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The effects of Holy Eucharist in the Theology of
Saint Chiril of Alexandria

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ABSTRACT

The strong and controversial personality of Saint Chiril, the engagement to the Holy Church and the responsibility to the Christian believers are just some of the features of our bishop, shepherd in Alexandria at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Extraordinary exegete of the Bible, deep thinker of the dogmas, great fighter against heretics, shrewd opponent of philosophers and pagans, Saint Chiril left behind an extensive work.

His most writings are of the dogmatic kind, such as *By Saint Trinity*, *Dialogues about Saint Trinity*, *By Incarnation*, *Sermons about Incarnation* or *Worship and serving in spirit and truth*, *Sermons of Resurrection* and many Letters.

One of the powerful parts in his doctrine was the teaching about the Holy Virgin Mary and the fight for his title of *Theolokos* (Mother of God). This intervention is really very important for the doctrine of Church and for our own lives.

Chapter one

The evolution of Christianity until Saint Chiril on Alexandria

In the second century, Christianity doesn't possess a doctrinal corpus. The ideas were very different and sometimes contradictory, the faith was not attached to precise and clear formulas. In the third century, the Church was developed and organized so that he resisted to persecution and too many apostasies. From the fourth century, Christianity represents a real lifestyle and an ideal for the new man. With his geographical expansion of this "new religion" come many people from pagans and that is why the Church must define his attitude in religious and philosophical matters.

1. Alexandria was the greatest intellectual center from the helenistical period. This position was fulfilled through his famous library. The city was also the capital of helenised Judaism, represented by Philon. In the Roman Empire, Alexandria was the second great city after Rome. In 180, Panten proposed the foundation of an exegetical school in Alexandria. Clement the Alexandrian was famous like a great interpreter of the Scripture. Also, from here rises Origen, the greatest exegete from the third century. Here we find out about Didymus the Blind, who had led the school, through the investment of Saint Athanasius. He wrote the first treaty *About Holy Spirit* beside other famous theological works: *About Saint Trinity* and many exegetical writings.

2. The Church of from Antioch is the place where the Christ disciples were named for the first time Christians. The Antiochian education had an historical and literary method in the interpretation of the Bible. Saint Ignatius used for the first term of "Christianity" the patristic age. Also, Theophilus from Antioch use the term of "Trinity" for demonstrating the unity of Gog in his Persons, in analogy with the first days of creation. Saint John Chrisostom talk about the vision of God and Theodor of Mopsuestia and Theodoret from Cyrus analyzed the problem of men's deification.

3. Cappadocia, the former center of the Hittite Empire, became in the fourth century the highest point of the theological thought. Saint Basil the Great wrote a very important work against Eunomius, bishop of Cyzic, the leader of extremist group of Arians, *Adversus Aeunomium*. His second dogmatic writing is against the pnevmatomahian heresy, with the title *About Holy Spirit*. He teaches that God comes to us through His uncreated energy, but

keeps His nature unchanged. Saint Gregory of Nazianz writes also against the eunomians. His ideas can be found in first of his five *Theological Discourses*. Here we can find his position about the dogma of the Trinity. Saint Gregory of Nyssa speaks about the vision of God in the soul through “darkness”. This is the mystical view of God. Because of his idea and concepts, Saint Gregory was called “a philosopher and mystic” theologian.

Aspects from the bibliography of Saint Chiril of Alexandria

About the childhood of Saint Chiril we know nothing. The only document from this period is his short declaration written in Ephesus: “From my childhood I learn the Scriptures”. His parents were good Christians from Alexandria. Therefore, we know that in Alexandria he learned all the great things and perfected his theological idea. His uncle was the bishop Theophilus that influenced the education of his nephew. For this purpose, Theophilus sent Chiril in the desert of Nitria, where he remained for five entire years in monasteries, learning the word of Scriptures, thinking only about the sense on the New and Old Testament. In four hundred and twelfth, after the death of his uncle, Saint Chiril was chosen bishop of Alexandria. Holding this status, he made the power of Church to be the strongest, influencing the state decisions.

Chapter two

Saint Chiril of Alexandria, successor of alexandrine doctrine

Here we debate the subject of his doctrinal defence against the anti-Trinitarian heresies, invented by Nestorius or Apollinarius. In this context, Saint Chiril develops the doctrine about Trinity, about the Person’s consubstantiality. In his book, *Treasure about Saint and consubstantial Trinity*, he speaks about the Trinitarian controversy from the fourth century.

Chiril – exegete.

His innovative method in biblical exegesis is the result of the polemics between the schools of Alexandria and Antioch.

Apologist

The most important apologetic writing is *Against Julian*. This apostatized emperor said that Christians are traitors towards the Jews and Greeks. In this context, Saint Chiril analyzes the relations between the triad of philosophers and the Christian Trinity. Plotin is the philosopher that makes the minutest Trinitarian analysis. In his work, Saint Chiril finds many occasions to combat the pagane philosophy.

The fight against anti-Trinitarian Heresies (Nestorius, Apollinaire)

In the fourth century, Apollinaire the bishop of Laodicea, generated a Christological system with an incomplete humanity in Christ. According to him, Christ took from the human nature the body and the soul, but not the spirit. After 50 years from Apollinaire and Saint Gregory of Nyssa controversy, “about Incarnation”, Saint Chiril made an overview of the most important Christological debate until him. He speaks about Apollinaire conception, about the doctrine of the two Persons from the theology of Diodor from Tars.

Nestorius, the patriarch of Constantinople, said that the Holy Virgin gave birth to Jesus, but not the Logos, even if He is present especially in Jesus. According to him, Mary is the mother of Jesus and not the Mother of God. In this context, he refused the title of *Theolokos*.

The Trinitarian Doctrine

Before Saint Chiril, Didimus the Blind wrote a very important book about *Saint Trinity*. In this way, Saint Chiril agreed that the Son of God was born by Father. The mystery of God is by himself a human consciousness and the receiving of Holy Spirit is only for the righteous

people. The Holy Scripture often speaks about this relation between the righteous man and God.

The Holy Persons and Their characteristics; the intra-Trinitarian relationship; the consubstantiality

God the Father, as Beginning and the Source of everything is present in Saint Chiril's theology. In his commentary of Isaiah (chapter 41, 8-20) he makes an overview on the presence and Father's work in the world.

God the Son, Christ – is our Savior and the One who heads the sins and offers forgiveness, justifies the faith, saves the lost people and makes them stronger than death. The knowing of God is better than all sacrifice and offerings from the Old Law because he is fulfilled in Christ. The light is a characteristic of the Word – Son of God and of His Holy Father. Saint Chiril explains also how Christ lights the people, a similar characteristic of his Father.

God the Holy Spirit – as well as his predecessor, Saint Athanasius, Saint Chiril explains in a biblical way the unity between the relationship between Holy Spirit, the Father and the Son. He is the Spirit of God, “Who proceed from the Father”, “Who is proper to the Son” and who is given through the Son to all who believe in Him. The Father is the only origin in Godhead. Saint Chiril says that through the unity of God, Holy Spirit is God and through the identity of nature of God, He is Lord.

The consubstantiality of Holy Personas in Trinity

Saint Chiril was permanently interested in explaining the term “of one essence” from the Nicaeo-Constantinopolitan Symbol of Faith. Therefore, in his work, “*The treasure of Holy and on essence Trinity*”, he makes a synthesis of the Trinitarian controversy from the fourth century, an answer to the Arian heresy. The unity in the Holy Trinity is the unity of essence. Likewise, a very important characteristic of Godhead is the eternity or the eternal existence of the Three Persons.

The teaching about Mother of God at Saint Chiril of Alexandria

According to Saint Chiril the central theme of the mariological dogma is the Incarnation of Logos. The divine oikonomia revealed himself through the Holy Virgin, because each Person of the Saint Trinity worked in the act of Incarnation: Father condescended, Holy Spirit had prepared the Virgin and Son was incarnated. In an eschatological way, Mother of God is the first human being that received God in her womb.

Chapter three

The Christological doctrine and the effects of Holy Eucharist in the theology of Saint Chiril of Alexandria

The anthropology of Saint Chiril is important for understanding his Christology. The Incarnation of Christ, His human nature, the salvation of men and the Eucharistic dimension of His Incarnation are our most important theme in this chapter.

The creation of man

God made the world. The world and his Creator are two different realities ontologically speaking. Saint Chiril puts the act of falling in sin in relation with the creation from nothing, meaning that the nature of created things is subjected to change. Therefore, Saint Chiril considers that the falling of man is an accident, without any change in God's good-will. In his life, man looks permanently for God because he needs God's image in his soul. In the center of his anthropology, Saint Chiril put the free-will of man, which is in him from the creation.

The Incarnation of Christ like ontological necessity for the revival of fallen human nature of communication of God

Saint Chiril, “the great theologian on spiritual life”, through his teaching about Mother of God places us in a Christological spirituality. In an apologetic way, Saint Chiril speaks about the distinction between the Only Begotten and First Born. So, Christ is the First Born among people from the moment of his Incarnation. He is Only Begotten because He isn’t in any classification, because of birth from the God’s nature.

The humanity of Christ and her role in human salvation

Christ the high priest takes our humanity in which we are cleaned and brought sacrifice to God. Saint Chiril explains this matter in the context of our salvation. In this context, he doesn’t mention about the humanity of Christ, but attempts to demonstrate that, inside our souls, it is another more intimate nature. In his opinion, the humanity of Christ is the perfect instrument for discovering His divine nature.

The Ransom of human nature through the Sacrifice and Resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ

The man’s ransom is realized by God through an act of love and mercy. In one of his letters at the Paschal Fest, Saint Chiril speaks about this aspect in the context of Son Incarnation. This reality is always in connection with our ransom. The Eucharist is the heart of the Church, the Mystery of Ransom. He is more like an imitation and a reality hidden and revealed in this mystery.

The Eucharistic dimension of Christ Incarnation

The faith in the Incarnation of Christ and the Holy Sacraments ensure the man’s unity with God. The process of deification in man starts from the Baptism, when he becomes temple of God and sanctuary of Holy Trinity. In this work the Eucharist has a very important role because he is the Body of Christ. For Saint Chiril the Eucharistic communion is the confession of Christ Resurrection. In this process, Holy Spirit is also very important because he assures the Christian unity in Christ, the unity of the mystical body of the Church. For Chiril, the substantial unity of the Three Persons of the Saint Trinity is the foundation union of Christ and His believers.

Chapter four

The Church and the Holy Sacraments in the theology of Saint Chiril of Alexandria

Christ submit us before God in liturgical sacrifice

In His quality of the highest priest, Holy Spirit is the initiator of the Holy Liturgy. The Eucharist is also a mystical presence of God in the middle of his people. In its deep meaning, the Eucharist is in the acts of the Holy Spirit.

Christ incorporates the entire human race in His Sacrifice and Resurrection

The Eucharist is a sacrifice because contains actually the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, not understanding here that Christ has scarified again. The Altar is representing the Holy Ground in which our Lord was put. His priesthood is current because He is present in the Church and in His Sacraments. In this case, the Eucharist indicates the permanent reality of our ransom until the end of days.

The Eucharist, the mystery of the union with Christ in His Body and Blood

The idea that we are creatures by our natures and sons by grace is used frequently in Saint’s Chiril writings. In one of his Christological dialogue he explains what is the reason of our creation from the essence of God, with which we have become compliant.

Christian's spiritual and bodily participation at the Holy Eucharist as participation in the divine nature of God

One important effect of Holy Eucharist is the unity between man and God. That shows the community value of the Holy Eucharist. All Christians receive the gifts of the spring of life. All of them receive the same Bread and communicate with Christ in one ecclesiological Body.

The presence of Incarnated Word, sacrificed and resurrected in the Eucharistic Body of the Church

From the first he was the Word, and the Word was in relation with God and was God. If we want to understand the mystery and the necessity of Christ Incarnation we must relate to God's eternal presence. The Body of Christ become live giving through his union with the Logos power, mixed with our human reality and come in union with our body to inquire His own life and to put in us the seed of immortality.

Bread and wine transforming reality in Eucharist, according to Saint Chiril

In the Holy Eucharist we eat and drink the real Body and Blood of Christ. In other way, the Body and Blood of Christ are real present on the Holy Altar. God himself said: "This is My Body and this is My Blood, that we can understand that these are real, not mere symbols. In this way, we know that the holy gifts have become, after Epiclesis, the Body and the Blood of Christ.

Chapter five

The work of Holy Spirit in Saint Eucharist, according to Saint Chiril of Alexandria

Saint Chiril says that Holy Spirit is defined in relationship with Father and Son. He is the divine hypostasis that locks the Trinity expressing her quintessence. The Trinitarian unity is expressed also in this perfect communion. In this way, Saint Chiril says that "all if from the Father, through the Son in the Holy Spirit". Until Saint Chiril theology about Holy Spirit, the third Person of Holy Trinity was analyzed by Didimus the Blind and Saint Athanasius the Great.

The work of Holy Spirit is essential in the Church. Through His power the priest make the Eucharist in the Holy Liturgy. Holy Spirit transforms the man in a new person, resurrected and saved by Christ.

Chapter six

The effects of Holy Eucharist in theology of Saint Chiril of Alexandria

In union with Christ, man accedes to immortality. Through His Blood we have received the Holy Spirit that illuminates our soul and heart. Through Eucharist we unite with Christ and Father in Spirit and with ourselves. The Eucharist is the waiting for Heavenly Kingdom. He is also an anamnesis, mystery, communion or sacrifice of praise. In an orthodox meaning, Eucharist is a sacrifice of redemption, because God said: "This is My Blood of the testament, which is given for men for the forgiveness of sins".

The deification is becoming the image of God. According to Saint Chiril of Alexandria, the process of deification is the purpose of Incarnation. Our purpose is becoming God's image, because through our ransom we got the adoption in God. The change brought by the Eucharistic work makes the man one of Christ. The Eucharist is the divine work o that brings God's kingdom on earth.