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The Connection between the Sacrament of Confession and the Holy Communion. A Biblical, Patristic and Liturgical-Pastoral Evaluation

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Abstract

In the Romanian Orthodox Church, the issue of the link between confession and communion was and is very often called into question, creating controversy between theologians and spiritual fathers when it comes to practical solutions. In the more recent times the continuous communion practice is increasingly frequent. The issue of confession frequency before Communion should also be evaluated in this context. This study evaluates the relationship between the Sacrament of Confession and Communion from a biblical, patristic and liturgical – pastoral perspective. It points out that as spiritual fathers, we must overcome the mentality that confession prior Communion justifies the believer as being worthy to partake, regardless of the intensity or lack of repentance and that we must begin to bring forth spiritual children. Only to this extent we will succeed to find an answer to the question of confession frequency before receiving Holy Communion.

Keywords

The Sacrament of Confession, the Sacrament of the Eucharist, liturgical theology, pastoral theology

I. Historical evaluation of the problem in the Romanian Orthodox Church.

In the Romanian Orthodox Church the problem of the existing connection between confession and communion was and is talked about, making a lot of disputations among theologians and confessors, when it comes to find and suggest any practical solutions.

Let's remember, for example, in the interwar period, about the dispute around Father Iovan from the Vladimirești monastery who practiced the frequent communion, which wasn't always preceded by confession, after the classic ordinance of the Church. Around Father Iovan was created a truly spiritual movement, alike that one created in Russia around Saint John of Kronstadt. Many confessors from that time viewed with some reservation such a practice, citing the lack of spiritual judgment, or the failure in respecting the Holy tradition of the Church. Look what Father Professor Petre Vintilescu from the Faculty of Theology from Bucharest wrote about it:

“... that recently arose some discussions related to a summary form of confession, practiced in one of our monasteries, which introduced the frequent communion as a special rule in the Christian life of community. Confession doesn't follow here the traditional ritual of the Church, but is integrated in “The prayer of forgiving all the willing and unwilling sins and of all the curses and vows”, which the priest read to all the community... Certainly, is not easy to find, in normal conditions, the sufficient justification for confession in that form, because is not complete neither as material confession, either as an act of repentance.” And Father Petre Vintilescu finishes through the following conclusion: “The confession individual and secret (it is understood that is before receiving Holy Communion – o.n.) established by the church discipline, remain therefore indispensable, even for those advanced in piety, in the interest of their supporting and guidance for their spiritual progress by their confessor.”¹

Therefore, in the same context generated by the practice of frequent communion from Vladimirești monastery, confessors from the big mon-

¹ Fr. Prof. Petre Vintilescu, *Sfânta Împărtășanie în spiritualitatea creștină. Deasă oră rară împărtășire?*, in ”Studii Teologice,” year V, 1953, nr. 5-6, pp. 401-403.

asteries in Moldova, but not only, sustained then, creating a direction presented even today in many spaces from our Church, that the Holy Communion should be given to the believers from time to time, always being preceded by confession.²

In the context of frequent communion from Vladimirești, Father Professor Petre Vintilescu, in a subchapter of his study quoted above mentioned the problem of frequent communion and confession; quoting in this sense from the Synodal tome of the Patriarch Gregory, from August 1807. This document appeared in the context of appearance of two groups among the monks from Holy Mount Athos, one of which claimed that is good to take frequent communion without confession, and the other one who claimed that the communion is useful only at certain time periods and without condemnation. All this currents are later disapproved by the synodal decisions, which underline that:

“communion with the most Holy Mysteries ought to be with the research of every believer, after the Holy Apostle, who says: everyone to investigate himself,... but this investigation shouldn’t be after his own mind, but with the help of the priests empowered by bishops with church gram, who advise them how to investigate and to temptation the deepen of the hearts of those confessing, the thoughts, the acts and the customs and to give them healing by the holy canons of the Holy and God bearer Fathers, and after this straightening to let them take the Holy Communion, as Saint John Chrysostom teaches... So, every believer, according to this rule, should investigate himself through his own confessor and to approach with fear and love to the confession with the Most holy Mysteries.”³

Also, Father Professor Petre Vintilescu conjure other synodal tome from August 1819 of the same Patriarch Gregory addressing to those who sustain that communion cannot be only at 40 days.

“Be confident that those pious need to approach to take communion with the Body of life giving, every Liturgy; that’s why they

² To see in this sense: Ieromonah Ilie Cleopa, *Viața religioasă din unele mănăstiri ale Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, in rev. “Studii Teologice”, year V, 1953, nr. 5-6, pp. 437-443

³ Manuel Ghedeon, *Κανονικαὶ διατάξεις*, t. II, Konstantinopol, 1889, pp. 123-124 apud Fr. Prof. Petre Vintilescu, *Sfânta Împărtășanie în spiritualitatea creștină. Deasă ori rară împărtășire?*, in “Studii Teologice”, year V, 1953, nr. 5-6, p. 400

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are called by the priest... but of the helplessness of the people to take communion every day, the Church decided that everyone should take communion when, after confessing to his own spiritual father, is found worthy and receive absolution for it from the confessor.”⁴

Others references from Father Petru Vintilescu are in the same sense in *Mărturisirea ortodoxă* of Mitrofan Kritopulos, which shows that: “The Church doesn’t give communion to everybody, anyway and without confession, but only those who are ready and prepared for this communion.”⁵ The last reference of the Father Professors to *Mărturisirea ortodoxă* of Petru Movilă: “when we receive communion, we should prepare after our Orthodox Church ordinance, which is to a sincere confession, feasting, and heartfelt, full reconciliation with others and so on.”⁶ According to those arguments, Father Petre Vintilescu concludes that: “the strongest rule that encourages in the Orthodox Church does not encourage anyone to communion without confession.”⁷

Nowadays, among theologians and confessors is required the practice of continue communion more often or frequent with the Sacraments. In this context appeared the practice of continue communion and the problem of the evaluation of the frequency of confession before the actual communion.

II. The link between the Sacrament of Confession and Holy Communion. A biblical, patristic and pastoral liturgically evaluation.

When we talk about the problem of the existing relation between the Holy Mystery of Confession and Communion, we should take into account the

⁴ Manuel Ghedeon, Κανονικαί διατάξεις, τ. II, pp. 153-154 apud Pr. Prof. Petre Vintilescu, *Sfânta Împărtășanie în spiritualitatea creștină. Deasă ori rară împărtășire?*, in “Studii Teologice”, year V, 1953, nr. 5-6, p. 400.

⁵ Mitrofan Kritopulos, Ομολογια apud Pr. Prof. Petre Vintilescu, *Sfânta Împărtășanie în spiritualitatea creștină. Deasă ori rară împărtășire?*, in “Studii Teologice”, year V, 1953, nr. 5-6, p. 401.

⁶ Petru Movilă, *Mărturisirea Ortodoxă*, Answer at 107 question, apud Pr. Prof. Petre Vintilescu, *Sfânta Împărtășanie în spiritualitatea creștină. Deasă ori rară împărtășire?* in “Studii Teologice”, year V, 1953, nr. 5-6, p. 401.

⁷ Fr. Prof. Petre Vintilescu, *Sfânta Împărtășanie în spiritualitatea creștină. Deasă ori rară împărtășire?*, in “Studii Teologice”, year V, 1953, nr. 5-6, p. 385.

fact that the person who wants to take the Holy Communion, cannot take it anyway, but in a spirit of spiritual training, so that they are taken "for the remission of sins and eternal life". When we approach the chalice must be attentive to our spiritual state, to not "give a kiss" to Christ like "Judas" did. After the Lord's word, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you." (Matthew 7, 6)

The question which is made is a natural one: in which condition we can take the communion, and to help us in our spiritual growing? The answer at this question came from the Orthodox Tradition: to take communion with spiritual benefit from the Holy Mysteries, the Christian should engage in life in Christ, participating actively at the liturgically life of Church, forcing themselves to do only the good, ridding out of what is bad and sin, confessing their sins, engaging themselves in an ascetic effort through feastings which Church decide, and being in conjugal abstinence few days before taking the communion and in the day when they take it, this last advice being for those who are married.

Regarding the requirement of confession before communion, we found in these sense very clear explanations in *Mărturisirea ortodoxă* from 1642: "Every clergy man or laic who wants to take communion should confess at his spiritual father before of all his sins"⁸. More clarifying in this sense is the specification of Saint Antim Ivireanul: "without confession no one to go and take communion"⁹. This rule is confirmed in the newest catechisms of the Orthodox Church: "At receiving the communion are called all the sons of the church, they can communion with the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus, if they firs confessed their sins and received forgiveness by their spiritual father"¹⁰. Such a provision sit in agreement with Holy Apostle Paul from the First Epistle to Corinthians:

"Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh un-

⁸ *Mărturisirea Ortodoxă*, I, 101, apud Arhim. Benedict Ghiuș, *În ce condiții ne putem împărtăși?*, Editura Bizantină Publishing house, Bucharest, p. 13.

⁹ Antim Ivireanul, *Opere*, Minerva Publishing house, edition Ștrempel, p. 356, apud Arhim. Benedict Ghiuș, *În ce condiții ne putem împărtăși?*, p. 13.

¹⁰ *Carte de învățătură creștină ortodoxă*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române Publishing house, Bucharest, 1978, p. 52.

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worthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." (I Corinthians 11, 27-32).

This scriptural text envisages the inner research before receiving the Holy Communion, which certainly implies the confession before it. This practice of the inner research before receiving the Holy Communion which is proposed by the above quote is confirmed by the patristic Tradition of the Church. We mention in this sense the text from The Didache – the Lord's Teaching through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations, chapter XIV:

"But every Lord's day gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure. But let no one who is at odds with his fellow come together with you, until they are reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be profaned"¹¹. The same urge we find in another text of the Didache: "In the church you shall acknowledge your transgressions, and you shall not come near for your prayer with an evil conscience. This is the way of life."¹²

The exegesis of the biblical and patristic texts above cannot yet specify if the expressions "sins confession" or "inner research" before receiving the Holy Communion designates the sacramental confession, the personal analysis of their own conscience or a public confession of their sins. When we affirm that thing we refer to the fact that in the primary Church the sacramental confession was only for the big sins: idolatry, apostasy, fornication, murder, robbery, and other sins considerate "big" or "to death". Some church authors from the patristic time considered that after the confession before baptism should be "the second confession". We have in this sense a confession in The Shepherd of Hermas:

"After that thou hast made known unto them all these words, which the Master commanded me that they should be revealed unto thee, then all their sins which they sinned aforetime are

¹¹ *Didahia celor 12 Apostoli*, chap. XIV, 1, in "Scrierile Părinților Apostolici", Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române Publishing house, Bucharest, p. 34.

¹² *Didahia celor 12 Apostoli*, chap. IV, 14, in "Scrierile Părinților Apostolici", p. 29.

forgiven to them; yea, and to all the saints that have sinned unto this day, if they repent with their whole heart, and remove double-mindedness from their heart. For the Master sware by His own glory, as concerning His elect; that if, now that this day has been set as a limit, sin shall hereafter be committed, they shall not find salvation; for repentance for the righteous hath an end; the days of repentance are accomplished for all the saints; whereas for the Gentiles there is repentance until the last day. Thou shalt therefore say unto the elders of the Church, that they direct their paths in righteousness, that they may receive in full the promises with abundant glory. Ye therefore that work righteousness be steadfast, and be not double-minded, that ye may have admission with the holy angels. Blessed are ye, as many as endure patiently the great tribulation that cometh, and as many as shall not deny their life. For the Lord swear concerning His Son, that those who denied their Lord should be rejected from their life, even they that are now about to deny Him in the coming days; but to those who denied Him aforetime, to them mercy was given of His great loving kindness.”¹³

A similar confession we found at Tertulian:

“These poisons of his, therefore, God foreseeing, although the gate of forgiveness has been shut and fastened up with the bar of baptism, has permitted it still to stand somewhat open. In the vestibule He has stationed the second repentance for opening to such as knock: but now once for all, because now for the second time; but never more because the last time it had been in vain. For is not even this once enough? You have what you now deserved not, for you had lost what you had received. If the Lord’s indulgence grants you the means of restoring what you had lost, be thankful for the benefit renewed, not to say amplified; for restoring is a greater thing than giving, inasmuch as having lost is more miserable than never having received at all.”¹⁴

¹³ The Shephard of Hermas, Vision 2, 2[6] 4-8 in “The writings of Apostolic Fathers, p. 303.

¹⁴ Tertulian, “On repentance”, cap. VII, 10-12, in col. “Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești”, vol. 3, *Apologeți de limbă latină*, p. 216, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române Publishing house, Bucharest, 1981, p. 216.

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This practice is in agreement with the biblical learning, because is not allowed to a baptized Christian to do big sins. We have in this sense the confession of Holy Evangelist John: “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remained in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (1 John 3, 9); “We know that whosoever is born of God sinned not; but he that is begotten of God kept himself, and that wicked one touched him not.” (1 John 5, 18). A similar confession we found in The Epistle to Hebrews of Saint Apostle Paul:

“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.” (Hebrews 6, 4-6).

That’s why, if was happened that a Christian to make a mortal sin or outrageous or against the Holy Spirit, he was excommunicated from the Eucharistic community, how was the case of the incestuous of Corinth (1 Cor. 5, 1-5). After a while, if he was doing the acts of repentance, he was received back in the Church (II Cor. 2, 3-11).

With all these, in the conscience of first Christians there was the conscience of sinfulness, having in this sense the confession of the same Evangelist John:

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”(1 John, 1, 8-10).

Repentance for the sins was seen as a continuous process, “which had a radical stage before Baptism, then became a permanent spiritual working for the rest of the life”¹⁵. A special accent is on “examination on himself” (1 Cor. 11, 28) before communion with the Holy Sacraments. Of course, the main accent is on daily repentance before God, especially before communion with the Holy Sacraments¹⁶.

¹⁵ Hyerom. Petru Pruteanu, *Despre legătura dintre Spovedanie și Împărtășire*, p. 2 (available at http://www.teologie.net/2013/07/05/spovedanie_impasire/; accessed in 13.11.2014).

¹⁶ According to *Didahia*, chap. 4, 14

In the case of major sins, by IV century, repentance or confession was in two ways: public, in the case of the sins which were known by everyone, or great sins, as apostasy, murder, adultery, witchcraft, heresy and so on; and individual, in the case of the sins unknown for the community, those being confessed to bishop or to the priest who was a confessor¹⁷. At the beginning of V century, Blessed Augustine, even he doesn't exclude the public confession; he shows his preference to the secret one. He introduces a new principle regarding the disciplinary penitence; according to this one the public sins necessitated obligatory a public confession, while those made in secret, asking private confession.¹⁸ After confession, the bishop or the spiritual father stops the penitent from communion for a determined period (from several months to even 15-20 years). According to the penitent repentance, the period in which he cannot take communion can increase or decrease. The allowing taking communion was immediately this period ends.

From those above, we clearly understand that the confession is not necessarily related to receiving the communion, because can be times when after confession the Christian don't receive the Holy Communion, because the person who confess is not prepared and he need to receive a canon for his sins.

Likewise, for the primary period of the Church we have patristic confessions which attest the fact that the daily confession of Christians does not implies necessarily the confession of sins. In this sense we mention a fragment from Saint Basil the Great:

¹⁷ Fr. PhD. Emil Cioară, *Duhovnicul și Taina Spovedanie în Biserica Ortodoxă*, Editura Universității din Oradea Publishing house, 2007, p. 240; see also Pr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Mărturisirea păcatelor și pocăința în trecutul Bisericii*, în "Biserica Ortodoxă Română", 1955, nr. 3-4, p. 231 and Priest conf. PhD. Dumitru Vanca, "Spovedania: marile etape istorice", în *Vocație, slujire, jertfelnicie – cinstire și recunoștință Părintelui prof. dr. Nicolae D. Neula la împlinirea vârstei de 70 de ani*, Editura Basilica a Patriarhiei Române Publishing house, Bucharest, 2014, p. 720.

¹⁸ Augustin, *Sermo 82, 87, PL 38, 511*: "The sins which are made in public should be reprovved in public and the sins made in private should be reprovved in private... We want to straighten in public, to blame and avoid, with a public blame, to traise the innocent. We want to straighten, to blame... The bishop is informed that someone is murderer, but only him knows the person how it is... I would like to publicly branded, I worry about him judge denounced this age. I'm reluctant to betray him, but do not neglect it. Rebuke him secretly put then under the eyes of God's judgment, i put bloody horror in his conscience and urge him to repent... I denounce it publicly, but admonish him privately. Evil must die where it was made" apud Ilarion Felea, *Pocăința-studiu de documentare teologică și psihologică*, Scara Publishing house, Bucharest, 2000, p. 109.

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“It is needless to point out that for anyone in times of persecution to be compelled to take the communion in his own hand without the presence of a priest or minister is not a serious offense, as long custom sanctions this practice from the facts themselves. All the solitaries in the desert, where there is no priest, take the communion themselves, keeping communion at home. And at Alexandria and in Egypt, each one of the laity, for the most part, keeps the communion, at his own house, and participates in it when he likes.”¹⁹

This text, which refers at a reality from the primary life of the Church when was allowed to “give to Christians, even at home, the Holy Communion and, when they want, to take it, even if they weren’t priests. Keeping the communion at home for extraordinary occasions was an occasion, at least for the piety Christians, to satisfy their piety, taking every day the communion.”²⁰

We observe from the text of Saint Basil the Great the fact that is not mentioned the confession before taking the communion, when this one was daily. To be sure, the problem of confession was only when the conscience of Christian was disturbed by any sin. Outside this, the communion could be taken without the condition of confession before it. This practice of frequent communion was the normality many years in the Church life, as Saint Ghenadie of Marseille said: “neither praise nor critic communion with the Holy Eucharist every day, I urge, however, and advise that it is appropriate to take communion on all Sundays, if, of course, the soul is untouched by sin”²¹ This patristic text briefs clearly about the period in which the Christians wanted to take the communion and to confess before it: only when the soul is touched by any sin. So, “the Confession and the Holy Communion are two different realities, the second one not being conditioned by the first one”²²

With the appearance of monasticism, after the fourth century, next to the sacramental confession appears the spiritual advising or the so called

¹⁹ Saint Basil the Great, *Epistola XCIII către patricia Caesaria*, PG, t. X, col. 628; t. XX-XII, col. 484 B, apud Pr. Petre Vintilescu, *Sfânta Împărtășanie în spiritualitatea creștină. Deasă ori rară împărtășire?*, in “Studii Teologice”, year V, 1953, nr. 5-6, p. 386

²⁰ Fr. Petre Vintilescu, *Sfânta Împărtășanie în spiritualitatea creștină. Deasă ori rară împărtășire?*, in “Studii Teologice”, year V, 1953, nr. 5-6, p. 386.

²¹ Ghenadie of Marseille, *De ecclesiasticis dogmatibus, cap. III, PL, t. XLII, col. 993* apud Pr. Petre Vintilescu, *Sfânta Împărtășanie în spiritualitatea creștină. Deasă ori rară împărtășire?*, in “Studii Teologice”, year V, 1953, nr. 5-6, p. 390.

²² Ioannis Foundoulis, *Dialoguri liturgice*, Vol. I, Editura Bizantină Publishing house, Bucharest, 2008, p. 23.

“monastic confession” which was made before the spiritual father, “abbot” or “gheronda”, who was in many times non ordained, and it should be at a simple nun or monk, “abbess” in the case of the women monasteries. This “monastic confession” refers at confessing the thoughts and receiving of some personal advices regarding the spiritual fight²³. This confession wasn’t about the big sins, which could stop the communion, this competence being at the competence of the bishop or the priest.

At the beginning of the fourth century, more accurate after the Edict of Milan from 313, inside the Church started to enter all the members of the Roman Empire who wanted this thing, even if their own life was not after the requirements of the Gospel. Even if their preparation for Baptism was made with exactness, the number of Christians who did mortal sins was even higher; the Church intervenes in this sense with several canons which should regulate the penitential discipline. Then started to be the link among the confession and the communion, as an obligatory condition for receiving the last one. This practice hadn’t just a formal character, but vises an exercise through the Church strengthen the conscience of all Christians before receiving the Holy Communion. Was in the same time an exercise through the Church strengthen the conscience of Christians of how they should close and receive the Holy Sacraments.

Unfortunately, in the fourth century, especially after the iconoclast period, the conditions to receive Baptism almost disappeared, this fact leading to introduction of some supplementary conditions regarding the receiving of the Communion.²⁴With this the frequency of the Eucharistic decreased drastically. Thus, if in the first centuries was an exception for someone to attend Liturgy without communion, after the sixth century, Liturgy content is assigned more and more to the mystical symbolic meanings that they could ascend spiritually Christians without Eucharistic gifts. The most common explanation regarding the nonparticipation at the Holy Communion, Father Alexander Schmemmann shows that had at his base:

²³ To see in this sense Irenee Hausherr, *Paternitatea și îndrumarea duhovnicească în Răsăritul creștin*, Deisis Publishing house, Sibiu, 1999 and Fr. conf. PhD. Dumitru-Vanca, “Spovedania: marile etape istorice”, in *Vocație, slujire, jertfelnicie – cinstire și recunoștință Părintelui prof. dr. Nicolae D. Necula la împlinirea vârstei de 70 de ani*, p. 712.

²⁴ Deacon Ioan I. Ică jr., *Caonul Ortodoxiei. Canonul Apostolic al primelor secole*, Deisis /Stavropoleos Publishing house, 2008, p. 309.

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“the pretext of the overwhelming unworthiness of the people of closing the chalice, and, as a result,... the necessity of a certain requirements and supplementary guarantees. The lay people live in the world and are in permanent contact with his ugliness, unfairness, sinfulness, with his lie and, that’s why they should need a period of special preparation, a special effort and repentance”²⁵.

In the same period, the monastic ordinances of the services and feastings are even more spread in the laic environments, until, in the eight century, the Sava monastic ordinary will became normative for all the Church, but the monastic influence of the entire life of the Church will culminate in the period of hesychastic disputes. This internal historical context of the Church, with the invasion of the Muslims in the East and the scholastic influence in West, made that people to take the communion even rarely, and if they wanted to do it, they should take the monastic practice regarding the sins confession, and even the thoughts confession, those two aspects of the spiritual life, the actual confession and thoughts confession, being in an only ordinance, know today as Confession.

Scarcely in the eight century, in the context of the dispute from Saint Mount Athos, between kollyvades and anti kollyvades, existed a trenchant attitude regarding the return at the old practice of the Church, that of “continue communion”, many orthodox communities tried to return at that natural way of communion.

In this situation it raises a problem of practical nature concerning spiritual preparation through the sacrament of confession of one who desires to take the sacraments frequently, especially about the frequency of confession to be able to take continue communion.

To give a satisfying answer at the problem, we first should refer at the connection between confession and communion in respect of the priest, because he makes the Liturgy and he takes all the time the communion. So, if we want to take the continue communion we should address to the priest because he takes the communion at all Liturgies. Therefore, what is canonic for the priest regarding the confession, should be canonic for every Christian.

Referee strictly to this problem; we must say at the outset that meet the first difficulty. Thus, if for the laics the tradition of the Church seems to

²⁵ Alexandre Schmemmann, *Euharistia – Taina Împărăției*, Anastasia Publishing house, Bucharest, p. 233.

be very inflexible, imposing the confession as a condition before the communion, when is about the priests who serve the Liturgy, this rule has nuances. In this sense we should look at the specifications in Liturgical book:

“The ordained priest and the deacon should prepare for the Liturgy as follows: Before, they should to beware of any bad action which prevents serving the Liturgy and the Holy Communion. They are finding under the curse, or will be found off the church, or damn by the bishop, or would get him some mortal sin. Deadly sins are these: Pride, Silver love, Greed, Fornication, Anger, Hatred, Laziness for the good acts... If his conscience says that he has a mortal sin, he shouldn't dare to serve the Liturgy, until he cleans of his sin, because he make another mortal sin if he dare to take the communion, because of his unworthiness, and this act will entail judgment or condemnation. Even during the Holy Liturgy, if he remembers he has a mortal sin and he understands it, how he can, he should humble himself with great regret, and with the thought that he should confess as soon as he can, to do the good things and to let the sins.”²⁶

We understand from this text the fact that the priest is obliged to confess only if he felt guilty of a mortal sin enumerated above. Even in the situation that he remembers any mortal sins during the Liturgy he should continue the service, confessing himself only after he finishes it. Thus, the confession isn't obligatorily for the priest before serving the Liturgy, only in the situation of mortal sins, while for the Christian people the confession before receiving the Holy communion is obligatorily every time. Such a practice can easily introduce a false conception in our orthodox faith, namely the separation between the clergy and the people, the clergy being able to enjoy some indulgences or allowances concerning the accession of the communion of the Holy Mysteries by prior confession, indulgences but for lay people are no longer valid. This separation between the clergy and the people sitting in church can affect authentic Orthodox spiritual life and living. This tendency of the separation of the clergy of people was foreign at the beginning of the orthodox spirituality, being borrowed from the west theology. This tendency is known under the generic name of “clericalism”. In face of a such situation, of distinction between people and clerics, in

²⁶ *Liturghier*, Povățuiri și învățături, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române Publishing house, Bucharest, 1987, pp. 419-420.

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respect of the difference of receiving Holy Communion, Father Archimandrite Benedict Ghiuș urge to “the instauration in the church of one regime of total equality between people and clerics regarding the confession before receiving the Holy Communion.”²⁷ Thus, what is canonic for priests should be available for people too. As a practical situation for this problem we remember the fact that in our church, the Euchologion has two types of formulations regarding the Confession: a form called by Father Ghiuș “of general or group confession” meaning the prayer of priest of forgiving all the sins, and a form of detailed confession, individual or the actual Confession. It is very interesting what Father Benedict Ghiuș notes after notes the two types of liturgical forms: “confessor priest remains free to use one form or another, after appreciation”²⁸ Meanwhile, Father Benedict discusses general form of confession (collectively), showing that “it is permissible Tradition”, but “only for isolated cases and spiritual well-defined communities with the necessary provisions”²⁹. Father propose the alternation with “with stewardship when the confession itself, when it’s various temporal substitution ways, despite their ambiguity, of course, with the consent of those concerned confessor and laymen, and clerics.”³⁰

In terms of frequency of confession before receiving Holy Communion, I believe that this should be left to the confessor, who alone can know “the inside” of his spiritual son. We call this the word of St. Symeon the New Theologian; Catechesis entitled Christ in the footsteps of the spiritual father “But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shall thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee.” (Luke 14, 10). This text, although it relates to spiritual obedience in general, may well be interpreted as approximating the Christian sacraments only with the advice and with the blessing of the confessor. Looking at things from this perspective, one cannot take the sacraments than in direct relationship with his confessor. No believer can claim from this perspective that we can take the communion because it hasn’t sins without first consulting with his confessor. The confessor remains the norm by which we can approach Christ, through whom we can enter into relation-

²⁷ Arhim. Benedict Ghiuș, *În ce condiții ne putem împărtăși?*, p. 17.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

ship with Christ through Sacraments. Thus, the first condition to be able to get a meaningful and frequent sharing is not chaotic at finding and stay faithful in obedience to a spiritual father. If you have found a confessor, it is essential to keep in touch constantly and then, with its help you can receive continue communion.

Another problem we should consider when we analyze this problem is the responsibility the confessor has to his spiritual son, when he takes care of him by advice, he can establish the frequency of communion and even the frequency he can keep the tie with him or how often he receives his son to confess. In the situation the Christian confesses relatively rare at his spiritual father, the confessing should precede always his desire of communion.

The confessor should help his spiritual son at a spiritual growing, this thing being possible only with his conscience growing. Of course, the frequent confession helps this thing. At the same time, the confessor can make his spiritual son conscious of the fact that confession cannot be perceived as a possibility of receiving forgiveness of the sins he doesn't understand and cannot get rid of them. Such a confession could become in a short time a deceptive formalism³¹, a routine designed to justify our conscience, even when apparently things are going in the natural spiritual order.

Likewise, the confessor should help his spiritual sons to understand that repentance is not confessing the sins and receiving the forgiving. We can say that repentance is a "therapeutic permanent process", while testimony is only "surgery" in this long process. Saint Apostle Paul urges that before the communion: "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup" (1 Cor. 11, 28). This research considers the Apostle's own conscience, to be educated so that man to see his sins and repent for them. If his sins are impediments on receiving the communion, he should go to confession and he should receive canon for his sins until the Eucharistic integration in the church he abandoned through sin. The confessor, in a permanent dialogue and through a care without border, should help his spiritual son to receive such a conscience. This thing isn't possible only through a continue dialog father- son. For receiving such a conscience we should truly pass through a series of true confessions

³¹ Hierom. Petru Pruteanu, *Despre legătura dintre Spovedanie și Împărtășire*, p.4 (available at http://www.teologie.net/2013/07/05/spovedanie_impasire/; accessed in 13.11.2014).

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before our spiritual father, these confessions should be for us the true returning from the sinful life or “renewals of the Baptism”³². Thus, the confessor should underline the quality of confession in front of his spiritual son, leading him to it, to receive the communion with great benefit for his spiritual life and not the number of confessing before communion to count, keeping an account that some of them will never return at the sinful life, even if they confess relatively frequent.³³

Thus,

“for taking the communion with the Holy Sacraments we should have a permanent condition of repentance and brokenness of the heart, without these we cannot close to the Eucharistic chalice. But this doesn’t mean that every time we should go to confess if our conscience doesn’t urge to.”³⁴

We saw many situations in which persons who wanted to take the communion frequently, hadn’t nothing unusual to confess, because they did this thing a few days ago, and they passed through the confessing chair just formally, like a “split ticket counter for Communion”³⁵ after the expression of Father Alexandre Schmemmann. What I see essential is the relationship with our spiritual father before receiving any communion, to have his agreement, his blessing, as to a doctor who knows very well his patient, so the confession with the sacraments should not be done after our discernment, but after “advice from the heaven”, received by the spiritual father. In the situation we feel the need to confess, any sin or thoughts, we should do this immediately, without rush or stereotypes.

As confessors, we should pass through the mentality in which the confession before communion makes the Christian worthy of receiving the Communion, independent of his intensity of repentance or the lack of it, valorizing only the fact that he confessed, even if it was formal. In just a

³² Father Alexandre Schmemmann speaks a lot in his writings about the Sacrament of Confession as the second Baptism, or a renewal of the gifts of Baptism through the Mystery of Confession.

³³ Hyerom. Petru Pruteanu, *Despre legătura dintre Spovedanie și Împărtășire*, p. 5 (available at http://www.teologie.net/2013/07/05/spovedanie_impirtasire/; accessed in 13.11.2014).

³⁴ Hyerom. Petru Pruteanu, *Despre legătura dintre Spovedanie și Împărtășire*, p. 5 (available at http://www.teologie.net/2013/07/05/spovedanie_impirtasire/; accessed in 13.11.2014).

³⁵ A. Schmemmann, *Euharistia – Taina Împărăției*, p. 243.

word, we should pass through “the formalism of absolution only to be”, which can be “confessing” damaging the souls, while, after these confessions and communions never happen in the heart of the Christian, and he continues to live his sinful life, foreign of the spirit of Gospel. In conclusion, as priests, we should pass over the stage of being only officials who should verify if some formalities are made, and we should start born spiritual sons and to be parents for the children we born through Gospel.