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The Church Lives by the Eucharist, the Eucharist Lives in the Church: The Ontological Identity of the Believers¹

Abstract: The object of the article is to detail the reasons used by Joseph Ratzinger to justify the binary ontological relationship between the Church and the Eucharist, projecting onto the identity of believers. With the use of an analytical-deductive method, it is argued that the Eucharist is not only an efficient cause for the existence of the Church and the continuance of believers in Christ, but it constitutes its essence and is the guarantor of the ontological identity of believers reflecting their mystical union with Christ and projecting onto the vitality of the Church. Based on Ratzinger's theological writings, it is demonstrated that he found a justification for the complementarity of this relationship in the Christological-pneumatological dimension of the essence of the Church and the Eucharist expressed in the concepts: People of God, Mystical Body of Christ, and Community. He started from the event of the Last Supper as the foundation of the interdependence of Church and Eucharist. He emphasised the need to understand liturgical celebration to justify the vitality of the Church. He demonstrated the Christological/ontological principle linking the Church and the Eucharist on the basis of one faith, worship, supremacy, and fraternity.

Keywords: Joseph Ratzinger, Benedict XVI, Church, Community, Eucharist, Mystical Body, People of God

Introduction

On the 75th anniversary of Joseph Ratzinger's birth, in 2002, Stephan Otto Horn and Vinzenz Pfnür compiled and published, on behalf of a group of disciples, texts containing his teaching on

¹ Translated from Polish by Maciej Górnicki.

the Church under the title *Weggemeinschaft des Glaubens. Kirche als Communio*.² In Poland, Joseph Ratzinger's ecclesiological and ecumenical writings were published in 2013 under the editorship of Krzysztof Gózdź and Marzena Górecka in the series *Opera omnia*.³ These texts became the source for the issue addressed in the title of this article.

The theologically justified claim that the Church lives by the Eucharist gives rise to the thesis that the Eucharist lives in the Church. A theoretically correct truth, using the method of observation, can easily be negated. For the faithful who are the Church – the People of God, the Mystical Body of Christ, the community – the Eucharist should be the centre of the life of its members. However, experience shows that it can just be an obligation, a habit. This is the result of factors such as routine, lack of awareness of the sacred, misunderstanding of the sacramental dimension, inability to use the mystery hidden in the sign, lack of need for sacrifice, prayer, contemplation and haste.

An analysis of this relationship in its binary dependence, based on Ratzinger's scholarly work, constitutes the substantive content of this study.⁴ The Eucharist is not only the causal cause for the existence of the Church and the continuance in momentary communion with God, but it constitutes the essence of the Church and is the guarantor of the ontological identity of believers built in personal union with Christ through the Holy Communion. The proper experience of the Eucharist is shaped by knowledge and religious experience: personal and communal.

To confirm the relationship of dependence between the Church and the Eucharist, Ratzinger used arguments from Revelation, the Bible and Tradition. These arguments provide answers to the questions: what does it mean that the Church lives by the Eucharist? What impact does the Eucharist have on the condition of the Church?

² Horn – Pfnür, *Weggemeinschaft*; in Polish: Ratzinger, *Pielgrzymująca wspólnota*.

³ Ratzinger, *Kościół – znak wśród narodów* (OO 8/1–2).

⁴ To date, the studies published on this topic include, among others: Bachanek, *Josepha Ratzingera nauka*, 111–131; Napiórkowski, *Misterium Communions*, 202–228; Hidber, “Umkehr im theologischen Denken”; Wójtowicz, *La Chiesa come communio*; Blanco Sarto, “La teologia di Joseph Ratzinger.”

What is the relationship between the functioning and development of the Church and the Eucharist? Why is the Eucharist celebrated in the Church effective? Does the significance of the sacrament of the Eucharist depend on its celebration in the Church? What influences the vitality of the Eucharist in the Church?

The aim of the study undertaken on this topic is to detail the reasons for the Church's dependence on the Eucharist for the construction of the identity of the believer, which Ratzinger used in his writings to justify the genealogy of the Eucharist, its essence, its dependence on the Church and its absolutely unrestricted vitality throughout human history. In essence, the Eucharist shapes the identity of believers and the community of the Church.

The Body of Christ is a key concept helpful in understanding the relationship of ontological dependence between the Church and the Eucharist. In the ecclesiology of the interwar period, it contributed to the revival of the awareness among believers that they form, together with the hierarchy, His mystical Body and thus enjoy in their souls the presence of the Mystery of Jesus Christ.⁵ What the path to the comprehension of this truth was like will be shown by further analyses verifying the thesis contained in the theme.

1. The Christological-Pneumatological Source of the Relationship between the Church and the Eucharist

In 1951 Ratzinger completed his doctoral dissertation entitled *People and House of God in St Augustine's teaching on the Church*, in which he reflected on Augustine's understanding of the Church as the People of God. The People of God can constitute an ecclesiological term but only in relation to a Christological-pneumatological source. Ratzinger explained, on the basis of Augustine's writings, that this Father of the Church uses the term People of God according to the terminology used in the Bible more to designate the people of Israel, while in the New Testament he refers to the pagan nations,

⁵ Ratzinger, "Przedmowa do nowego wydania," 44.

which become a people “only through communion with Christ and can only become such in the Body of Christ.”⁶

People become the People of God through communion with Christ in the Holy Spirit, that is, they become members of this community through the sacrament of baptism and the Eucharist, which make them “one” in Christ (Gal 3:28). Joseph Ratzinger put it in the following formula: “The Church is the People of God only in and through the Mystical Body of Christ.”⁷

“In the patristic period, the adjective *mysticum* meant as much as sacramental, belonging to the realm of the sacrament – the mystery,” Ratzinger wrote. “Where the word *mysticum* occurred in connection with *Corpus Christi*, and did not indicate the Church but the Eucharistic Body of Christ.”⁸ This suggests observing the metaphor referring to the Church, which is the Body and Christ in this Church is her head. The Church has been interpreted as the Mystical Body of Christ in the vein of the teaching of St Paul, who in 1 Cor 11:12–31 and Rom 12:4–5 referred to the image of the numerous members together constituting one Body. St Paul introduced this concept independently of the Old Testament. He associated it with the celebration of the Eucharist by Christians and emphasised the unity that existed between them. He explained the relationship between Christ and the Church to the arguing Romans and Corinthians, calling Christians, in his First Letter to the Corinthians, the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27) and, in his Letter to the Romans, the Body in Christ (Rom 12:5). Christians are the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27) or form one Body in Christ (Rom 12:5). Christ is the source of their unity.

Augustine, however, focused on the text from the Letter to the Corinthians, in which the truth is expressed: “Since there is one bread, therefore we, who are many, form one body” (1 Cor 10:16). Augustine’s teaching takes on a sacramental meaning and is Eucharistically oriented. Through the offering of the body of Christ in the Eucharist,

⁶ Ratzinger, “Przedmowa,” 3.

⁷ Ratzinger, “Przedmowa do nowego wydania,” 47.

⁸ Ratzinger, “Przedmowa,” 3.

believers are one and become the body of Christ.⁹ Ratzinger does not see in this phrase Augustine opposing the Eucharist against the Church on the basis of a bipolarity between institution and mysticism. The Eucharist is a sacrament, an ecclesial reality that not only gathers people geographically in one place but unites them in communion with Christ, with whom they become one Body. This union is both external and internal and is the experience of everyone who gathers for the Eucharist when participating in the life of the Church. The importance of Eucharistic theology for the self-understanding of the Church cannot be overestimated. And this discovery served Ratzinger's elaboration of the relationship between the Church and the Eucharist at the level of mutual co-creation of the ontological identity of believers in the Church.

As Ratzinger noted, since patristic times ecclesiology has been inspired by Eucharistic devotion and spirituality.¹⁰ “[...] In the Fathers, the Eucharist and the Church are not found side by side like two different things, but interpenetrate each other.”¹¹ Subsequent centuries, however, brought a partial weakening of these bonds, reinforcing more strongly legal interpretations and consequently causing much damage. “The separation of the doctrine of the Eucharist from ecclesiology, which occurred gradually from the thirteenth century onwards, was not only detrimental to both disciplines [...], it led both to regrettable, dangerous simplifications, the overcoming of which appears at the present time as the great task of the Church.”¹² The return to the richness of ancient Christian thought occurred together with the biblical, liturgical and ecclesiological renewal of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and then found particular expression in the texts of the Second Vatican Council, according to which “Eucharistic sacrifice [...] is the fount and apex of the whole Christian life” (*LG* 11), and “source of the Church's life and pledge of future glory” (*UR* 15).

⁹ Ratzinger, “Przedmowa,” 3.

¹⁰ Ratzinger, “Wspólnota z Eucharystii,” 512–514.

¹¹ Ratzinger, “Wspólnota z Eucharystii,” 512.

¹² Ratzinger, “Pojęcie Kościoła,” 609–610.

St Augustine interpreted the concept of the Body of Christ differently from most ecclesialogists of the early and mid-20th century. The research contained in Ratzinger's dissertation on the People of God in the teaching of St Augustine helped to overcome the tension caused by the debate over the understanding of the terms: Church as People of God and Mystical Body of Christ, among German theologians.¹³ One of them, Mannes Dominik Koster OP, in his work *Ekklesiologie im Werden* (Ecclesiology in Development), which appeared in 1940, showed that the term *Mystical Body of Christ*, rather than Church, refers more to the belonging of souls to Christ.¹⁴ It is therefore a metaphor and not a theological term. Ultimately, the theological truth contained in the term Mystical Body of Christ in relation to the Church was defended by Pope Pius XII in his encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi* in 1943,¹⁵ although Henri de Lubac had already reflected on the subject in his work *Corpus mysticum*.¹⁶ Along with Ratzinger, other great theologians also took up this important topic. Yves Congar, Romano Guardini, Jean-Marie Roger Tillard, and Karl Rahner saw in the Eucharistic celebration, on the one hand, a fundamental element and, on the other, the highest degree of realisation of the Church.

Adopting Augustine's teaching, Ratzinger combines a Eucharistic ecclesiology with a pneumatological ecclesiology of communion.¹⁷ Ratzinger complements the understanding of the Church with another important term: ecclesial communion (from the Greek *koinonia*). The Church is both ecclesial and eucharistic communion between people and Christ (1 John 1:3; Phil 3:20–21; Col 3:1–4), and people among themselves (2 Cor 1:7; Eph 4:13; Phil 2:1). “The Church comes into being and exists by the Lord giving Himself to people, entering into communion with them and thus forming them into

¹³ Ratzinger invoked the authority of the Catholic theologian Romano Guardini (1885–1968), the Protestant theologian Karl Barth (1886–1968), and the Lutheran bishop Otto Dibelius (1880–1967). Ratzinger, “Przedmowa,” 1.

¹⁴ Koster, *Ekklesiologie im Werden*.

¹⁵ Pius XII, *De Mystico Jesu Christi Corpore*.

¹⁶ de Lubac, *Corpus mysticum*.

¹⁷ Ratzinger, “Duch Święty jako Communio,” 495–496.

a communion. [...] This is why the Church is always created around the altar.”¹⁸

If it is true that it is the Church that celebrates the Eucharist, then it is even more true that it is the Eucharist that makes the Church as a community alive. It is in the Eucharist that the diverse individual men and women, children and adults who gather there become one regardless of origin and nationality. Through the celebration of this mystery, the source of communion and fellowship, which called itself by the word communion, the Church builds herself up as the Body of Christ, made up of diverse members, animated by the Holy Spirit and coming together in mutual building love. This implies that the Church and the Eucharist are in deep and undeniable interaction, forming each other to the extent that one cannot exist without the other. It is important to maintain among the members of the Church the awareness of their Christological-pneumatological origin and the possibility of sustaining their identity through participation in the Eucharist while preserving this source.

Ratzinger in the post-synodal exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis* pointed out: “The Church ‘draws her life from the Eucharist.’ Since the Eucharist makes present Christ’s redeeming sacrifice, we must start by acknowledging that ‘there is a causal influence of the Eucharist at the Church’s very origins’. The Eucharist is Christ who gives himself to us and continually builds us up as his body. Hence, in the striking interplay between the Eucharist which builds up the Church, and the Church herself which ‘makes’ the Eucharist, the primary causality is expressed in the first formula: the Church is able to celebrate and adore the mystery of Christ present in the Eucharist precisely because Christ first gave himself to her in the sacrifice of the Cross. The Church’s ability to ‘make’ the Eucharist is completely rooted in Christ’s self-gift to her. Here we can see more clearly the meaning of Saint John’s words: ‘he first loved us’ (1 John 4:19). We too, at every celebration of the Eucharist, confess the primacy of Christ’s gift. The causal influence of the Eucharist at the Church’s origins definitively discloses both the chronological and ontological

¹⁸ Ratzinger, “Wspólnota z Eucharystii,” 512.

priority of the fact that it was Christ who loved us ‘first.’ ‘For all eternity he remains the one who loves us first’” (*SCar* 14).

The Christological understanding of the Church and the Eucharist serves to emphasise its incarnational, visible, material, institutional side, while the pneumatological refers to the immanent, invisible, spiritual, charismatic side.

2. The Last Supper as the Foundation of the Interdependence of the Church and the Eucharist

The Church cannot be treated as a legal organisation or corporation. Called by Jesus Christ, she has become a sacrament of saving grace like Himself. The sacramentality of grace, although having its source in Christ, is realised in His Church. Christ did not seek propaganda for a new morality – as Ratzinger observed – since this depends on the voluntary decision of the individual and is not binding.¹⁹ “He had a much greater desire to create a new religious community, a new people, and he expressed this will of his with one simple gesture, of which Mark wrote as follows: He called to himself those whom he himself willed [...] and appointed the Twelve [...] (Mark 3:13f).”²⁰

The Last Supper, which initiated the Paschal events, played an important role in the genesis of the Church. Its close connection with the Jewish Passover must be seen. As Ratzinger notes: though “we do not know for certain whether Jesus’ Last Supper was the Passover or whether, at the time of the killing of the Passover lambs, Jesus was already shedding blood on the Cross, there is, however, a close connection between it and the Jewish Passover.”²¹ Jesus incorporated the feast of the Last Supper into the Passover feast and thus made his meal a new actual Passover. He himself became the Paschal lamb and may have been dying at that hour when the blood of the lambs sacrificed to commemorate the Passover event flowed in the temple.²²

¹⁹ Ratzinger, “O genezie i istocie Kościoła,” 129.

²⁰ Ratzinger, “O genezie i istocie Kościoła,” 129.

²¹ Ratzinger, “O genezie i istocie Kościoła,” 130.

²² Ratzinger, “O genezie i istocie Kościoła,” 131.

The Jewish Passover was a feast emphasizing the birth of the people of Israel (Exod 11–12). Its celebration every year was not only a commemoration of that night in which Israel became a people but became the source of Israel's life and its dignity as God's people. All the scattered people of Israel gather together at the feast of Passover in one temple.²³ As Nils Alstrup Dahl, whom Ratzinger quotes, observes: "In the ancient Israel, worship is a creative event through which the historical and eschatological redemption is made present and Israel is re-created as the people of God."²⁴

Christ sees in Himself the true Paschal Lamb and dies vicariously for all mankind and, at the same time, the Last Supper, which He celebrates with the Apostles is a true Passover feast, for at it He gives His Body to be eaten and its participants drink His Blood. This feast contained in its structure the essential elements of the Passover feasts celebrated annually by God's people of Israel.

As a consequence, just as for years Israel worshipped in the temple to guarantee its unity in the Passover celebration by sacrificing the Paschal lambs, so the Last Supper became the foundation of the unity of God's new people the Church. At the Last Supper the New Covenant was made, as Jesus clearly stated after the consecration of the wine: "This is the Blood of the new and everlasting covenant." The Last Supper is celebrated among the Twelve. In their presence, He described His death as an expiatory sacrifice for all: "This is the Blood of the Covenant, which will be poured out for many" (Mark 14:24). The institution of the Eucharist and the making of the covenant at the Last Supper must be seen in close connection with Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection. The Last Supper is the anticipation of these salvific events, and the Eucharist will make them present after Jesus' death on the cross, which has a sacrificial and expiatory character also after His glorification, or exaltation to the glory of the Father.

The Eucharist established at the Last Supper becomes the centre of the life of the Church and has an eminently ecclesia-forming character. At the Last Supper the Twelve were admitted to participate

²³ Ratzinger, "O genezie i istocie Kościoła," 131.

²⁴ Dahl, *Das Volk Gottes*, 272.

in the New Covenant. Ultimately, the New Covenant was realised on the Cross. For through Christ's sacrifice on the cross, redeemed humanity becomes the new people of God (the Church). On the cross Christ merited the grace of redemption and salvation. From Christ's sacrifice of the cross the word of God and the holy sacraments derive the saving power. Through the cross of Christ and the application of the effects of his Sacrifice, especially in the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist, the Christian is endowed with a new ontic quality. The Last Supper is the anticipation of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, and this that constitutes the specific foundation – as Ratzinger notes – of “a particular event that is only proper to it, that distinguishes [the Church] completely from all other religious communities and unites its members to their Lord and to each other, making them a new community.”²⁵

It gathers into one the members of the Church who live with one another in internal unity through the Eucharist and, through its consumption, grow as the Body of Christ, unite with God and become united with one another in the likeness of the mystical unity that takes place between the members in the body. Wherever they are, by partaking of the Eucharist they are united into one body. By eating the one Body which is the centre of every Feast of the Lord, Christians of all places and times become the Church. “The transfigured body of Jesus constitutes the place of God's presence among men and the place of new worship.”²⁶ Jesus established the Church around the Eucharist. This new visible community is the new People of God, which finds the centre of its life in the celebration of the Supper, from which it is born by being constantly nourished by His Body.

As Ratzinger shows, on the basis of the scholarly research of Ludwig Hertling, it is possible to accept the thesis that “the Church understood the concrete shape of her unity more or less in this way: she saw in herself the communion of the Last Supper.”²⁷ In the Last Supper, she found and experienced the creative event by virtue of which she enjoys an imperishable vitality, for she is the source

²⁵ Ratzinger, “O genezie i istocie Kościoła,” 130.

²⁶ Ratzinger, “O genezie i istocie Kościoła,” 132.

²⁷ Ratzinger, “O genezie i istocie Kościoła,” 141.

of life and contributes to the continual birth of God's vital powers in man. She is the real source of the Church's existence, the lasting basis of her ontic being. Thanks to her, people are in communion not only with one another, among themselves but also with Christ; they are the Church in Eucharistic communities.

3. A Deeper Understanding of Liturgical Celebration as a Guarantor of the Church's Vitality

The creed and the believers' participation in sacramental life and prayer guarantees their identity. Faith is not only man's relationship with God, but also a virtue. The way it is lived out is a confirmation of the vitality of the Church. It is not about inventing and therefore fixing its criteria here; these are contained in the teaching of Jesus Christ and precede human reflection. But they can and should be rethought, internally accepted and practised. What constitutes people's faith and what constitutes its dynamics in the Church? Ratzinger recalled: "[...] it was already Paul, who by calling the Church 'the body' ('I'), formulated the idea of the Church as a subject that abides in becoming. [...] From a formless mass of people, the Church becomes a subject through the One whom Paul calls 'Head' – through Christ. This means that as one reality she continues to exist only through Him. She exists as the Church because she remains in relation to Him. [...] She does not have her subjective character out of herself; it is He who gives it to her. [...]. This seemingly speculative answer immediately turns out to be practical when we ask how it becomes so. Well, relationship to Christ means in practice that the Church, both as a whole and each of her members, turns to Him in prayer and prays with Him. It becomes the Church through the liturgy [...]."²⁸ Faith, therefore, is a process taking place in man individually, but co-resonating with the experience of other believers who make up the Church, who mature in its essence through living participation in liturgical celebrations.

Through praying together in the liturgy, the believers rediscover the presence of "the Trinity as the source of the fundamental

²⁸ Ratzinger, *Formalne zasady chrześcijaństwa*, 176.

profession of faith.”²⁹ Through the experience of communion on the plane of faith with the Triune God, they are able to experience the bond with one another through liturgical action. The effectiveness of the celebration of the liturgy as a mystery of God’s presence is achieved through the word. The relationship to God is conditioned by faith, which is born of hearing the Word (cf. Rom 1:17) and is confirmed in the celebration.

The liturgical celebration is an event of the community of the Church, for which the centre can be none other than the Eucharist. In many speeches, Ratzinger explained the essence and brought the mystery of the liturgy closer in various ways. Celebrating the liturgy in the community of the Church should not be a ritual or just a meeting of a group of people. It is a participation in the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. It requires care and respect for its essential beauty. It can be said, explains Ratzinger, “the Church as Church and insofar as it is Church, is the ‘Body of Christ’ (that is, the very participation of people in the communion between man and God, which is the Incarnation of the Word). If we understand this, the inseparability of the Church and the Eucharist, of sacramental communion and communal communion, also becomes obvious.”³⁰

Ratzinger thinks that believers need a new liturgical awareness, so that they do not seek self-fulfilment there and so that they learn again to see in it God’s gift and at the same time the living heritage of the faith of past centuries. The peculiar and arbitrary construction of the liturgy must disappear, because the celebration has a “predetermined” rather than an “arbitrary” character, and an inner sense of the sacred must be awakened. Of course, these tasks cannot be accomplished without undertaking an educational process. However, liturgical education cannot consist in learning and performing external actions, but in being introduced to the essential *actio*, i.e., the transforming work of God. He also calls for the restoration of the practice of celebrating the Eucharist with the face turned to God and not to the celebrant.³¹ He is clearly in favour of restoring

²⁹ Ratzinger, *Formalne zasady chrześcijaństwa*, 176.

³⁰ Ratzinger, “Komunia – wspólnota – misja,” 296.

³¹ Ratzinger, *Duch liturgii*, 74–77.

the pluralism of the liturgy and wishes for a new grassroots liturgical movement that will involve the faithful and allow the people of God to discover the profound meaning of liturgical celebration.

Ardour and zeal in the celebration of the liturgy are essential qualities conducive to maintaining the ontological-sacramental identity of the faithful in the Church. Liturgical celebrations must be defended against abuse. The value of the liturgy lies in the encounter with God “when, however, the liturgy is something that everyone creates on his own, then it does not give us what constitutes its authentic quality: the encounter with a mystery that is not our product but our origin and the source of our life,”³² Ratzinger stresses. “The Eucharist proves to be the heart of ecclesial life.”³³ Aware of the danger of the cyclical implementation of the post-conciliar renewal of the liturgy, Ratzinger did not hide his dissatisfaction with its inadequacy. He wrote: “If the formulas of liturgical celebration are simplified and made more accessible, it should be done so in such a way as to protect at the same time the mystery of God’s action in the Church, that is, in such a way that the essence of the liturgy and its ecclesial character – inviolable both to the priest and to the community – are not compromised. Therefore, the rationalistic cheapening of the liturgy, divisive discussions, pastoral infantilism degrading the Catholic liturgy to the rank of a social gathering, to the level of a comic strip, should be resolutely opposed. Even the reforms that have already been introduced should be reviewed from this point of view, especially with regard to the ritual.”³⁴

The Eucharist, lived well and consciously, contributes to the building up and consolidation of the ontological identity of believers and directs the transformation of one’s own life. It opens, in mystical experience, to a deeper communion with Christ and fosters spiritual union in Christ with all who participate.

The Church is a peregrinating people; she must have a goal towards which she is moving. This goal is permanent, and it is Jesus Christ, towards whom believers make their pilgrimage through temporality

³² Ratzinger, *Moje życie*, 133.

³³ Ratzinger, “Komunia – wspólnota – misja,” 286.

³⁴ Ratzinger, *Raport o stanie wiary*, 108.

towards eternity. Only such a goal gives meaning to the never ceasing liturgy linking the pilgrim Church to the Church of the saved. Eternity is the fullness of life.

4. Complementarity/Unity as a Paradigm of the Church–Eucharist Relationship

Christ in the Church is the foundation and ultimate goal of the mystical unity of believers with God and among themselves. With Christ the Church is born, in Him she is united and strengthened, and towards Him she proceeds. Ratzinger wrote: “There is only one Christ. Wherever the Eucharist is celebrated, He is all present. Therefore, if the Eucharist is celebrated even in the humblest country church, the whole mystery of the Church, her living centre, the Lord, is present there.”³⁵

In the post-synodal exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis* Ratzinger promoted mystical unity in the Church through the Eucharist, writing: “The Eucharist is thus constitutive of the Church’s being and activity. This is why Christian antiquity used the same words, *Corpus Christi*, to designate Christ’s body born of the Virgin Mary, his eucharistic body and his ecclesial body. This clear datum of the tradition helps us to appreciate the inseparability of Christ and the Church. The Lord Jesus, by offering himself in sacrifice for us, in his gift effectively pointed to the mystery of the Church. It is significant that the Second Eucharistic Prayer, invoking the Paraclete, formulates its prayer for the unity of the Church as follows: «may all of us who share in the body and blood of Christ be brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit». These words help us to see clearly how the *res* of the sacrament of the Eucharist is the unity of the faithful within ecclesial communion. The Eucharist is thus found at the root of the Church as a mystery of communion” (*SCar* 15).

The unity of the Church is based on supernatural internal bonds and at the same time realised in external visible forms. It is a fact and at the same time a task. The Church is one, just as the Eucharist is one. “The Eucharist appears above all as the building up of the unity

³⁵ Ratzinger, “Eucharystia – centrum Kościoła,” 306.

of the community and of the Church.”³⁶ Her unity, however, is constantly, as it were, gained and strengthened in the daily life of her members. Christ’s Church is one until the end of the world and the only one on the whole earth. The Eucharist celebrated in the Church is also one as the sacrifice of Christ. It embraces the totality of time and space. There is and can be no other salvific economy, there is and can be no other people of God than the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, and there is and can be no other sacrifice of Christ than the true, saving sacrifice on the Cross made sacramentally present in the Eucharist. For there is one Christ, one covenant between God and men, one goal to which all men are called.

This unity touches the temporal order and the peregrinating Church, as well as the heavenly order and the Church of the saved. Ratzinger emphasises: “the reflection of this unity is the *communio sanctorum*, which includes two aspects: the *communio sancta*, that is, the communion of sacred signs, of sacred realities possessed by the Church (among which the Eucharist comes first) [...], on the other hand it is the *communio sancti*, that is, the personal communication of the sanctified by Christ [...].”³⁷

Personal communication in Christ makes “every Eucharistic celebration have the structure of *communicantes* – communion not only with the Lord, but also with creation and with people of all places and all times. [...] The Eucharistic celebration is not only an encounter between heaven and earth, but also an encounter between the Church past and present, an encounter between the Church here and the Church there. It presupposes a visible entrance into this visible and named unity. The names of pope and bishop indicate that we celebrate one truly single Eucharist of Jesus Christ, a Eucharist that we can only receive in one Church.”³⁸

Among the factors of ecclesial unity, faith, worship and supremacy are usually mentioned. The ecclesial community recognises itself by professing the same faith, worshipping God in the same essential way and recognising over itself the single authority of the Bishop

³⁶ Ratzinger, “Wspólnota z Eucharystii,” 513.

³⁷ Ratzinger, “Kościół jako świątynia Ducha Świętego,” 313.

³⁸ Ratzinger, “Eucharystia – centrum Kościoła,” 306.

of Rome as successor of St Peter. The Eucharistic community is obliged to maintain a close bond both with other communities and with its own bishop, as well as with the Pope. The Church founded by Christ is a complex reality. As well as an invisible structure, it has a visible structure, a consequence of the fact that the Church is a community established as a visible organism. The ministry of the Bishop of Rome as the successor of Christ is a ministry of unity. Every bishop is the guardian of unity in the diocese. As the guardian of unity, he is to guard it against various errors and divisions that harm the whole. The service of unity is the primary responsibility of the bishop, encompassing clergy and laity alike, offices, the ministry of preaching and worship. In the service of unity, the bishop may act as a father, teacher, shepherd and judge, always bearing in mind that in all aspects of his office, he must be a servant and his ministry must be characterised by love. In daily life, the unity of the Church is nourished by love. Without it, faith, worship and authority would be merely external or even soulless bonds. Love itself, on the other hand, without faith, which orders it, without established forms of worship and universally accepted rules of authority, would have no effective unifying power in itself. It must be an evangelical and ecclesiastical love at the same time.

Ratzinger found the principle of this love in the spirit of Christian fraternity, which is why he warned against an excessively juridical reference to the Church and encouraged a combination of law and love and participation in the Eucharist with the right balance of order, norms and spiritual commitment. Fraternal love stems from a lively awareness of God's fatherhood and from being in a relationship of sonship with the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who has become our brother. "In Jesus Christ, God not only turned to men, but definitively and radically opened himself to them. For in Him, God became man, and as man He ultimately came out of his being completely other and entered into the community of dialogue of all men. The man-Jesus remains in this community that unites all human beings as beings of the same rank. Every human being can turn to Jesus, and through him he turns to God."³⁹ A proper understanding of this relationship

³⁹ Ratzinger, *Chrześcijańskie braterstwo*, 53.

is important for concretising the idea of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood in Christ. This relationship resounds in the cultic activity of the Church, which is intrinsically a fraternity. Ratzinger wrote: “[...] Fulfilled in the celebration of worship, the Church is intrinsically a fraternal community, she compels us to concretely celebrate the Eucharist in responsive dialogue as fraternal worship, without opposing a solitary hierarch to a crowd of the faithful who, in turn, immersed in their prayer books, fail to see one another. The Eucharist must once again become a sacrament of fraternity, for only in this way can it build community.”⁴⁰

The Eucharist is never the property of just one community. It is the Eucharist that creates the community and gives it a new and profound dimension. In this way, the local community becomes an image of the one, holy universal and apostolic Church. The Eucharist is a mystery of the community and should be celebrated in the community because the Eucharistic Sacrifice is offered on behalf of the people and for the people. The Mass is valid even when celebrated by the priest alone, without the people, because he does not cease to be the Church’s representative before God. Reflecting on the Church-Eucharist relationship leads even further. In the early days, in the early Church, “the Eucharist included, in addition to the worship feast, a real meal.”⁴¹ Ratzinger states: “under present conditions this form should not be renewed [...] but if the fraternity in the parishes is, as it were, separated into individual associations or organisations, it is necessary to introduce general meetings which make it clear that the whole parish belongs to the unity. Individual organisations can exist insofar as the ministerial subordination to the fraternity of the whole ecclesial community is realised in them [...]. Parishes, according to the words of St John (2 John 13), should learn to see themselves as children of a common mother who, in a community of faith and love, form the great unity of the Mother Church, the Body of the Lord.”⁴² Members of the Church strengthen their identity “only by participating in the Eucharistic community of worship through

⁴⁰ Ratzinger, *Chrześcijańskie braterstwo*, 72–73.

⁴¹ Ratzinger, *Chrześcijańskie braterstwo*, 73.

⁴² Ratzinger, *Chrześcijańskie braterstwo*, 74.

which one becomes a member of the Christian fraternity.⁴³ This state is achieved most fully in the Eucharist, which unites people to Christ and people to one another.

The celebration of the liturgy is not the action of a particular group, a particular environment or a particular local Church. The drawing of humanity closer to Christ is bound to Christ's drawing closer to people. Christ wants to unite humanity and bring about one Church, one divine assembly of all people. Thus, the horizontal and vertical dimensions, the unity of God and the unity of humanity, the community of all worshippers in Spirit and truth, are closely related. This means that the liturgy owes its greatness to what it is and not to what people strive for. The participation of believers in the Eucharist is certainly necessary, but as a means to join humbly in the spirit of the liturgy and to serve the One who is the true subject of the liturgy: Jesus Christ. He comes in body and soul, in flesh and blood. In Deity and Humanity, to unite us to Himself, to make us one body. Hence, without experiencing His presence in our midst, there can be no true union in the liturgy.

The unity of ecclesial communion is concretely manifested in the Christian communities and is renewed at the celebration of the Eucharist, which unites them and differentiates them in the particular Churches, 'in quibus et ex quibus una et unica Ecclesia catholica existit'. The fact that the one Eucharist is celebrated in each Diocese around its own Bishop helps us to see how those particular Churches subsist *in* and *ex Ecclesia*. Indeed, «the oneness and indivisibility of the eucharistic body of the Lord implies the oneness of his mystical body, which is the one and indivisible Church. From the eucharistic centre arises the necessary openness of every celebrating community, of every particular Church. By allowing itself to be drawn into the open arms of the Lord, it achieves insertion into his one and undivided body». Consequently, in the celebration of the Eucharist, the individual members of the faithful find themselves in *their* Church, that is, in the Church of Christ. From this eucharistic perspective,

⁴³ Ratzinger, *Chrześcijańskie braterstwo*, 77.

adequately understood, ecclesial communion is seen to be catholic by its very nature (*SCar* 15).

The truth of the unity of the Church excludes the existence of other true churches side by side or in temporal succession. The true Church is one and at the same time, from its beginning, open to all those seeking salvation, to different traditions and cultures. This is already manifested in the Gospels, each of which contains the same message of Christ, delivered in four ways. The pluralism of the Church showed itself emphatically at the so-called Jerusalem Council, when the Church officially switched from Jews to Greeks, and no less clearly at the Second Vatican Council.

Even though the Church by its nature is one, she has unfortunately not escaped divisions throughout history. Currently, Christianity is divided into three major denominations: Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant. In the latter, there are, moreover, many communities independent of each other. The divisions, of course, do not invalidate the truth of the unity of the Church. “The causal cause of unity is the *mysterium sacramentorum*, especially the Eucharist.”⁴⁴

Ratzinger, referring to the Eucharist as the only sacrifice made in the Church, although in different denominations, wrote: “An emphasis on this eucharistic basis of ecclesial communion can also contribute greatly to the ecumenical dialogue with the Churches and Ecclesial Communities which are not in full communion with the See of Peter. The Eucharist objectively creates a powerful bond of unity between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches, which have preserved the authentic and integral nature of the eucharistic mystery. At the same time, emphasis on the ecclesial character of the Eucharist can become an important element of the dialogue with the Communities of the Reformed tradition” (*SCar* 15).

Conclusion

According to Joseph Ratzinger, the Church is a living assembly of those called in Christ, a community of believers who, through

⁴⁴ Ratzinger, “Lud i dom Boży,” 264.

baptism, constitute his Body, uniting themselves with him in the Eucharist to strengthen their ontological, mystical identity.

A particular way in which the believers build up an ontological identity takes place in the Eucharist, in which, according to Ratzinger's message, Jesus Christ is present in a real and sacramental way, under the consecrated forms of bread and wine, He truly lives among his people. It is for this reason that the Church can be said to live the Eucharist, for in it Christ is present, and the faithful, by receiving Him in communion, build a mystical identity, experiencing a personal union with Him. The Holy Spirit gives the Church sacramental vitality and sanctifies the faithful. The Eucharist lives in the Church, which is the mystical Body of Christ. The real presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit is the ontic principle of the identity of believers, who form the living community of the Church through the Eucharist. The Church celebrates the Eucharist, and the Eucharist forms the Church.

Ratzinger sees the source of the ontological identity of believers in the Eucharist, for since the Last Supper the Church, that is, the community of believers, is built up and constituted through the Eucharist. The Last Supper celebrated by Christ among the Apostles became the anticipation of the salvific events and the foundation of the Church and the Eucharist. The Eucharist commemorates and perpetuates the mystery of salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ on the Cross. The celebration of the Eucharist is the realisation of Christ's Paschal Mystery. The community of believers, by participating in the Eucharist, can continually grow and expand, for by participating in the salvific event of Jesus Christ, it sees for itself the only possibility of not losing the dignity of a believer and retaining the certainty of hope for eternal life. Since the Last Supper, thanks to the Eucharist, Christ has been constantly present in the community of disciples, He creates it, forms it, gives it growth and directs it towards the goal of personal union with Him until eternity.

In the Eucharist, a living relationship occurs between celebrating Christ's presence in a sacramental way and experiencing His mystical closeness projecting onto the identity of the believer. Conscious celebration is the guarantee of the vitality of the individual believer and of the community of the Church. The Eucharist gives man the opportunity to grow in his spiritual dimension, it supports him

in achieving a mystical union with Christ Himself. This mystical relationality on the level of the Eucharist – the community of the Church leads to the establishment of a mystical bond. “The deepest mystery of the communion of God and man is accessible in the Sacrament of the Body of the Risen Christ; this mystery demands our body and is also realised in the Body. The Church, which arises from the Body of Christ, must for her part also be a Body, and one only, just as Jesus Christ is one, and His presence is in turn reflected in the unity and continuity of the one apostolic Church.”⁴⁵

The Eucharist is the sacrament of Christian fraternity. Participation in the Eucharist makes communicants one through their relationship to God the Father in communion with Christ closely bound by love in the Holy Spirit. They form a community of Eucharistic communion and, in the united visible cultic assembly, affirm participation in the invisible essence of the Body of Christ. Jesus Christ unites the faithful in the Church through the Eucharist with a knot of faith and love.

Kościół żyje Eucharystią, Eucharystia żyje w Kościele. Ontologiczna tożsamość wierzących

Abstrakt: Przedmiotem badania w niniejszym artykule jest wyszczególnienie racji, którymi posłużył się Joseph Ratzinger do uzasadnienia binarnej ontologicznej zależności pomiędzy Kościołem a Eucharystią, rzutującej na tożsamość wierzących. Przy pomocy metody analityczno-dedukcyjnej artykuł wykazuje, że Eucharystia nie jest tylko przyczyną sprawczą dla istnienia Kościoła i trwania wierzących w Chrystusie, ale stanowi o jego istocie i jest gwarantem ontologicznej tożsamości wierzących, odzwierciedlającej ich mistyczne zjednoczenie z Chrystusem i rzutującej na vitalność Kościoła. W oparciu o pisma teologiczne Ratzingera artykuł udowodnia, że znalazł on uzasadnienie komplementarności tej relacji w wymiarze chrystologiczno-pneumatologicznym istoty Kościoła i Eucharystii, wyrażonym w pojęciach: Lud Boży, Mistyczne Ciało Chrystusa i Wspólnota. Wyszedł z wydarzenia Ostatniej Wieczerzy jako fundamentu wzajemnej zależności Kościoła i Eucharystii. Podkreślił potrzebę zrozumienia celebracji liturgicznej dla uzasadnienia żywotności Kościoła. W oparciu o jedną wiarę, kult, zwierzchnictwo i braterstwo dowiódł chrystologicznej/ontycznej zasady łączącej Kościół i Eucharystię.

Słowa kluczowe: Joseph Ratzinger, Benedykt XVI, Kościół, Eucharystia, Lud Boży, Mistyczne Ciało, Wspólnota

⁴⁵ Ratzinger, “Komunia – wspólnota – misja,” 300.

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