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# **Sacrifice, Communion and Teophanic Love – Pedestal of Marriage and Pastoral Desideratum of Romanian Orthodox Church for the Contemporary Family**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this article is to reveal the iconic dimension of the Sacrament of the Wedding, built on the reciprocal state of sacrifice and love, as shared by the spouses, as an immediate effect of the Holy Spirit's descent. In this direction, the Marriage becomes the eucharistic icon of the Church, as shown by the whole Liturgical tradition of It, and embraces the world in the sacred light of God while aligning it in communion with its Creator. As its main and renewing coordinates come from God, the Sacrament of the Marriage remains an eternal beam of the Spirit, blooming in virtue, as well as a true school of pastoral care, where the challenges of this life find their answer inside the Orthodox family.

## **Keywords**

Holy Sacrament, Holy Trinity, Holy Marriage, love, God, pastoral care, family

The Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church has established, by synodal decision, the year of 2020 as the “Commemorative Year of the Pastoral Care of Parents and Children” and the “Commemorative

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Year of Romanian Orthodox Philanthropists”<sup>1</sup>, as a response of the endless preoccupation for each person’s soul, while acknowledging with greatest objectivity our society’s evolution, as well as its implications on the Christian family. The purpose of this decision is to emphasize the immediate needs of the contemporary family, challenged nowadays by desacralization and genuine decline of morality.

Both the family and the virtue of philanthropy outline the immediate iconic face of the human being, who, by listening to the exhortation of love (Mark 12, 30-31) addressed to each of us by God, directs his entire existence on the “Path to the Kingdom”<sup>2</sup>, or in the communal mode of reciprocity of love between man and woman in the Mystery of Marriage, either in person, in order to “be one” (John 17, 11) with God.

As in the Romanian society<sup>3</sup> the religious feeling perceived as “living in God” becomes increasingly aggressed by challenging and denying its transcendental dimension, the contemporary man loses his image, by turning into a “homo noeticus” (Genesis 1, 26) out of ΕΙΚΟΝ ΕΙΚΟΝΩΝ<sup>4</sup>. In this way, his sacred space of being renewed by the Holy Spirit’s grace is lessened, while the cult of reason transforms him into a simple subject out of a person. As portrayed in the contemporary sciences, as anthropology, sociology, psychology and psychoanalysis, the man of our days suffers the lack of love and the existential consecrating meaning.

Under such circumstances, willing to return the man, as “inhabitant of Heaven” and as part of his family as an icon of the Church his figure imprinted by the divine love, the Romanian Orthodox Church becomes the main factor of Romanian soul’s revivification by the love shared in the collective space of the Sacrament in general and mainly of the family.

Therefore, by sustaining the present pastoral undertaking of the Church, these following pages aim to generally approach the gracious dimension of the Sacrament of Marriage, whose liturgical composition, according to

<sup>1</sup> <https://basilica.ro/actul-de-proclamare-a-anului-omagial-si-comemorativ-2020/>.

<sup>2</sup> See Hieromonk ARSENIE BOCA, *Cărarea Împărăției*, Editura Sfintei Episcopii Ortodoxe Române a Aradului, Arad, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Regarding religion in Romanian society, see Carmen Gabriela MÂNDRILĂ LĂZĂREANU, *Asistența socială și religiozitatea la diferitele grupuri de populație vulnerabilă*, Doxologia, Iași, 2014, pp. 31-66.

<sup>4</sup> Father Professor Cristinel IOJA, *Probleme ale pastorației contemporane* (Master lectures), p. 35.

Father Alexander Schmemmann, “makes us believe it was structured as an Eucharistic Liturgy”<sup>5</sup>, highlighting its mystical and existential basis as the expression of the “endless”<sup>6</sup> love shared by the two spouses who take upon themselves the responsibility of sacrifice, as well as several conditions in order to fulfill the pastoral mission of the family.

### I. Love – An Endless “Liturgy of the Heart” through Christ<sup>7</sup> - The Existential Fundament of the Romanian People

By assuming His earthly dimension, Christ brought upon us a revelation of the Holy Trinity’s divinity, an unceasing theophany manifested inside each human being created after the image of the heavenly Hypostasis, invited to a permanent dialogue of mutual commitment. All these are manifested as “we love God because He first loved us” (1 John 4, 19) and also because “the thorough reason of embodiment does not come from man, but from God” to “transform the human nature into a real Theophany, as a loved space of His presence”<sup>8</sup>.

By coming to this world as the son the Virgin Mary<sup>9</sup>, Christ has shared with us the sight and knowingness of the Holy Trinity (See Luke 9, 35 and Luke 3, 22) as “a triple hypostasis of the Essence”<sup>10</sup>, “in a profound connection with the practical life of people, of society”, according to the theologian J. Moltmann<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Jean MEYENDORFF, *Le Mariage dans la perspective orthodoxe*, YMCA-Press, Paris, 1986, p. 54.

<sup>6</sup> Regarding the signification of the wedding rings, see Father Professor Ene BRANIȘTE, *Liturgica Specială pentru facultățile de teologie*, Lumea Credenței, București, 2008, p. 333.

<sup>7</sup> André SCRIMA, *Biserica liturgică*, Humanitas, București, 2005, p. 9: “From an anthropological perspective, the Liturgy is the man’s way of living open towards the Other’s epiphany”.

<sup>8</sup> Paul EVDOKIMOV, *Taina iubirii. Sfințenia unirii conjugale în lumina tradiției ortodoxe*, Christiana, București, 1994, p. 65.

<sup>9</sup> Regarding the Virgin Mary’s icon, see His Holiness IRINEU, Archbishop of Alba Iulia, *Împărăteasa Cerului și Mama noastră*, Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Professor Ioan TULCAN, “Locul și semnificația teologică a lui Dumnezeu – Tatăl în comuniunea Sfintei Treimi la teologii Jurgen Moltmann și Dumitru Stăniloae”, in: Ștefan BUCHIU, Sorin ȘELARU (coord.), *Dumnezeu – Tatăl și viața Preasfintei Treimi*, Editura Trinitas, București, 2010, pp. 139-165.

<sup>11</sup> Jürgen MOLTSMANN, *Trinitat und Reich Gottes*, Ch. Kaiser Verlag, Munchen, 1990, apud Ioan TULCAN, “Locul și semnificația teologică a lui Dumnezeu – Tatăl...” p. 143.

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The Holy Trinity<sup>12</sup>, “structure of the Supreme Love”<sup>13</sup> gradually revealed to the world<sup>14</sup> according to its capacity to understand such truth<sup>15</sup>, as we can read in the Holy Scripture, becomes for us all the archetypal principle<sup>16</sup> of our unity in love. “In the absence of an absolute and ongoing love we cannot explain the world’s love or its purpose”, as “the world’s love is drawn and aims to this absolute and ongoing love among many divine persons”<sup>17</sup>.

In a continuous intersubjectivity relationship whose plan of consciousness becomes an apophatic one<sup>18</sup> from the perspective of Orthodox Theology, the Persons of the Holy Trinity find Themselves in a state of “conscious mutual coalescence”<sup>19</sup>, as a proof of the absence of passiveness related the shared love.

The possibility of finding the man in this love communion with God lies in the extension towards the entire creation of the cordial relations manifested by the Divine Persons and only the Son of God’s embodiment can bring us in an absolute paternal relationship with the Father<sup>20</sup>, in the

<sup>12</sup> See Father Professor Boris BOBRINSKOY, *Taina Preasfântei Treimi*, EIBMBOR, București, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Father Professor Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. I, EIBMBOR, București, 2003, pp. 293-337; Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu*. Opere complete 5, Basilica, București, 2013, pp. 429-461.

<sup>14</sup> Stelianos PAPAPOPOULOS, *Vulturul rănit. Viața Sfântului Grigorie Teologul*, Editura Bizantină, București, 2019, p. 225: “In the Old Testament, God our Father revealed Himself clearly, showed Himself while the Son was barely known. The New Testament shows the Son and only suggests the Holy Spirit’s grace, Now, at the Pentecost, the Holy Spirit is working inside us, inside the Church, is showing clearly what was said about Him in the New Testament, without changing a single word. Can you see how the Holy Trinity’s light is shining to the world little by little?”

<sup>15</sup> Sf. IOAN DAMASCHIN, *Dogmatica*, EIBMBOR, București, 2005, p. 18: “The awareness of God’s existence is naturally written inside our hearts”.

<sup>16</sup> His Holiness Irineu POPA, Metropolitan of Oltenia, “Sfânta Treime, taina deplinei comuniuni a persoanelor distincte”, in: Ștefan BUCHIU, Sorin ȘELARU, *Dumnezeu – Tatăl și viața Preasfântei Treimi*, p. 51.

<sup>17</sup> Father Professor Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, p. 293.

<sup>18</sup> Father Professor Ștefan BUCHIU, *Cunoașterea apofatică în gândirea părintelui Stăniloae*, Libra, București, 2002, pp. 82-83.

<sup>19</sup> Father Professor Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Sfânta Treime sau la început a fost iubirea*, EIBMBOR, București, 1993, p. 30. Regarding the apophatic knowledge and the cataphatic one, see also Hiermonk Rafael POVÎRNARU, *Viața cultică a Bisericii după Tratatul Pseudo – Areopagitice. O realitate autentic creștină*, Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2018, pp. 21-85.

<sup>20</sup> Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, *Contra Sabelienilor, Arieniilor, Anomeilor și Pnevmatomahilor*, in: PG 31, 609 B, apud. Father Constantin GALERIU, *Vocația pascală a creației. Înviere*

Holy Spirit<sup>21</sup>. A complete and permanent experience of this commune reality becomes possible only in the Church, and we must understand it as “an extension of the trinitarian life among the people and as mystery of their togetherness with the Holy Trinity through Christ in the Holy Spirit”, according to Father Professor Cristinel Ioja. Therefore, using the words of the same author, “the Church is drawn from the work and the power of the Holy Trinity, as the structure and the main example of living of the Church”<sup>22</sup>, Its entire work being manifested in “Its cult”<sup>23</sup>.

The initiation sacraments, mainly the Baptism, become the way through which, according to His Holiness Patriarch Daniel, “God – the Son leads us to our Father, Who, through the Holy Spirit, brings us to the real life”, thus becoming “sons of the Father, brothers of the Son and among ourselves”<sup>24</sup>.

By its bi-millennial existence, the Romanian people understood its faith became the suggestion of the complete togetherness with Heaven, with God the Holy Trinity. Therefore, by being aware of its collective personalism engrafted in its soul by the ancestral Church, the Romanian people has lived its history by showing the unquestionable existence of the Holy Trinity in its way of life. In this manner, our people love the subjective unity, manifesting it in a collective manner, in a multiple exterior picture, according to the differentiated plurality of the Persons. The Romanian language, our songs, our national costumes and architecture are settled in a unifying context, yet diverse, as each person’s originality must be respected, without losing the sense of community. According to Father Dumitru Stăniloae<sup>25</sup>,

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*și transfigurare*, Basilica, București, 2019, p. 15: “Est Pater [...] radix ac fons Filii et Spiritis Sancti”.

<sup>21</sup> Father Professor Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, p. 297: ”Through the earthly dimension on the Son we join our Father in a philiatic communion, and we pray through the Holy Spirit to our Father or we talk to Him as His sons (...). The Holy Spirit erases through grace the distance between our self and His self, by creating through grace among ourselves and the Father the same relationship He shares with the Father and the Son. If by Christ’s embodiment we have become sons by grace, through the Holy Spirit we share the knowledge and the privilege of sons”.

<sup>22</sup> Cristinel IOJA, “Taina Treimii și experiența ei în dimensiunea liturgică a Bisericii”, in: Ștefan BUCHIU, Sorin ȘELARU, *Dumnezeu – Tatăl și viața Preasfintei Treimi*, p. 388.

<sup>23</sup> Father Professor Ioan TULCAN, “Locul și semnificația teologică a lui Dumnezeu – Tatăl...”, p. 152.

<sup>24</sup> Father Professor Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu*, p. 6.

<sup>25</sup> Cristinel IOJA, “Father Dumitru Stăniloae and the Renewal of the Orthodox Dogmatics in Romania”, in: *Teologia*, vol. 81 (2019) 4, p. 43: “The restoration of Father Dumitru

“Romanian people do not want to live outside their unity among their fellows (...) They do not wish to become thoughtless, but to keep their uniqueness while being part of the same ensemble. They want to be persons, considering the person as a form of singular existence in a community reflected by the community”<sup>26</sup>

At the same time, the Romanian acknowledges that

“the person evolves as part of a community, and different people make the life inside a community diverse, interesting and loved. The persons represent the community they belong to in diverse possibilities. The person loves the community for what it gives him and vice versa”<sup>27</sup>.

From lines as such we can clearly see the awareness of the quality as person – icon of the Person worn by the Romanian since his becoming a member of the unavowed ecclesial corpus, by the Sacrament of the Baptism<sup>28</sup>, as a sacred space of the endless love manifestation, as well as a continuous synergy cultivated and renewed in the cultic life of the Church, in this way emphasizing the mysterious life of the Holy Trinity. However, cultivating these virtues has been possible by our brothers’ participation at the Holy Liturgy<sup>29</sup> - “the Church’s ultimate prayer”<sup>30</sup> – the main power of keeping the Church and the nation’s unity.

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Stăniloae in Orthodox Theology of the twentieth century is remarkable and impressive and he succeeds to selectively and creatively assume the most frequent philosophical systems and philosophical ideas of his time in the spirit of Church Tradition, remaining at the same time on the biblical and patristic line of ecclesial theology and experience. It goes beyond the schematism of school dogmatists influenced by medieval scholastics precisely by the force of its theological creation through a comprehensive and synthetic vision, anchored in the Revelation, in Christ and Church, in the Mysteries, Liturgy, Asceticism and Eastern Spirituality. The monumental work of Father Stăniloae expresses an exceptional creativity, universality, fidelity and implicitly originality in the valorisation of the sources”.

<sup>26</sup> Father Professor Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Reflecții despre spiritualitatea poporului român*. Opere complete 9, Basilica, București, 2018, p. 452.

<sup>27</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Reflecții despre spiritualitatea poporului român*, p. 452.

<sup>28</sup> See Father Alexander SCHEMANN’S study, *Din apă și din Duh. Un studiu liturgic al botezului*, Sophia, București, 2009.

<sup>29</sup> See Viorel SAVA, “Participation at the Divine Liturgy – Personal Necessity and Ecclesial Event – in the Theological Reflection of Father Professor Ene Braniste”, in: *Teologia*, vol. 57 (2013) 4, pp. 56-73.

<sup>30</sup> Metropolitan Serafim JOANTĂ, *Rugul aprins al inimilor noastre. Convorbiri cu tinerii*, Doxologia, Iași, 2018, p. 120.

“Our people’s intuition, with its un-misleading sense surprised the truth that in Liturgy lies the essence of its Christian law. It felt the Liturgy, the ecclesial cult as *the Church’s way of revealing*”<sup>31</sup> *represents the doctrine in prayer, in songs*<sup>32</sup> and in the Christian practice”<sup>33</sup>.

As a living part of the Ecclesia during the Holy Liturgy, the Romanian built up his faith in the Trinitarian God, towards Whom he had constantly reinforced his love’s confession in the liturgical community, becoming more and more aware that “by acknowledging out Trinitarian God, we praise and worship the love of His essence and Its spread inside us as His creation”<sup>34</sup>.

By claiming its faith in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Romanian people assumed love<sup>35</sup> as the transcendent principle of the communion with God and with the entire creation<sup>36</sup>.

The kiss of peace has become for each Christian the space of the mysterious encounter of the Holy Trinity, lying inside their bodies transformed into “actual cathedrals”<sup>37</sup>, whose hearts have generated echoes of the Holy Spirit and sacrificial love.

During the Holy Liturgy, by listening to the Word, by manifesting love as a response to the priest’s exhortation and by saying the Credo, the Romanian people has thoroughly experienced the power of transfiguration of its entire life in the absolute dimension of the Sacrament.

By taking communion of Christ the Eucharist, each Christian has felt the Son of God’s power of sacrifice. He brought us together in love by fulfilling what is written in the Scripture while being betrayed and crucified for this world’s life.

<sup>31</sup> Alexander SCHMEMANN, *Introducere în teologia liturgică*, Sophia, Bucharest, 2009, p. 34.

<sup>32</sup> See Father Professor Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Cântarea liturgică comună, mijloc de întărire a unității dreptei credințe”, in: *Ortodoxia*, XXXIII (1981) 1, pp. 58-72.

<sup>33</sup> Father Professor Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Reflecții despre spiritualitatea poporului român*, p. 328.

<sup>34</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Spiritualitate și comuniune în liturghia ortodoxă*, EIBMBOR, București, 2004, p. 400.

<sup>35</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Spiritualitate și comuniune în liturghia ortodoxă*, p. 401: “In fact, avowing God as Holy Trinity means to acknowledge love as the supreme truth not only in theory, but also as the source and the upholder of life”.

<sup>36</sup> John ZIZIOULAS, *The Eucharistic communion and the world*, T&T Clark, London, 2011.

<sup>37</sup> Alexandru MIRONESCU, *Floare de foc*, Eikon, București, 2019, p. 288.

In this way each Christian has received inside one's heart the divine Logos and began to preach this love through the Holy Gospel.

## **II. Love, Word, Holiness – Preceding Triad of Mutual Commitment in the Sacrament of Marriage**

As an active part during the Holy Liturgy<sup>38</sup>, experiencing the communion with the Father and the divine Logos and the Holy Spirit, in a complete state of sacrifice in the name of his faith, the Romanian Christian has felt as an inner echo Christ's Gospel as an essential piece in the process of renewal God's icon in him, through the sublime and revealed love of the Holy Gospel<sup>39</sup>.

The Christian has experienced in his life the reality of God as the expression on love (1 John 4, 8)<sup>40</sup>, according to Saint John the Evangelist, this also being the first and the most sacred command (Matthew 22, 36-40, Mark 12, 28-31) on which the Law and the Prophets are founded and effected (Matthew 22, 40).

Likewise, by acknowledging inside his heart Saint Paul's words, as we can see them in I Corinthians – “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13, 13) – “God's likeness”<sup>41</sup> and “thoroughness”<sup>42</sup> of the virtue, the Romanian uncovered love as a manifestation towards God (Luke 20, 27; John 14,15; John 14, 21), towards one's neighbor (John 15, 12) and towards himself – spiritual state coming from loving God, also known as - “virtuous φιλαυτία”<sup>43</sup>.

<sup>38</sup> Regarding “the active participation in the Holy Liturgy” see Father Professor Ene BRANIȘTE, “Participarea la Liturghie și metode pentru realizarea ei”, in: *Studii Teologice*, II (1949) 7-8, pp. 567-638; Ene BRANIȘTE, “Cum trebuie să luăm parte la Sfânta Liturghie. Material catehetic și omiletic în legătură cu explicarea Sfintei Liturghii”, in: *Glasul Bisericii*, X (1951) 4-5, pp. 20-23.

<sup>39</sup> Ene BRANIȘTE, “Cum trebuie să luăm parte la Sfânta Liturghie...”, p. 20: „During the Holy Liturgy we also find parts of the Holy Scripture in the Apostle and in the Holy Gospel, in countless verses and words from the Bible, scattered plentifully in the prayers and the holy songs, as well as in the interpretations of the Holy Fathers in the Homilies or in the priest's sermon”.

<sup>40</sup> See Father Professor Dumitru STĂNILOAE, “Dumnezeu este iubire”, in: *Ortodoxia*, XXIII (1971) 3, pp. 366-402.

<sup>41</sup> Sf. IOAN SCĂRARIUL, *Scara*, Predania, București, 2008, p. 402.

<sup>42</sup> AVVA DOROTEL, *Învățăături și scrisori de suflet folositoare*, Bunavestire, Bacău, 1997, p. 43.

<sup>43</sup> Jean-Claude LARCHET, *Despre iubirea creștină*, Sophia, București, 2010, p. 26: “Spiri-

This “virtuous φιλαυτία” is the expression of the pious sharing of love with his fellow ones<sup>44</sup>, as a condition of assuming the state of sacrifice for God’s lucent icon worn by Christ, our brother. By experiencing<sup>45</sup> the revealed Word through love in the Holy Gospel’s light, the man feels the necessity of confessing his own love, in an interior dynamic with Christ and by externalizing his feelings towards his fellows, thus highlighting the love of the Holy Trinity (1 John 4, 9-11; Romans 5-8).

By assuming the revealed Christ in the “Liturgy of the Word” as a mysterious laborer through the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament of Communion<sup>46</sup>, together with His own engagement – the spring full of grace of the Holy Proskomidy – “Sacrament of Offering”<sup>47</sup>, as well as of the Anaphoral Diptych, the Christian becomes a part of the communion with the Saints, as an absolute confession of the thoroughness acquired through the continuous participation of the Church at the Holy Trinity’s life<sup>48</sup>.

Thus, in Saint John Chrysostom’s Liturgy, we hear the priest addressing God these following words: “We still bring to You this eloquent ministration for (...) Saint John the Prophet, the Forerunner and the Baptist, for the Saints, the glorious and in all praise the Apostles, for the Saint (N) whose remembrance we perform, and for all Your saints”.

At the same time, the anaphoral diptych in Saint Basil the Great’s Liturgy reveals the way in which God’s servant, either priest or bishop, is performed, in order for God to unite us “one with another by sharing the Same Holy Spirit”, through the eucharistic sacrifice, in a “permanent

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tual self-love or virtuous philautia is the fulfillment of the First Commandment - that of loving God, because to love oneself spiritually means to love oneself in God and for God”.

<sup>44</sup> Etymologically, the word experience translates as “starting from the attempt” (ex peira), opening both a continuous perception directed towards itself and outwards, as well as the active face of a consciousness (together science) grafted into God.

<sup>45</sup> Father Professor Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Spiritualitate și comuniune în liturghia ortodoxă*, p. 468: “By the words *sacrifice expressing the Word* is suggested both the bringing of the gifts of bread and wine as the sacrifice of our body, and of the Body and Blood of the Lord. For both are speaking bodies. But it is also expressed that they are accompanied by the words of prayer”.

<sup>46</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Spiritualitate și comuniune în liturghia ortodoxă*, p. 176.

<sup>47</sup> Hieromonk Rafael POVÎRNARU, “Cult, Liturgy and “Trinitarian culture” as mirrored in Father Dumitru Stăniloae’s Vision”, in: *International Journal of Orthodox Theology*, vol. 10 (2019) 4, pp. 164-187, <https://www.orthodox-theology.com/media/PDF/4.2019/RafaelPovirnar.pdf>.

<sup>48</sup> Father Professor Boris BOBRINSKOY, *Taina Preasfântei Treimi*, p. 186.

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Pentecost”<sup>49</sup>, in this manner letting us know “the mercy and the grace with the Saints (...): Ancestors, Fathers, Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Preachers, Evangelists, Martyrs, Confessors, Teachers”.

These two fragments written by the Church’s two great Saints – Saint John Chrysostom and Saint Basil the Great – set us in a state of communion with Christ and through Him, with His Saints “remembered and praised by us”<sup>50</sup>.

Under such conditions, each Christian whose name is spoken at the Holy Proskomidy, together with the mirids<sup>51</sup> “becomes one” (John 17, 21) with the saints who have always been in God’s grace through Christ.

In this line of Saints from our Church, who were able to experience and to keep the Holy Spirit’s grace in the mutuality of their family’s love, in a state of sacrifice through Christ, we must include Esperius and Zoe<sup>52</sup>. Celebrated on the 2nd of May, this family comes to the fore by their complete openness to sacrifice through the essence of their reciprocal love, as well as through the “eucharistic state” of loving and giving themselves to God.

In the Orthodox calendar, on the 3rd of May we celebrate another family filled with the sense of martyrdom in the name of love for people and for God – Saints Timothy and Mavra - who chose to write their love story with their own blood nimbed by God’s Spirit, for the temporal dimension of this world, as well as for the divine eternity of the archetypal communion of love.

Another couple married in the name of Christ became saints – Emilia and Basil the Old<sup>53</sup>, parents of some of the greatest Saints of the Church – Saint Basil the Great, Saint Gregory of Nyssa and Saint Peter of Sevastia, all of them carried by the same mother in whose womb God rested, giving the world not only the proof of the absolute thoroughness of the family living in a permanent state of communion and sacrifice with the Holy

<sup>49</sup> Father Professor ENE BRANIȘTE, “Însemnătatea Sfintei Liturgii pentru viața creștină. Material Cultic și omiletic pentru explicarea Sfintei Liturghii”, in: *Glăsuț Bisericii*, 1-2 / 1951, p. 34.

<sup>50</sup> See Father Professor Ene BRANIȘTE, “Câteva cuvinte despre miridele (părțile) speciale scoase la Proskomidie pentru felurite scopuri”, in: *Bucuria sfințitoare a Liturghiei. Studii de Teologie Liturgică*, vol III, Andreiana, Sibiu, 2014, pp. 13-16.

<sup>51</sup> Regarding the life of the Saints, see *Mineiul lunii Mai*, IBMBOR, București, 1972, pp. 15-16.

<sup>52</sup> *Mineiul lunii Mai*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>53</sup> *Mineiul lunii Mai*, p. 143.

Trinity, but at the same time being an icon of the Holy Spirit's work inside each "small church" consecrated by this union of love. In the same line of saints, we must include Saints Andronicus and Juno<sup>54</sup>, "well-known among the apostles" (Romans 16, 7), celebrated on the 17<sup>th</sup> of May. Certainly, this quality was acknowledged by Saint Paul the Apostle because of their virtue manifested through their love, transformed into a living book for the entire history of the world, as a role model for the future generations.

Furthermore, the day of June 8<sup>th</sup> celebrates Saints Nicander and Daria, whose family life was described by the thorough power of martyrdom in the name of the love for the fellow ones, as the expression of the same eucharistic love of God's Son.

Also, we must remember Saint Constantin Brâncoveanu<sup>55</sup>, whose faith and love for God proved to be a sincere sacrifice and commitment towards the Heaven. He did not hesitate when he had to choose between an earthly existence for him and his family and the eternity under God's sight.

Although the synaxarion contains several examples of such families who reached accomplishment in God's grace, in this present paper we have chosen to write about the already mentioned saints, with the immediate purpose of proving that the state of marriage claims its power of sacrifice from the eucharistic communion with Christ, renewed each Proskomidy, when each Christian experiences the endless love towards his fellow man through the Son of God, as a continuous sacrifice manifested in and through God, since the love is nothing but a divine quality<sup>56</sup>.

Only the eucharistic dimension makes the Sacrament of the Marriage<sup>57</sup> a manifestation of Christian love, "also known as love for the fellow man, because the husband and the wife are each other's fellow"<sup>58</sup>, and a

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<sup>54</sup> Regarding the martyrdom of Constantin Brâncoveanu, see Father Eugen DRĂGOI, "Sfinții Martiri Brâncoveni – 300 de ani de la mucenicie. Tabel cronologic și bibliografie", in: *Biserică, Misiune, Slujire*, vol. 14, Editura Arhiepiscopiei Dunării de Jos, Galați, 2014, pp. 132-168.

<sup>55</sup> Monahul Teodot DIONISIATUL, *Sfântul Nectarie din Eghina, făcătorul de minuni. Viața și opera (1846-1920)*, Sophia, București, 2003, p. 210: "Love, divine attribute, because «God is love». For this, he who remains in love remains in God and God in him. Love is the good disposition of the soul that makes it want nothing more than the knowledge of God".

<sup>56</sup> Regarding the Sacrament of Marriage "joining" the Holy Liturgy, see Father Vasile GAVRILĂ, *Cununia – viață întru împărăție*, Fundația „Tradiția Românească”, București, 2004, pp. 433-439.

<sup>57</sup> Jean Claude LARCHET, *Despre iubirea creștină*, p. 114.

<sup>58</sup> Father Vasile GAVRILĂ, *Cununia – viață întru împărăție*, p. 258.

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permanent state of loving martyrdom, as “by making the Marriage a part of the Liturgy the Sacrament of Love becomes part of the Kingdom through Unity”<sup>59</sup>.

This entire context becomes the space of an interactive and continuous theophany of God’s love for the man, and this determines the human being’s immediate necessity of sacrifice and love towards God’s creation.

The communion of the man with the Father and the Holy Spirit miraculously manifested during the Holy Liturgy transforms the human being into an absolute participant in the life of the Holy Trinity, while the creation “shares a mutual togetherness in diversity and freedom” with It, as we can surprise in the Sacrament of the Marriage<sup>60</sup>, according to the High Metropolitan Irineu of Oltenia.

### III. The Marriage as a Mystery of Love<sup>61</sup> – the Icon of the Kingdom

By observing carefully the Sacrament of Marriage as it is written in the Euchologion<sup>62</sup> we are shown that by confessing their love to Heaven, the spouses are accepting God’s invitation to participate in a state of sacrifice to the life of the Holy Trinity in the heavenly Kingdom.

A reality as such can be perceived from the very first moment after the Engagement<sup>63</sup>, when the entire work of grace begins with the great blessing – “Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” – this ritual becoming a real doxological frame where the man is brought upon his Creator’s sight. In the same time, the word is accompanied by the priest making the sign of the cross over the wedding crowns with the Holy Liturgy. This gesture bears the sigil of the love between the man and the woman, whose thoroughness will be found in Heaven. Everything is settled on Christ’s cross, as an endless state of mutual sacrifice in love –

<sup>59</sup> His Holiness Irineu POPA, Bishop of Oltenia, “Sfânta Treime, taina deplinei comuniunii a persoanelor distincte”, p. 54.

<sup>60</sup> Sf. MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Scrieri*, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol. 81, EIBMBOR, București, 1990, pp. 27-28: “The mystery of the love that makes us gods out of human beings and gathers those who are divided in the general reason of the commandments and embracing them all in a unitary way by benevolence, is the power from which they all start in their different behaviors through mildness”.

<sup>61</sup> See *Molitfelnic*, EIBMO, București, 2019, pp. 79-126.

<sup>62</sup> *Molitfelnic*, pp. 79-126.

<sup>63</sup> *Molitfelnic*, p. 81.

“an unceasing bond”<sup>64</sup> of those “who walk together through the Sacrament of Marriage”<sup>65</sup>.

This gesture described above confirms that “all things are bearing the Cross”<sup>66</sup> and all the Christological dimension in the Sacrament of Marriage “is always inseparable of the trinitarian dimension: the embodiment’s meaning and the world’s redemption are lying in the presence of the Trinity in every Christian’s life, called by the Church to overcome his condition as simple beings and becoming a person in communion with Those of the Holy Trinity”<sup>67</sup>.

The Great ἑκτένεια reveals by its content some of the main gifts the Sacrament of Marriage brings into the life of those who assume through love the cross of the family. Thus, we must remember the special request<sup>68</sup> in the wedding in Cana of Galilee, where we can foresee the Marriage through Christ as the ultimate endeavour to restore the family in God’s Kingdom, after our First Parents lost the communion with our Lord in the Garden of Eden.

Moreover, we can see how this holy sacrament becomes the right environment to bear children<sup>69</sup>, through which, according to Father Rafail Noica, “God is painting His self-portrait”<sup>70</sup>.

By following closely one of the most important liturgical sources – the *Barberini Graecus 336 Codex*, in the Romanian Book of Prayers, right after the Great ἑκτένεια, three prayers can be found, whose purpose is to emphasize the complete union of the man with his woman “through Christ and in the Church” (Ephesians 5, 32.).

Therefore, in the first prayer we notice the references to Adam and Eve<sup>71</sup>, those who were as one since the very beginning, as, according to Father Dumitru Stăniloae, “Adam virtually embraced Eve”<sup>72</sup>, as well as the

<sup>64</sup> See Great Litany, in: *Molitfelnic*, p. 88.

<sup>65</sup> *Cu Părintele Galeriu între Geneză și Apocalipsă. Convorbiri realizate de Dorin Popa*, Harisma, București, 2002, pp. 357-359, apud Pr. Vasile GAVRILĂ, *Cununia– viață întru împărăție*, p. 170.

<sup>66</sup> Pr. Vasile GAVRILĂ, *Cununia– viață întru împărăție*, p. 171.

<sup>67</sup> See *Molitfelnic*, p. 88.

<sup>68</sup> *Molitfelnic*, p. 88.

<sup>69</sup> Ieromonah Rafail NOICA, *Cultura Duhului*, Renașterea, Alba Iulia, 2002, p. 90.

<sup>70</sup> See Deacon Ioan I. Ică Jr., *Canonul Ortodoxiei I. Canonul apostolic al primelor secole*, Deisis/Stavropoleos, Sibiu/București, 2008, pp. 909-1032.

<sup>71</sup> See *Molitfelnic*, pp. 89-90

<sup>72</sup> Father Professor Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol 3, EIBMBOR, București, 2003, p. 187.

entire world. In this manner, this sacrament became the icon of the restored communion between man and God.

The commandment received by our First Parents – “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it” (Genesis 1, 28) – has become a desideratum continuously renewed in the Sacrament of Marriage, as a commandment from Heaven addressed to the spouses, aiming their thoroughness and their children’s by participating to God’s life revealed in the cult of the Church<sup>73</sup>.

The second prayer speaks about the unity of the first two people and about several families in the Old Testament<sup>74</sup> and it “leads us from creation to redemption”<sup>75</sup>. In this context we can see how this encounter with the family in the Old Testament emphasizes the fidelity among people, as a reflection of fidelity in love of the people of Israel and God. Mainly this fidelity, now surprised “under the Church’s grace”, is followed in the Sacrament of Marriage. If the human remains faithful in his love to the Holy Trinity, God can keep the grace the newlyweds have received in the Church<sup>76</sup> untouched by sins.

The last prayer is the main moment of the sacrament – the epiclesis<sup>77</sup> – when, by joining the right hands of the spouses, the priest starts praying as it follows: “Sovereign Lord, stretch forth Your hand from Your holy dwelling place, and join together<sup>78</sup> this Your servant (Name) and Your servant (Name), for by You is a wife joined to her husband. Join them together in oneness of mind; crown them with wedlock into one

<sup>73</sup> Regarding the main cultic principles, see Father Professor Ene BRANIȘTE, *Liturghia-sufletul etern al Ortodoxiei în rugăciune. Studii de Teologie Liturgică*. Vol. I., Andreiana, Sibiu, 2013, pp. 91-478.

<sup>74</sup> See Father Professor Ioan VICOVAN, “Taina Sfintei Cununii din perspectiva personalităților istorico-biblice menționate în cadrul slujbei”, in: Viorel SAVA, Ilie MELNICIUC-PUICĂ (coord.), *Familia în societatea contemporană*, Doxologia, Iași, 2011, pp. 255-265.

<sup>75</sup> Father Professor Vasile GAVRILĂ, *Cununia– viață întru împărăție*, p. 183.

<sup>76</sup> Father Kallistos WARE, *The Orthodox Way*, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 1986, p. 7: “The Church gives us not a system, but a key; not a plan of God’s City, but a means of entering it”.

<sup>77</sup> Regarding the Epiclesis of the Sacrament, see Father Professor Ene BRANIȘTE, *Liturghia Specială pentru facultățile de teologie*, Lumea Crediței, București, 2008, p. 333.

<sup>78</sup> Father Vasile GAVRILĂ, *Cununia– viață întru împărăție*, p. 193: “The union of man and woman in the Sacrament of Marriage is not a formal or external union, or a conjugal union, meant to remain at the level of bodily union, but a deep, ontological union that brings them back to their promordial integrity: body and soul in harmony and not separate or antagonistic”.

flesh; grant to them the fruit of the womb, and the gain of well-favored children”<sup>79</sup>.

We can observe how through the heavenly blessing “the two people become one” not by their power, but by God’s work of grace, Who takes them to His Kingdom and reflects on them the light of love of the Holy Trinity and the sacrifice in communion, continuously renewed by the Marriage’s ritual and the Orthodox one, in general.

The following act – crowning the couple – remains the “ritual act which symbolizes and seals the Sacrament”<sup>80</sup>. Jean Meyendorf qualifies this gesture as the victory of life upon death<sup>81</sup>, in the spiritual dimension of the New Testament, a necessary condition for the newlywed to be close to the Sacrament of Marriage.

This moment in this ritual recognizes the man as an emperor of creation, and therefore the crowns are monarchical.

Already crowned “with grace and glory” (Psalms 8, 5), the two spouses turn their union into a “real kingdom, a small church and, at the same time, a sacrament and a path to the Kingdom”. In this manner, the Sacrament of Marriage becomes “the beginning of a small realm which can be a *part* of the true Kingdom”<sup>82</sup>.

At the same time, beyond the kinglike appearance of man rendered to him by the Holy Church when crowning the heads of the spouses, we can see another side of this gesture, respectively the one of martyrdom, as “the true kingdom, after Christ’s example, belongs to the Martyrs”<sup>83</sup>.

Thus, the presence of the martyrs’ doxology<sup>84</sup> in this Holy Sacrament is explained, and this detail transforms the union between man and woman in a true confession of self-sacrifice. This state finds its spring in the eucharistic icon worn by the human being found in communion with Christ during the Proskomidy, but also through the Sacrament itself, during the Holy Liturgy.

<sup>79</sup> See *Molitfelnic*, p. 94.

<sup>80</sup> Father Professor ENE BRANIȘTE, *Liturgica Specială pentru facultățile de teologie*, p. 333.

<sup>81</sup> Jean MEYENDORFF, *Le Mariage dans la perspective orthodoxe*, p. 50.

<sup>82</sup> Father Vasile GAVRILĂ, *Cununia– viață întru împărăție*, p. 207.

<sup>83</sup> Father Vasile GAVRILĂ, *Cununia– viață întru împărăție*, p. 207.

<sup>84</sup> *Molitfelnic*, p. 100: “Sfinților Mucenici, care bine v-ați nevoit și v-ați încununat, rugați-vă Domnului să se miluiască sufletele noastre”.

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The Apostle's content (Ephesians 5, 20-33) of the Marriage's ritual brings upon our sight the model of absolute unity between Christ the Groom and His Bride, the Church. Such an image has become the unconditional icon of the nuptial love, built on sacrifice, unsparingly given. This biblical text has the power to confirm the Christian's participation in the life of the Holy Trinity, as the "spiritual union of Christ with His Church (...) is a union which leads to the Father, in the Holy Spirit". Therefore, we can see "the Christological dimension of the Sacrament of Marriage is always considered as an unquestionable part of the Holy Trinity's life"<sup>85</sup>.

At the same time, the pericope from the Gospel of John brings under our attention the first public miracle performed by Christ at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, at His Mother's insistence<sup>86</sup>, when the water was turned into wine.

By Christ's intervention in this event the love transcends through grace<sup>87</sup>, beyond any other dimensions of materiality and of humanity in this world. It became the fundament of sacrifice as a continuous mutual state between the man and the woman, aiming their redemption as an act of permanent communion with the Heaven.

The *ἔκτένεια*, the Lord's Prayer and using the same goblet for the two spouses make the Sacrament of Marriage a "mirror of the Liturgy", as mentioned in the previous pages.

The liturgical dance confirms once again the Christological content of the Sacrament and it determines once more the communion of man with God, the Holy Trinity, and an immediate participation in the life of the

<sup>85</sup> Father Vasile GAVRILĂ, *Cununia – viață întru împărăție*, p. 215.

<sup>86</sup> Cuviosul Paisie AGHIORITUL, *Cuvinte duhovnicești*, IV: *Viața de familie*, Evanghelismos, București, 2003, p. 64: "She was and remained pure because her birth did not know the human pleasure".

<sup>87</sup> Jean Claude LARCHET, *Despre iubirea creștină*, pp. 120-121: "The change of love through grace is foreshadowed (at the wedding in Cana), by the miracle of turning the water into wine. Wine imagines the strong and beautiful love of husbands from the beginning of marriage; its end shows that it also ends; and of daily living, it makes its selfishness perish through passions that tarnish love. Water are the powers of man, the good beginnings planted in his nature, which take the form of the natural love, called by us love as feeling. It is poured in stone vessels, used for the cleansing of the Jews, which imagines the legalistic means of the Old Testament to establish and perpetuate love in marriage — the observance of the promise, the vow, or the covenant between spouses. Water (i.e. love as a natural feeling or eros) in wine (in a spiritual state that bears the image of loving the fellow one, i.e. in agape)".

Kingdom. In this way, the first lines of the doxology<sup>88</sup> confirm our faith that the Son of God's embodiment has become the main event of all mankind, as well as of the entire creation.

These lines are also "an icon of the Virgin Mary holding Her Baby"<sup>89</sup>, as She is also the guide of the two spouses in their family life, whose aim is having children.

The procreation comes as God's blessing spread over the sacrificial love of the two spouses, as a last aspect in the martyrs' doxology. Martyrdom is "the supreme power of confession the eucharistic life the spouses have accepted"<sup>90</sup>.

The last words of doxology<sup>91</sup> sung on this opportunity show us that "the unity towards which the wedded love is called to achieve in the Church is neither more nor less than the Trinitarian unity.

It is the absolute unity in diversity (...), following the image of the Holy Trinity"<sup>92</sup>.

Finally, the priest's gesture of holding up the crowns from the two spouses' heads has many spiritual meanings: "1. the union of the man with the woman has been made (...) with the bishop's blessing, «according to God's will, not the one of men»; 2. their union does not answer the immediate needs of men and does not belong only to a human, earthly plan, but it fulfills the vocation given to them through creation – being «one flesh»"<sup>93</sup>.

At the same time, this liturgical gesture represents a true theophany, as "through Sacrament, each man can overcome his condition, the human condition; and, even though it is an earthly reality for which the Church is praying, the wedding is also a "birth" of the two in the unique Body of the Church and the beginning of their «never-ending journey» to the Kingdom"<sup>94</sup>.

<sup>88</sup> *Molitfelnic*, p. 100.

<sup>89</sup> Father Vasile GAVRILĂ, *Cununia– viață întru împărăție*, p. 213.

<sup>90</sup> Father Vasile GAVRILĂ, *Cununia– viață întru împărăție*, p. 214.

<sup>91</sup> *Molitfelnic*, p. 101.

<sup>92</sup> Father Vasile Gavrilă, *Cununia– viață întru împărăție*, pp. 214-215.

<sup>93</sup> Father Vasile Gavrilă, *Cununia– viață întru împărăție*, p. 220.

<sup>94</sup> Father Vasile Gavrilă, *Cununia– viață întru împărăție*, p. 220.

#### **IV. Actual pastoral coordinates to the spiritual reanimation of the family**

If we reconsider these previous lines, we will see how the awareness of the sacrificial love manifested by the Romanian people throughout its existence has become a natural echo of the Christian cult, mainly of the Holy Eucharist. This state of mind has increased the perception that “through Christ, life in its completeness was given back to the man, it was offered to him once again as sacrament and communion, transformed into Eucharist”<sup>95</sup>.

In such situation, willing to manifest his love towards his fellow man and towards God, the Romanian has chosen what the Creator Himself had given to the entire mankind – the state of becoming a family aware of the commandment received by our first parents in Eden: “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it” (Genesis 1, 28). This exhortation is covered by the Holy Spirit’s grace in the Church and finds its fulfillment in the Sacrament of Marriage.

By receiving on this occasion all the necessary gifts to reach thoroughness in a communion<sup>96</sup> of love, the man is invited to fulfill God’s call through his life, thus reaching the state of holiness.

Over time, the man has lost himself in the deceiving pitfalls of this world’s materiality. Now, he sees himself torn apart from the calling of love and sacrifice for the other, while being a part of the family. He focuses his entire life on his self, on lust and sins, losing God’s grace by leaving the Church.

By crossing this line, the man of the present serves his body and its senses, losing the awareness of his fellow man and of God, as well.

Under such conditions, the contemporary family is facing many challenges, accompanied by sins which get to deform its essence, by throwing it into despair, into a real “culture of death” which has captured the present society.

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<sup>95</sup> Father Professor Alexander SCHEMANN, *Pentru viața lumii. Sfintele Taine și Ortodoxia*, Basilica, București, 2012, p. 25.

<sup>96</sup> See John ZIZIOULAS, *Being as Communion: Studies in personhood and the Church*, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 1985; John ZIZIOULAS, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church*, T&T Clark, New York, 2006.

This is the image we can witness all around the world, as well as in the Romanian society which has been laicized. Therefore, the Romanian Orthodox Church, which, according to His Eminence Emilian, the Vicar Bishop of the Diocese of Arad, “has kept faith and tradition unaltered” by adapting to the “new social, political, economic, cultural and spiritual realities”<sup>97</sup>, in its quality as mother aware of her son’s condition and in an unquestionable agreement with the teachings of the Holy Fathers<sup>98</sup> and with the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils<sup>99</sup> which had given the Church “a unitary and normative character for the whole Christendom”<sup>100</sup>, has shared the love received from Christ with those who had left God’s directions inside their family.

By evaluating the actual challenges of the family, firstly we must observe the increasing percentage of divorces<sup>101</sup>. The main cause can be found in the following aspect: this world is constantly encouraging a sexuality beyond limits which is consuming the “fertility as an expression of grace” and love and this is leading to profound tragedies, mainly related to an increasing number of abortions<sup>102</sup>. At the same time, this reality has had an influence over the Romanian society’s birth rate and over the decreased number of children – icons of their families’ thoroughness.

Moreover, we observe an increased level of aggressiveness towards the Christian family coming from several minor social groups who are trying hard to change the paradigm of the family as a concept and to turn it into a reality which is completely different than the one created by God. He has united the man and the woman; He has not allowed other different manifestations determined by an exaggerated sexuality.

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<sup>97</sup> † EMILIAN CRISANUL, Vicar Bishop of the diocese of Arad, “Between East and West: Communism against the Romanian Orthodox Church”, in: *Teologia*, vol. 73(2017) 4, p. 16.

<sup>98</sup> See Sf. IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, *Cuvinte de aur*, vol. III: *Nunta, familia și problemele lor*, Egumenița, Galați, 2012; Sf. Ioan GURĂ DE AUR, *Problemele vieții*, Cartea Ortodoxă and Egumenița, Alexandria/Galați, pp. 122-174.

<sup>99</sup> See *Hotărârile dogmatice ale celor șapte Sinoade Ecumenice*, Basilica, București, 2018.

<sup>100</sup> His Holiness Laurețiu STREZA, Bishop of the diocese of Caransebeș, *Tainele de inițiere creștină în Bisericile Răsăritene*, Trinitas, Iași, 2002, 89.

<sup>101</sup> <https://www.businessmagazin.ro/actualitate/in-romania-1-din-4-cupluri-divorteaza-cum-s-a-ajuns-aici-17842944>, <https://www.nwradu.ro/2019/09/statistici-despre-divorturi-casatorii-nasteri-si-decese-in-2018-in-romania/>.

<sup>102</sup> <https://provitabucuresti.ro/resurse/scoala-provita/statistica/178-statistica-avort-romania>.

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Furthermore, we must remember that the whole laic process the mankind is facing today, with strong spiritual, physical and cultural implications in the structure of the family, is unfortunately present in our Romanian school. Under the influence of this erratic modernism, it allows the approach of several topics which irreversibly affect the consciousness of our children<sup>103</sup>.

Besides all these, the crisis of the Romanian family is also caused by the increased rate of school dropout<sup>104</sup>, as well as by the phenomenon of family abandonment, when one of the parents or both of them leave the country, letting their children in “the care of their grandparents”. We must add to this list the real and profound suffering of these children whose emotional evolution is naturally bound to their parents’ affection.

We must not forget the Romanian families living outside the country. Even though they have access to a certain level of comfort, they are experiencing the cultural differences of the society they are living in. In this new context, love, sacrifice and self-giving, as acts born from the God’s presence consciousness, are missing more and more.

This crisis has several causes. Firstly, we can see the contemporary man feels the need to be independent in relationship with God. Another cause can be found in the “religious multiculturalism” which has allowed the human being to assume the Only Truth of the Trinity as a relative one. Also, accepting other teachings which answer the pleasure and the person’s “freedom of mind” must be added on our list.

We can find this state of mind inside each contemporary family living a common unhappiness in the absence of the awareness related to the gift of Marriage assumed towards Heaven as a gesture of man’s responsibility for his fellows and towards God. Under the influence of several sources of unchristian thinking and governed by technology, as well as by the aggressiveness of mass-media, the man of the moment is consistently losing the feeling of love and communion in exchange for selfishness, being capable to make the iconic image of the family to fade away.

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<sup>103</sup> [https://adevarul.ro/educatie/scoala/educatia-sexuala-romania-comparativ-europa-afectea-lipsa-educatiei-sexuale-scoala-dezvoltarea-elevilor-1\\_5cb4b47c445219c57e90c848/index.html](https://adevarul.ro/educatie/scoala/educatia-sexuala-romania-comparativ-europa-afectea-lipsa-educatiei-sexuale-scoala-dezvoltarea-elevilor-1_5cb4b47c445219c57e90c848/index.html); <https://evz.ro/educatie-sexuala-scoala-diriginti-instruiti.html>.

<sup>104</sup> <https://www.rfi.ro/social-111111-eurostat-rata-abandonului-scolar-timpurii-romania-printre-cele-mai-mari-din-ue>; <http://www.ziare.com/stiri/eveniment/sunt-tot-mai-putini-copii-in-scolile-din-romania-abandonul-scolar-din-cauza-saraciei-este-in-crestere-1587304>.

Equally, the mentality cultivated in the contemporary family has produced notable effects inside the school system. One of these effects is the parents' disapproval for their children to attend the Religion class, making them lose one of the main possibilities of knowing God and sharing Him with the other members of the family. As a consequence, under the auspices of complete freedom of thought and conscience, and putting aside the Christian morality, having their parents' countenance, the pupil embraces many preoccupations which aim to cultivate the pleasures of the body, while they remain unaware of God's grace.

Under such circumstances, the school and the Church must collaborate in order to provide the spiritual and intellectual education of the child and to prepare him to assume living according to the principles of Christian morality later in life and to make his family capable of sacrifice love towards the fellow man and God.

Regarding the immediate pastoral care of the family, we appreciate that the Church has to intensify the catechesis school, approaching subjects which are making the contemporary family look like an emblem of pleasure rather than an icon of the eucharistic love.

Also, we consider necessary that the Church has to cultivate the thorough awareness of loving God and the fellow man, despite the selfishness or passions which are keeping the contemporary man far from the Holy Trinity.

Moreover, we consider it is the Church's duty to make all of us aware of the eternal meaning of the Sacrament of Marriage, both theologically and spiritual, as well as the canonical one, regarding the well-known conditions in order to reach it.

We also have to pay attention to the necessity of knowing the fatherly responsibility, by following the Holy Fathers' teaching and those families who managed to reach thoroughness while living their lives in agreement with God's will.

Another argument found in the pastoral intentions of the Church regarding the family is that of immediate understanding of the motherlike icon, described by the perfect model of our Virgin Mary.

All we have mentioned in the lines above can be reached only by an active and continuous participation of the spouses in the liturgical life of the Church, as only by embracing the Sacrament of Confession and the

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Eucharist<sup>105</sup>, the Christian can let the Holy Spirit vesture his love assumed in the Sacrament of Marriage, as an echo of the Eucharist.

Even though the present paper does not cover all the pastoral opportunities of the Church, but we hope it does provide several guidelines on the main directions which connect the family with its actual spiritual work.

All these measures can bring once again the Romanian Christian family on the consecrating path of the cross through Sacrament, by opening the flourishing life of the soul towards the continuous resurrection of the Holy Spirit's love.

## V. Conclusions

Considering the aspects presented in our previous lines we reach to several conclusions. First of all, we must emphasize the spiritual meaning of the birth and of keeping the Romanian people's unity, whom, by its true fidelity towards the Holy Trinity, has constantly cultivated since its beginning love and self-sacrifice, as immediate implications of the cultic communion, but mainly of the eucharistic one, as acquired inside the Orthodox Church.

Such a state of mind has been continuously felt, thus creating the appropriate conditions to share all the divine gifts given through the Word, the cult and the Sacrament in the ecclesial space, in a mysterious dialogue of love. As a reverberation of this communion, the Romanian has kept his reflex to overflow his grace of sacrifice and love inside his family, following the same path of the Orthodox saints.

But the suffering the contemporary world and its people have created according to the "new culture", with visible implications on the Christian family, has determined the Orthodox Church to focus more on finding the causes which led to the spiritual wounds of the families in our time.

In this respect, the actual pastoral care of the Church can be described as in this paper, whose aim is to give the family its awareness of its unity, based on the first hand on the love as sacrifice, as an effect of the sacred communion with the Father, the Son and with the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>105</sup> See Lucian FARCAȘIU, "The Connection between the Sacrament of Confession and the Holy Communion. A Biblical, Patristic and Liturgical-Pastoral Evaluation", in: *Teologia*, vol. 61 (2014) 4, pp. 110-126.

Thus, the purpose of these previous lines is to offer the contemporary family the consciousness of sacrifice and love between the husband and his wife, as an expression of assuming Christ when becoming a part of the Church and brother in grace with Him, as only Christ has loved the world and sacrificed Himself for its salvation. In addition to this main aim of this paper we bring upon the Orthodox people's hearts the awareness of the Orthodox Church's maternity, who is expecting her sons to leave the path of the sin and to return to their families – to their liturgical community and to the unitary space ensured by the mother, the father and the children, after the Holy Trinity's icon. In this space, the parent knows true happiness "while joining his child's hands, putting him on his knees (...), teaching him a prayer for God"<sup>106</sup>, according to His Eminence John, The Metropolitan of Banat.

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<sup>106</sup> *Pe cărarea raiului. Convorbiri duhovnicești cu P.S. Ioan al Munților realizate de Prof. Dr. Luminița Cornea, Sophia, București, 2014, p. 355.*