathers them in the Church so that they may participate in His work, in His service to the world, and in the liturgy. This gathering, therefore, also means some separation from the world, in order to, with the door closed and by “breaking the bread” (cf. Luke 24:30) recognize the Living One and be able to witness with joy that: “The Lord is risen indeed” (Luke

³ It is worth recalling that we can find very similar observations with J. Ratzinger, for example in the book by Ratzinger/Benedict XVI (2005, p. 37-46).

24:34). It is precisely the fact of being gathered in order to be able to enter the coveted homeland of the Kingdom of God that constitutes a fundamental condition for the Christian mission in the world (cf. Schmemmann 1988, p. 22). Christians do not bring to the world any theory or programme, but the experience, joy and light of a new life.

In the reality of a gathering (synaxis) convened by the Lord, the reality of the Church is revealed. One could say that it is good to be called by Jesus Christ in spite of our diversity, so that in the unity of the community we can celebrate the Eucharistic Supper, the eucharistic “breaking of bread” (cf. 1 Cor. 11:20). This experience of the eucharistic gathering is prior to all other attempts to understand the Eucharist (cf. Schmemmann 1997, p. 9). Hence, all members of the *liturgical* synaxis, each according to their function, concelebrate the Holy Liturgy. Father Alexander, referring to the terminology of Nikolai Afansiev, uses the term “concelebration” which refers to all participants in the Lord’s Supper. This is also indicated by the title of the main celebrant: the chairman, whose task is to lead the gathering. Similarly, in this perspective, one should understand the ancient custom of dressing a priest, especially a bishop, in liturgical vestments in front of the previously gathered God’s people. The interdependence of the presence and activities of the main celebrant and liturgical community is indicated by the dialogical character of almost all eucharistic prayers and the wording in them: accept our prayers, our requests, our praise⁴. Each of them is somewhat sealed by the ceremonial “amen” of the whole congregation.

The experience of the congregation that celebrates the Eucharist also emphasizes the Christian understanding of the temple. This is above all *domus ecclesiae*, a place and space where the Lord’s disciples gather for “breaking the bread” (cf. Schmemmann 1997, p. 13). The shape of the temple, the organization of its space, the relationship between the presbytery and the nave with the faithful, the placement of the altar – all this indicates the dialogical and communal character of the Christian liturgy. Hence, not only is the presbytery but also the whole temple consecrated and devoted to Christian worship. A similar role, according to our author, is played by iconostasis in the Orthodox Church. It arose not from the idea of separation (of the clergy and the lay), but on the contrary, of connecting the divine world with the human one, the heavenly

⁴ This is also the structure of the Catholic Eucharistic liturgy: “As we celebrate the memorial of his Death and Resurrection, we offer you, Lord, the Bread of life and the Chalice of salvation, giving thanks that you have held us worthy to be in your presence and minister to you. Humbly we pray that, partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ, we may be gathered into one by the Holy Spirit”. Eucharistic Prayer II. “Look with favour on your Church’s offering, and see the Victim whose death has reconciled us to yourself. Grant that we, who are nourished by his body and blood, may be filled with his Holy Spirit, and become one body, one spirit in Christ” (Eucharistic Prayer III).

world with the earthly one. It arose as a testimony of experiencing the temple as “heaven on earth”, the experience that “the time has come and the Kingdom of God is near” (Mark 1:15). Iconostasis, just like an icon, is the consequence of the incarnation. In the temple, it is, in an analogous way, the embodiment of the unity of the visible and invisible world, the present symbol of the new, already divinized creature.

The Holy Liturgy, according to Father Alexander, is the “sacrament of a gathering” (cf. Schmemmann 1997, p. 15). For the Son of Man came to “gather into one the scattered children of God” (John 11:52). The Eucharist is the revelation and updating of the unity of the new People of God, through Christ and in Christ, who in His flesh on the cross reconciled all people in Himself, putting to death the hostility (Eph. 2:14-18; cf. Kiernikowski 2000, p. 32-34). Christians do not go to their individual prayer, they do not come together to achieve their more or less appropriate own goals. They gather as the Church to experience their own gathering, the gift of the given and accepted unity with God and with each other, as the work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. When the faithful gather at the Lord’s Supper, they fully realize that through baptismal immersion they have become members of one Body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 12:27). They go to show and realize their membership, reveal and testify before God to the mystery of the Kingdom of God, which “has come in power” (cf. Schmemmann 1997, p. 15). In this way, people who are different and distracted by sin become one in the living Resurrected Lord. They become one flesh and one soul, nourished by the Body and Blood of God’s Son and filled with the Holy Spirit⁵. Whoever tastes this will never for trivial reasons leave the eucharistic gathering and communion in one Body and in one Cup. He will appreciate above all this choice and the grace of participation in the gathering of saints.

III. The Eucharist as the mystery of the Kingdom of God

Alexander Schmemmann reminds us that at the beginning of the liturgical drama, thanks to liturgical acclamation, its participants face the pilgrimage goal: the Kingdom of God. In the language of the Bible and liturgical tradition, to bless means to proclaim, confess, and gratefully receive God’s gift, the fruit of His redemptive action (cf. Kiernikowski 2000, p. 119-120). The Kingdom of God expresses everything that Jesus Christ offers to man (cf. Schmemmann 1997, p. 30-31). His public activity begins with the words of the Gospel: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near” (Mt 4:17). It is already present

⁵ Cf. Eucharistic Prayer III *Roman Missal*.

among disciples and the world. When the community of the faithful bless for the gift of the coming Kingdom of God, it means that they accept it with love and strive to this kingdom with all their being. The Church is the gathering of those who, in the Kingdom of God revealed by Christ, discover the mission and essence of their lives (cf. Schmemann 1988, p. 23). An expression of the acceptance of the gift of the coming kingdom is the communal “amen” solemnly uttered by the congregation. This “amen” is also given as a gift by the Saviour. For only by knowing Him, only in Him, who is the great “Amen” uttered to God the Father, the fate of humanity and of all creation is settled (cf. 2 Cor. 1:20).

The proclamation of the Kingdom of God and the corresponding “amen” is just the beginning. The community of disciples abides in prayer and joyful waiting for the fulfilment of the promise that is already being realized. They are waiting to meet the Risen Lord. They are waiting for the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. This is the solemn celebration of the coming salvation. It is expressed by the beauty of the temple and rituals, gestures and vestments. For the Church is nothing but love, expectation, joy of the approaching meeting, heaven on earth. It is the joy of a newly found childhood, its freedom and selfless love, which is able to transform life (cf. Schmemann 1988, p. 24).

The Kingdom of God is inseparably connected with man’s recovered divine filiation. By grace, man becomes the son of God the Father, son “in the Son”. It is always the fruit of the Holy Spirit’s activity. Therefore, being gathered as the Body of Christ, coming to the Lord’s altar, participation in the sacrificial feast of the kingdom is effected in the power of the Sanctifying Spirit. The Kingdom of God and everything that this term means is realized only where the Paraclete is redeemingly present. It is Him that makes the Eucharist transform the end of the old world into the beginning of a new one, unites into the Lord’s gathering people separated by sin and hostility. Hence, the life of every believer, of the whole Church gathered at the Holy Liturgy, is a constant summoning of the Spirit of Truth, it is a constant epiclesis (cf. Kiejkowski 2014, p. 80-88; Rosato 1998, pp. 17-30). Where the Holy Spirit is, there is the Kingdom of God.

The Eucharistic liturgy is a symbol of the kingdom because it reveals and affords participation in the mystery of the Church, which joins in communion with the Holy Trinity. This is accomplished through Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, and the community of believers thus reveals what it is: the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. The uniqueness of Christian liturgy is revealed in this anticipation of parousia. The Lord’s Supper is the sacrament of the coming of the Resurrected One, meeting and being in communion with Him at His table in His kingdom (cf. Luke 22:30; cf. Schmemann 1997, p. 32). And so, for example, following the gathering of the faith-

ful, the entrance of the bishop or presbyter reveals and makes the entire Church enter a new world, from old life to changed life. It is a world in which there are no more altars and temples, because the altar became Jesus Christ himself, and His changed humanity is the only true temple. Only in Him humanity is granted access to the community with the Triune God. Hence, the entrance of the leader in Orthodox liturgy is accompanied by the angelic singing of *Trisagion* (cf. Schmemmann 1997, p.38). The community of disciples ascends and stands with angels before the face of God who is absolutely unachievable and different, and at the same time one that can satisfy the deepest human desires.

IV. The Eucharist as the sacrament of unity

Alexander Schmemmann also calls the Eucharist a *mystery of unity* (cf. Schmemmann 1997, p. 109). Unity affects the very essence of being a participant in the mystery of salvation in the lives of individual Christians and, at the same time, the saving presence of the Church in the world. The Eucharist is the food for eternal life (cf. John 6:53-54). Man is a thirsty being, thirsty for real food. He ultimately craves God (cf. Schmemmann 1988, p.10; Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI 2011, p. 40-43; 52). God who is the Unity of the Three Loving Persons. And he will be satisfied when immersed in such divine love, he will love in its likeness⁶. Our author notes that the sign of peace precedes the confession of the *Symbol of faith* (cf. Schmemmann 1997, p. 102). Ancient Christian testimonies, including Narsai, Theodore of Mopsuestia and Saint Augustine, confirm the historicity of the real “kiss of peace” made by the entire liturgical congregation (*Eucharystia pierwszych chrześcijan* 1987, p. 384-391). The kiss of peace often accompanies Christian liturgy, for example during the sacrament of adults’ baptism or during the ordination of the presbyterate and the episcopate. It was retained in the ancient practices of Nestorians, Copts and Armenians⁷. Schmemmann points out, however, that in contemporary Orthodox practice (let us add that it is often a similar case in our Catholic parish liturgies) there has been a significant change – the transition from the actual sign to the call. Moreover, in his opinion, the content of the acclamation was changed, the current wording of which “let us love each other” invites more to an undefined mental attitude towards the other participant of the liturgy rather than to real action. There is a very serious problem here. It is about the expression “Christian love”, which is widely accepted in the Christian environment and in fact

⁶ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe salvi*, 11.

⁷ The call: “Let us offer each other the sign of peace” can also be found in a renewed Roman liturgy.

has become commonplace and lost its essential primary meaning. Its evangelical novelty has been lost, which is expressed, among other things, in love for enemies (cf. Matthew 5:43-48). They were drowned out by various excuses and comments (cf. Schmemmann 1997, p. 103-104). Meanwhile, Christian love is not only a confirmation, a strengthening of natural love, flowing from the bond of blood or the nation (cf. Matthew 10:37; Luke 14:26), but is fundamentally different from it and infinitely exceeds it. It is *a new* love which an old man is not capable of without rebirth through Jesus Christ. You can not work it out by acts of your will, self-knowledge, asceticism, and training. Christianity is not so much the commandment of love, which ultimately exceeds the natural possibilities of man, but above all it is *revelation and gift* (cf. Schmemmann 1997, p. 104) of this love. Before this love was commanded to Christians, it was/is first revealed and given. The shocking newness of Christianity is the truth that only “God is love”, who through the event of incarnation, the mystery of human-divine nature gives Himself to humanity.

Father Alexander reminds us that to live in the Saviour as the “vine” and in His love it means to be and to live in the Church, the Body of Christ. For Christ’s love is the beginning, content, quality and purpose of the Church’s life (cf. John 13-35). This love is the essence of the *holiness* of the new People of God, and also the source of its *apostolate* and *unity* (cf. 1 Cor. 13:1-3). Christ’s love not only binds individual Christians in the experience of a new unity but also through it wants to manifest and give itself to the whole fallen world. This world is marked by the separation of all from all, which cannot be overcome by purely human love, contaminated with the fear of death and the fruit of sin (cf. Kiernikowski 2000, p. 35-40). The essence of the Church then is to show and nurture in the world the existence of love as life and life as love (cf. Schmemmann 1997, p. 105).

The Church is a community which is the fruit of Christ’s love for the other, the stranger, the enemy. Contrary to such unity is the pure human “feeling” of kindness, which would most gladly get rid of the presence of others, a crowd that disturbs spiritual peace and being focused on prayer. In this perspective, as it is strongly emphasized by our Orthodox priest, the meaning of the kiss of peace is manifested. It is not an expression of human kindness, but a sign of immersion in God’s love, making unity through strength and in the image of Crucified Jesus’ love. It is about the miracle of a new love that makes the stranger/enemy become our brother. And it is independent of whether he/she changes according to our expectations and sensitivity. In a Christian, in this particular Christian congregation, fearful alienation is overcome which God’s and man’s enemy introduced into the human world for its destruction (cf. Heb. 2:14; Eph. 2:14-18; cf. Kiernikowski 2000, p. 309-315). In liturgy, there is a real unity, the action of the Triune God for the sake of unity, which makes itself present

through the liturgical mystery and which is accepted and taken by the gathered believers in freedom. The sign of peace expresses being filled with the love of Christ, which, according to human categories, sometimes makes strangers and hostile people become brothers in Christ. This means that those who are in conflict with each other are to reconcile and forgive each other, and actions leading to unity are undertaken. Christians gather during the Liturgy not to experience consolation and spiritual comfort, but to wait for the gift, the fire of the Holy Spirit, who will enable them to effect unity, even at the price of their lack of peace and commitment to reconciliation in the image of crucified love.

After the kiss of peace in Orthodox liturgy, there is singing or recitation of the *Symbol of faith*. Originally, *Credo* was connected with baptismal initiation. In the Eucharistic celebration, it appeared relatively late – at the beginning of the 6th century in the context of great dogmatic disputes (cf. Müller 2007, p. 89-93). It was a kind of border (*hóros*), which separated the Church from heresy, and at the same time a sign of the unity of the professed faith and the actual gift of unity which the baptised gathered at the Eucharist experienced. In this way, our author emphasizes, confessing the *Symbol of faith* after the sign of peace became commonplace, being nothing but confirmation of the obvious, organic and inseparable bond between, on the one hand, the unity of the Church's faith and its fulfilment in the Eucharist, and on the other – as the essence of experience in the life of the Church (cf. Schmemmann 1997, p. 108). According to the Orthodox theologian, this original, obvious bond between the sign of peace and *Credo*, although it was preserved in the liturgical rite, was lost in the experience of most Christians and also theologians⁸. For many of them, the Eucharist ceased to be the mystery of the people gathered by the Lord, the sacrament of accepting and building real unity. It rather appears as a place of personal sanctification, of experiencing subjective spiritual experiences. He calls this process very emphatically as *degeneration of the original Eucharistic experience* (cf. Schmemmann 1997, p. 109). He believes that this extremely subjective experience was sanctioned in Orthodox thought under the influence of Western theology. This is particularly about the artificial and erroneous separation of theological treaties, which is motivated by methodological reasons, which discuss the reality of faith, the Church and the Eucharist. Consequently, the unity that is fundamental to Christianity disappears – as a new quality of life from the faith lived in the Church, which is given and accepted as a unity in the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist (cf. Schmemmann 1997, p. 110).

The separation of faith and real commitment to unity reveals the loss of something very important in the very sense of faith. Christian faith is first of

⁸ A. Schmemmann, in writing these words, meant the Orthodox participants of the liturgy. I think that these words can also be justified in referring to Catholics, our parishioners.

all a relationship with someone else, it is a meeting of Jesus Christ, it is a reception and a focus on Him, it is love and desire of unity with the Saviour so much that “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20; cf. Ratzinger 1996, p. 237-248; cf. Kiernikowski 2011, p. 398-421). Faith is a way out of oneself, it is entrusting oneself to God the Father through the mediation of Jesus, it is a relationship and ecstasy, it is an adoption (cf. Kiejkowski 2013, p. 117-130)⁹. It is a reference to the objective Truth (cf. Ratzinger 1996, p. 56-69; Kiejkowski 2010, p. 27-29). Meanwhile, “religious emotionality” is based on oneself and directed towards oneself, towards one’s own self-satisfaction (cf. Schmemmann 1997, p. 111). Such emotional religiosity is attached to customs, traditions, rituals, external forms of liturgical and ecclesiastical life. It is a conservatism that has lost the experience of faith, the novelty of the Gospel. In fact, it hides the old man and his egoism behind the mask of external customs in order to hide from the mortal judgment of faith.

Meanwhile, the eternal newness of life and the power of uniting in Christianity are rooted in faith that transforms and fills the old forms with new content, based on the Truth which is Jesus Christ. Emotional religiosity is not interested in Truth/truth. It is an agnostic being. It is completely focused on itself, on its own fulfilment and contentment, it wants to be self-sufficient and independent. Therefore, it is indifferent to learning the truths of faith, to the mystery of revelation recorded in *Credo*. It is not interested nor is it moved by the mystery of the Holy Trinity, the person of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God and His Passover, the work of the Holy Spirit, faith that conquered the world. Articles of faith are not needed to satisfy spiritual and religious feelings. And the unity that it expects and waits for is ultimately alien to faith. This is no longer the unity that Jesus Christ brings and to which He calls us through the eucharistic celebration, but it is a defence of natural unity, created by man, it becomes a form and sanction of the Gospel of world unity unchanged by the newness (cf. Kiernikowski 2000, p. 35-46). The Church, which is called to make the unity of the Triune God present in the world, sometimes becomes the guardian of unity built on the foundations of an old selfish man. The Church, which was supposed to be a sign of heavenly unity, became a sign of earthly unity. It is the *betrayal*, as our author puts it, of its vocation (cf. Schmemmann 1997, p. 113).

The author of *For the life of the world* was convinced that there is no more important task for the Church, and especially for Orthodox theology, than a profound distinction between heavenly unity, related to the very essence of the Church’s identity and its saving mission in the world, from the present and proposed world unity, understood as the reality of the world and the unsaved man (cf. Schmemmann 1997, p. 114). Referring to the ancient intuitions

⁹ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe salvi*, 4-9.

of Christian writers, he points out that the devil does not create new words, but gives a new, false meaning to old words. Therefore, words need to be precisely defined, purified, exorcised (cf. Clément 2010, p. 70-75). This also applies to words such as: God, unity, faith, piety, love (cf. Schmemmann 1997, p. 114).

The concept of “unity” which interests us in Christianity is primarily related to God’s original plan for human life and the highest quality of this life. Man created in the image of God is called to unity in the image of this communion, which is in the Holy Trinity. It is a divine unity thanks to grace. The Triune God is the source and beginning of all life, which is unity in diversity (cf. Greshake 2001, p. 47-59). An unattainable icon of such unity is Rublev’s *Trinity* (cf. Špidlik and Rupnik 2001, p. 21-35; Bielawski 2015, p. 125-130). Christianity is knowledge, getting to know God in His Triunity. In the light of the Holy Trinity, everything becomes understandable: creation and man, fall and salvation. In Its perspective, salvation is seen as regaining communion with God, and in Him with all creation. In unity is the essence of the new and eternal life of the already given and announced Kingdom of God: “that they may be one, as we are one” (John 17:22; cf. Schmemmann 1997, p. 116). In the restored, renewed, Divine unity, the essence and content of faith is expressed. Faith is participation in unity that descends from heaven. The Church, on the other hand, is a place where the heavenly unity becomes a gift, is made present and actually fulfilled. The Church celebrating the Liturgy is the actualization of a new life, unity thanks to faith. Therefore, there is no Christian faith beyond the heavenly unity of the Bride of Christ. In the Church, everyone, even a hermit abiding in desolation, lives and cares for such unity. The whole visible sacramentality of the Body of Christ serves this purpose.

Only through getting to know heavenly unity can one recognize and distinguish the unity proposed by the fallen world, touched by the mystery of sin, permeated with fear of dissolution and death (cf. 1 Cor. 7:31; Heb. 2:14). The devil could tear a man, and with him all creation, away from God. He could soak the fallen world with the consequences of sin, but he cannot change the very nature of life as a calling to deified unity, because only the Triune God is the Creator and Giver of all life, whose unlosable right is unity. All creatures, especially man, long for heavenly unity, crave it and tend towards it. Satan’s victory, however, is the separation of unity from its Divine source and making it a kind of idol. For those who have been hit by the lie of sin, it has become an end in itself which wants to be achieved independently of God. Consequently, unity appears as an ambivalent reality. On the one hand, the desire for true unity continues to penetrate various areas of a human created in God’s image: family life, acts of mercy, art. On the other hand, to the extent that it broke away from God, unity becomes an end in itself, being a source of new divisions, evil, hatred, love of oneself and equal counterparts. Unity which became

an idol dehumanizes, stands at the beginning of all modern and contemporary utopias and bloody ideologies: left-wing and right-wing (cf. Schmemmann 1997, p. 118). The Gospel proclaimed by the Savior and then by the Church will denounce all manifestations of false unity, will introduce a redemptive, definitive separation and not peace, but a “sword” (cf. Matt. 10:34). For the beauty and hope of heavenly unity to be revealed, it is necessary to see and know all the ugliness and hopelessness of idolatrous unity. As during baptismal liturgy, the catechumen renounces the devil and his affairs, so in his everyday Christian existence he must renounce the lies of false unity in order to receive the gift of a community of life with the Holy Trinity and Its unity. It is the paschal unity that comes through the mystery of the wisdom of the Cross (cf. Gal. 6:14) and destroys the barrier raised by the devil, the father of lying and separation (cf. Eph. 2:14-22). Christians are all the time called to be vigilant and ascetic in order to recognize the temptations of blessing, religious sanctioning of various human types of unity: political, national or ideological. The unity by which Christians live and celebrate is another name for the received and experienced faith. Hence, the professed *Credo* and the kiss, the sign of unity and peace are so close to each other, they are an experience of heavenly unity, eternal life already on earth. As it is expressed in *the Epistle to Diognetus*: “They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven”¹⁰.

The Eucharist is revealed and realized as the gift of a gathering (synaxis), which is convened by the Risen Lord. In the Holy Liturgy, believers become participants in the mystery of unity and the Kingdom of God. These aspects of Alexander Schmemmann’s Eucharistic theology seem particularly valuable in the context of our Catholic practice of experiencing this sacrament. Undoubtedly, we still need to deepen our awareness that the Eucharist is a great gift of a recovered unity with God and between each other and in a very concrete existential context. It is about fulfilling our identity and being called as people – we are created in the image and likeness of God, so that through love we can be in a unity as great as the one we see in the Holy Trinity. Such a unity, which we call eternal life (cf. Luke 10:25-28; John 17:1-26) is possible only because we participate in one Body and in one Cup (cf. John 6:53-59). The same goes for the identity and mission of the Church. As we read in *the Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

God created the world for the sake of communion with his divine life, a communion brought about by the “convocation” of men in Christ, and this “convocation” is the Church. The Church is the goal of all things, and God permitted such painful upheavals as the angels’ fall and man’s sin only as occasions and means for displaying all the power of his arm and the whole measure of the love he wanted to give the world (CCC 760).

¹⁰ *List do Diogneta*, 5,9. <http://opusdei.org/pl-pl/article/list-do-diogneta/> [dostęp: 6.03.2018].

The Eucharist is a sacrament in which the great miracle of God's love, which is the work of reconciliation, of gathering into one people, is manifested and is still being carried out. Biblical and liturgical tradition uses the term "Kingdom of God" here. It is important and valuable to mould our believers mystagogically so that they may more and more experience the Paschal joy of meeting, in a personal and communal dimension, the Resurrected Lord, the newness of a united life, the changed world. So that after having received the "bread" broken for them by the Saviour, they could witness with the disciples that the Lord had actually risen from the dead and appeared to them (cf. Luke 24:34).

EUCHARYSTIA – ZGROMADZENIE, KRÓLESTWO BOŻE, JEDNOŚĆ.
WOKÓŁ TEOLOGII EUCHARYSTII ALEKSANDRA SCHMEMANNA

STRESZCZENIE

Aleksander Schmemann (1921-1983) należy do najważniejszych współczesnych myślicieli prawosławnych, którzy tworzyli na emigracji we Francji oraz w Stanach Zjednoczonych. *Eucharystia: misterium Kościoła* to ostatnie dzieło tego wybitnego myśliciela. Stanowi ciąg rozmyślań poświęconych Eucharystii, będących świadectwem i owocem ponad trzydziestoletniej pracy tego prawosławnego duchownego jako duszpasterza, wykładowcy, pisarza. Niniejszy tekst podejmuje wybrane wątki z jego teologii eucharystycznej. Po pierwsze, w Eucharystii urzeczywistnia się Kościół jako zgromadzenie zwołane przez Zmartwychwstałego Pana. Po drugie, Święta Liturgia jest misterium królestwa Bożego. Po trzecie, Eucharystia jest sakramentem jedności.

Słowa kluczowe: Aleksander Schmemann; Eucharystia; Kościół; jedność

SUMMARY

Alexander Schmemann (1921-1983) is one of the most important contemporary Orthodox thinkers active in exile in France and the United States. *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom* is the last work of this outstanding thinker. It is a series of reflections devoted to the Eucharist, which are a testimony and the fruit of over thirty years of his work as a priest, lecturer, and writer. This text takes up selected themes from his eucharistic theology. Firstly, the Eucharist is where the Church is realized as a gathering called together by the Risen Lord. Secondly, the Holy Liturgy is the mystery of the Kingdom of God. Thirdly, the Eucharist is the sacrament of unity.

Keywords: Alexander Schmemann; Eucharist; Church; unity

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