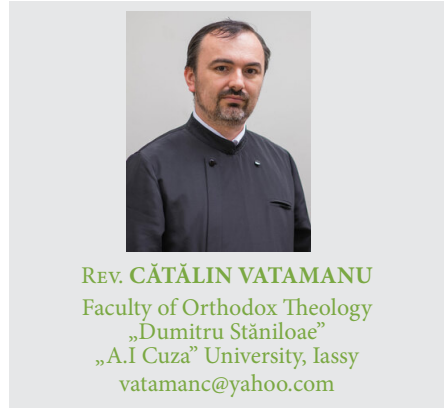


KNOWLEDGE OF GOD – AS AN INNER HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Abstract

From the Old Testament perspective, wisdom is not man's ultimate destination, but it is the way "by which" we can reach God. Travelling through life with wisdom, man finds his true theological destination by dwelling in the mystery of the revealed word. Thus, "Wisdom has built her house" (Prv 9:1), living spiritually in people who discover in the mystery of the spoken word the redemptive work of Christ in the intimacy of humanity that he came to redeem from sin. This interiority, understood as the dwelling of the Word of God in the human heart, in its spiritual abode, is interpreted by Holy Scripture, patristic and philocalic literature, as well as by the liturgical prayer of the Church as an incarnation of the Word in us, which we understand it as a food of doxological words and the communion of Eucharistic Christ, Divine Body and Blood, Liturgy of God with us in the Church of His Glory, which is His ecclesial Body.



Keywords

Knowledge, Wisdom, Education, Eucharist, Old Testament

Knowledge as the experience of the human encounter with the divine

God's wisdom predates the world: "The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens." (Prv 3:19 – ESV); "O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures" (Ps 104:24); "To him who by understanding made the heavens, for his steadfast love endures forever" (Ps 136:5); "The Lord possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth" (Prv 8:22-23). Starting from this theological affirmation of the eternity of

Wisdom, as a good connoisseur of the Hebrew Scriptures, St. John the Apostle developed in the prologue of his Gospel the theological assertion about the Wisdom who has made her dwelling among men and Who hypostasized in our horizontal history through the Incarnation (Jn 1:14) of the Son of God from St. John the Baptist, is the Wisdom of God. Virgin Mary has added to the exodus about the eternity of the Logos another aspect of His identity – that He is the eternal Light of God: “The Word was the true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world” (Jn 1:9).

In the fifth exhortative discourse on the value of wisdom, the author of Proverbs highlights the preaching power of God through the word that comes from Him, as a power that annihilates evil. The power of wisdom in everyday life comes from its eternal existence, from God, by whom all things were created and by whom all things are held in divine guardianship. Therefore, the holy author emphasises the divine origin of wisdom, to show that it is from this that man’s trust in the working of heavenly blessings in his own life is nourished. “The Lord” is the source of all blessings, and this truth is emphatically expressed by the syntactical positioning of the divine Name in the first position in Prv 8:22; Ps 26:1-2; Ps 96:1; Ps 98:1-2.9. He is not only the root of all good things, but the very fruit of all good things, like the fruit of the “Tree of Life”, alluded to in Prv 8:19: “My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold, and my yield than choice silver.”

From the Old Testament perspective, wisdom is not man’s ultimate destination, but it is only the way “by which” we can reach God. This is why in some rabbinic commentaries, such as the Jerusalemite Targum, the first word of Scripture, *b’reshith*, is read and interpreted as *b’kokhmah*, “through/into wisdom”, precisely to highlight its intimacy with the deity and the original power that brought everything from non-being to being. St. John clearly states that the beginning of all is the Son of God: “All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made” (Jn 1:3), because he is Wisdom (Lk 11:49). The new creation of the creation of creation is accomplished by the same God, for, says St. Paul to the Colossians, “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him, all things hold together” (Col 1:13-17). He who “established (*yasod*) the world by his

wisdom” (Jer 10,12), “fixes himself” in our historical time, incarnates himself, dwells in it as a man.

This whole theological presentation in sapiential language is about what wisdom is about God, as an attribute of His and a characteristic of His actions, from which the other perspective, of its relation to people, derives. Just as there is an iconomy of creation, there is a divine iconomy of wisdom’s presence in humanity, as divine prerogative and power. Endowed with limited powers – for God gives to one man five talents, to another two, to another one, “to each according to his ability”, says Christ the Lord (Mt 25:15) – people are endowed with the priceless power of wisdom if they desire it and seek to acquire it in life. Interwoven with the power of the word revealed in the holy Scriptures, wisdom, treasured and worn in the sight of man, becomes an ornament: a crown of the mind, earrings of humble obedience, a necklace of the head and a basis for holy thoughts, a bracelet of good works (Prv 1:9). No jewel made by man of the most costly, fine and shining earthly materials can equal the beauty of wisdom, our true wealth.

As a divine gift and as a reward for the efforts to seek it, man receives through wisdom “the fear of the Lord” and “the knowledge of God”: “My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints. Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path; for wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; discretion will watch over you, understanding will guard you, delivering you from the way of evil, from men of perverted speech.” (Prv 2:1-12).

If jewels illuminate and beautify man’s face, wisdom illuminates his secret place, his soul and mind, so that, says the holy author, “evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the Lord understand it completely” (Prv 28:5), and “the wisdom of a prudent man is to understand his way” (Prv 14:8). Moreover, “good understanding is the fruit of grace” (Prv 13:15). Moreover, the Parables are “to know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, 3 to receive instruction in wise dealing, in

righteousness, justice, and equity” (Prv 1:2-3). Hence the author’s repeated exhortation: “Hear, O sons, a father’s instruction, and be attentive, that you may gain insight”, as in Prv 4:1. Wisdom, confirmed by true knowledge and confession, places us in a relationship with God. It is the mark of man’s fidelity to his Creator, the sign of obedience, holy fear and parental obedience.

Wisdom calls for and brings about God’s mercy, it fills the spiritual and material interiors of our lives with goodness. Contemplating the perfection of creation, we believe that “when you open your hand, they are filled with good things” (Ps 104:28). God, “who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s” (Ps 103:5), and this renewal of life is experienced fully, doxologically and eucharistically, in the Liturgy of the Church: “We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house”, says the psalmist (Ps 65:4).

Hunger for God and feeding on words – signs of messianic times

Without physically feeding on any payment for the public exercise of the prophetic act, God’s chosen, and inspired people often speak of the fulfilment of their calling as an act of divine fulfilment, and of the revelation of God as food offered to the whole world for the inner transformation of man. For example, the calls to prophecy of Isaiah, Jeremiah or Jezekiel refer to an act of divine fulfilment in Is 6:7; Jer 1:9; Ezk 3:3. Feeding on God’s word brings blessing to the mouth, understood as the sweetness of honey: “How sweet are your words to my tongue, more than honey in my mouth!” (The Lord’s judgments “sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb” (Ps 19:10).

In Old Testament biblical narratives, famine is often seen as a divine curse and abundant food as a blessing. The acquisition of food is therefore necessary for any community, as a biological sustenance, but also as a primary condition for the perpetuation of religious, cultural and national values. This is why holy people have emphasized the value of nourishment from the word of wisdom that comes from God. If without food one can endure a time of holy fasting, this fasting cannot exist without nourishment and nourishment from the word of God.

Interpreted theologically, history reveals to us mysterious meanings of God’s work with us. What we understand as a time of political persecution, drought and famine are, in reality, a sign of the withdrawal of divine blessing and the coercive manifestation of “the rod of men and the stripes of the sons of men” because of disobedience (2Kgs 7:14), as Isaiah reinforces: “For behold, the Lord God of hosts is taking away from Jerusalem

and from Judah support and supply, all support of bread, and all support of water” (Is 3:1). In a difficult historical context, after a long and intense period of extermination of the YHWH priests, the prophet Amos announces that there will be similar episodes in “those days”, characterised by the absence of the Voice, the pedagogical silence of God: “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord God, in which I will send a famine on the earth, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord” (Am 8:11) (Vatamanu 2014, 40-54). This is the most painful famine and the most bitter thirst, seen as signs preceding the divine judgment, as opposed to the fruitfulness of the earth and the flowing of the grape in the valleys as a blessing after this judgment (Joel 4:18).

In “those days”, “disaster comes upon disaster; rumor follows rumor. They seek a vision from the prophet, while the law perishes from the priest and counsel from the elders” (Ezk 7:26), “the seers shall be disgraced, and the diviners put to shame; they shall all cover their lips, for there is no answer from God” (Mi 3:7). When “we do not see our signs; there is no longer any prophet, and there is none among us who knows how long” (Ps 74:9), in the strongest silence of our unbelief, of idolatry to our passions, there will be a cry of hope to God. The ancients show us that it will be so: in his despair “Saul asked the Lord, but the Lord answered him neither in a dream, nor by Urim, nor by the prophets” (1Sam 28:6), and Jeroboam sent his wife to ask the prophet Ahijah about the health of Abijah his son (1Kg 14:1-3). This alienation of man is presented by Christ the Lord as starvation and lack, as an exit from the self that is prostrated by the father and an entrance into the selfish self of the passions, as in a “far country” (Lk 15:13), where the sinful man “squandered his wealth” and “spent everything” (Lk 15:13-14). There, the prodigal son “wanted to fill his belly with the carob which the pigs ate, but no one gave it to him” (v. 17-19). “But when he came to himself, he said, How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” In the *parable of the unmerciful rich man and poor Lazarus*, the torments of hell are understood as a bitter thirst in the tormenting fire (Lk 16:24).

The rehearing of God’s words in His holy place (Is 2:2-4) restores joy and hope of redemption to all humanity: “Who will believe what we have heard?” asks the prophet rhetorically (Is 53:1). Revelation among the chosen people becomes a beacon for all peoples, who will “flow” there, the holy mountain of the Lord being a spiritual

convergence pole of all peoples who will discover the Teaching/Law: “It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.” (Is 2:2-4, Mi 4:1-2).

In those days, the knowledge of the glory of the Lord will spread over the earth as water covers the bottom of the sea: “They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Is 11:9) and “the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the bosom of the sea” (Heb 2:14). As the whole earth (*adamah*) is filled with the knowledge of God, so man (*adam*) is filled with the Law of the Lord, which thus becomes within him, the mysterious source of his revelatory experiences. The prophet Jeremiah speaks to us of this inner knowledge of God as a distinctive sign of the Messianic age, of Christ’s dwelling in the most intimate midst of our humanity (as the Hebrew text Is 7:14 also states): “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jer 31:31-33).

This interiority understood as the dwelling of the Word of God in the human heart, in its spiritual dwelling place of great mystery, is understood by Holy Scripture, patristic and philocalic literature, as well as by the liturgical prayer of the Church as an incarnation of the Word in us, which we understand as nourishment of doxological words and the co-incarnation of the Eucharistic Word, the divine Body and Blood, the Liturgy of the togetherness of God’s service with us in the Church of His Glory, which is His ecclesial Body.

The liturgical experience of the knowledge of God culminates in the Eucharistic communion of Christ and fellowship with His Ecclesial Body

What we read in Holy Scripture as revealed truth, the Church has always affirmed: creation is the work “very good” (Gen 1:31) of God, it is full of life (Gen 9:2-3) for man’s nourishment, and the “bondage of wickedness” brought about by the disobedience of the forefathers (Rom 8:21) is removed by the Incarnation of the Word (Jn 1:14), so that God may be “all in all” (1 Cor 15:28). The whole of creation is a synthesis of the divine and the human, the sensible and the intelligible, directed towards the revelation of God in the Eschaton.

The first commandment given by God to man, before being a prohibition to eat, is an invitation to feed “from every tree in heaven” (Gen 2:16-17). The power of God’s word is transformed into a blessing to eat, in Gen 1:29, where food is God’s first gift to man: “And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.” In a theological key, the idea reappears in Prv 9:5, where Wisdom calls man to eat of His bread. God’s prophetic invitation: “Come, eat your bread with gladness and drink your wine with a good heart!” (Eccl 9:7), awaits man’s faithful and hopeful response. This sapiential image is interpreted Christologically in the The Catechetical Homily of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople on the Holy and Radiant Day of the All-glorious and Saving Resurrection of Christ our God: “If any is pious and loveth God, let him take delight in this goodly and splendid festival. If any is a dutiful servant, let him enter, rejoicing, into the joy of his Lord. If any hath labored in fasting, let him now receive his payment. If any hath worked from the first hour, let him receive today his just reward. If any hath come after the third hour, let him celebrate, giving thanks. If any hath arrived after the sixth hour, let him not be in doubt, for he will in nowise be penalized. If any fail to come even by the ninth hour, let him approach doubting naught, fearing naught. And if any arriveth even at the very eleventh hour, let him not be daunted by his tardiness, for the Mașter, being generous, will receive the last even as He doth the first. He giveth rest unto the one who cometh at the eleventh hour even as the one who hath labored from the first hour: He is merciful to the latter and He careth for the former; to one He giveth, and on the other He bestoweth freely; He accepteth the labors and welcometh the intention; He honoreth the deed and praiseth the intent. Wherefore, enter ye all into the joy of your Lord. Ye who were first and ye who came afterward, receive your recompense. Rich and poor, dance with each other; ye who have abstained

and ye who were remiss, honor the day. Ye who fasted and ye who neglected to fast, be glad today. The table is laden: take delight therein, all of you. The calf is fattened: let no one depart hungry, let all enjoy the banquet of faith, let all enjoy the riches of goodness.” (*Slujba Învierii* 2000, 45-6) The Mass on Resurrection night is par excellence, a festive Supper of the Risen Christ with all people, regardless of their ascetic needs.

Christ’s Resurrection is the meaning of history. Through it, the manna, the “bread from heaven” sent to the chosen people in the wilderness of Sinai, is no longer the simple bread that man needs for his body, but is truly the word that comes from the mouth of God: “And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (Dt 8:3). The Word-bread places man in a much higher, meta-historical experience of his daily nourishment with the Truth and Life – Christ, the incarnate Son of God.

In addition to the many prophetic texts introducing divine oracles, which refer to “the word of the Lord which was *in the* prophet...”, others present the revelation of God as an inner act of man (Vatamanu 2022: 13-23). This interiority is in the Old Law only foreshadowing and anticipation, since the Incarnation of the Son of God makes it possible for the Word to dwell in people.

Starting from the Jewish understanding of God’s dwelling among Israel (Ex 17:7; 29:45; 33:5; Lv 15:31; Nm 35:34), Pauline theology affirms the communion between man and God as inwardness: “shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6); God sent “the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba! Father!” (Gal 4:6). Other texts refer to a transformation of our lives, as St Paul says: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20) and the renewal of our image through Christ (Gal 4:19). Speaking in another epistle about Christ’s mysterious dwelling in him, St. In another epistle, the Apostle Paul says that this experience opens the way for him to understand his own life as a participation in the resurrection in this life: “Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends

on faith – that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.” (Phil 3:8-14).

The model of the saint is replicated in the liturgical and mystagogical framework of the Church by every human seeker of deification through the work of the grace of the Holy Spirit. The encounters of our social experience are always characterised by our being situated *opposite* one another, in a closeness that we so easily delimit by what differentiates us rather than by what brings us together or unites us: age, sex, cultural and religious identity, social and economic status, etc. In the Church, however, although we come as communal persons, the orientation of our senses is no longer horizontal but vertical towards God. Thus, by entering the Church, we suspend for a holy time our quality of temporary inhabitants of the geographical social space, and we cling to Heaven, we anticipate communion with the Mother of God and with the saints who pray to God. Our heavenly convergence transforms our mundane framework of immediate reality into a divine matrix, a laboratory of salvation. “The liturgy has, conceptually – says Petre Vintilescu – an ecclesiological or community mission. The idea in which it was instituted and established is expressly dominated by the aim of bringing about on the earth of the present age the Kingdom of God, in which all His children are gathered, united in a life of peace and brotherly love, under the breath of the same Spirit of His Christ.” (Vintilescu 1946, 4-5).

However, the theology of our approaches and departures from God has nothing to do with the spatiality and contingency of immediate realities, but with the experience of *being* with God, as a state of human re-finding in the One who is God the Man, Jesus Christ. And continuing the revealed biblical tradition, means the revelation of God in us and our transformation into the human medium of prophetic manifestation. St. Gregory of Nyssa (*On Death*, in PG 46AB) speaks at length about this mystical collaboration of the divine with the human, who, starting from certain concepts and premises of Stoic philosophy, emphasized the relationship between the macrocosm and the microcosm as a unity realised according to the perfect model of the mystery of

the Trinitarian Godhead, and that in this the spiritual nature of man does not lose its qualities, is not destroyed by the power of divine immanence, but is even enhanced by it, towards the deification of the human being through grace. The same Church Father argues that the harmony of “opposites” is not artificial, since matter shares in the power of the Holy Spirit. And this participation of matter in spirit is seen by St. Gregory as an intimate, ontological condition that causes the movement of man’s soul towards God (Telea 2009, 165).

Certainly, the liturgical life of the Church expresses in the spirit of prayer the intimacy of the human with the divine, made possible by the Incarnation of the Son of God, as a life nourished from within by the Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Christ the Lord. Therefore, to exemplify the theological affirmation of the interiority of the Word in us, we will refer in what follows to the prayers of the Eucharistic canon, in the hymnology of which the Fathers of the Church have placed as essential the mystery of nourishing our humble being with that which truly brings power, authority and life: Christ.

The interiority of Christ’s indwelling in our humble humanity is made possible by the Mother of God’s holy willingness to receive the Son of God to be born of her.

The grain of wheat, which sacrifices itself to become more than another grain and grain, in the earth and from the earth, for itself, but, departing from the earth and uniting itself with water and fire becomes bread for the food of men, is the image of the Eucharistic Christ, as we liturgically affirm in Cantic 1 of the *Canon of Preparation for Holy Communion*: “O blessed Bride of God, O good land which produced the unplowed Corn which saves the world, grant that I may be saved by eating it.” (Liturghier 2000, 306).

The virginal womb of the Mother of God, warmed not by any passionate impulse of the flesh, but by the very fire of the Holy Spirit, bakes the seed of divinity with humanity. Like bread in the oven, “Truly, Mother of God, in your womb the divine Bread of Life was baked, keeping your innocent womb unharmed. For this we praise you as our nourisher for ever and ever” (8th Odi) (Liturghier 2000, 311).

Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, the Holy Bread offered by God the Father to humanity through the work of the Holy Spirit, is not revealed in the whirlwind of fire (Ex 3:14; Is 6:4,6; Ezk 1:4,13,27 etc.), but in the warmth tempered for us by the gentleness of the Incarnation of the Virgin, in the steaming bread placed in peace on the table for holy communion. Therefore, we pray: “O all-holy Lady, Altar of the Bread of

Life, which for mercy's sake came down from on high and gave new life to the world, make even me, who am unworthy, worthy now with fear to eat it and live" (3rd Odi) (Liturghier 2000, 307). We wish to partake of this holy supper "with faith and love": "May Thy holy Body be for me the bread of eternal life, O gracious Lord, and may Thy precious Blood..." (Odi 1) (Liturghier 2000, 306).

The invitation to come together is made by the One who offers Himself as food, Eucharistic Sacrifice and Holy Giver: "The Lord is good. O taste and see! For of old He became like us for us, and once offered Himself as a sacrifice to His Father and is perpetually slain, sanctifying communicants" (9th Odi) (Liturghier 2000, 311).

By this peaceful sitting at table we wish that the Eucharistic food set before us, the Bread and Wine, the Body and Blood of Christ, maybe for our deliverance from sins and not for our condemnation: "Thy holy Body be for me the bread of eternal life, O gracious Lord, and may Thy precious Blood be a remedy for my many forms of sickness" (Odi 1) (Liturghier 2000, 306); "As Thou didst foretell, O Christ, let it be to Thy wicked servant. Abide in me as Thou didst promise; for lo, I am eating Thy divine Body and drinking Thy Blood" (Odi 5) (Liturghier 2000, 308); "Disdain me not to receive now, O Christ, the Bread which is Thy Body and Thy divine Blood, and to partake, O Lord, of Thy most pure and dread Mysteries, wretched as I am, and may it not be to me for judgment, but for eternal and immortal life" (6th Odi, Kontakion) (Liturghier 2000, 309).

In this Eucharistic Supper we are all recapitulated, which is why we pray that God's all-merciful goodwill and forgiveness towards those of old may also be towards us, as we confess in the "Second Prayer" of the Eucharistic Canon, of St. John Chrysostom: "O Lord my God, I know that I am not worthy or sufficient that Thou shouldst come under the roof of the house of my soul, for all is desolate and fallen, and Thou hast not with me a place fit to lay Thy head. But as from the highest heaven Thou didst humble Thyself for our sake, so now conform Thyself to my humility. And as Thou didst consent to lie in a cave and in a manger of dumb beasts, so also consent to lie in the manger of my unspiritual soul and to enter my defiled body. And as Thou didst not disdain to enter and dine with sinners in the house of Simon the Leper, so consent also to enter the house of my humble soul which is leprous and sinful. And as Thou didst not reject the woman, who was a harlot and a sinner like me, when she approached and touched Thee, so also be compassionate with me, a sinner, as I approach and touch Thee, and let the live coal of Thy most holy Body and precious Blood be for the sanctification and

enlightenment and strengthening of my humble soul and body, for a relief from the burden of my many sins, for a protection from all diabolical practices, for a restraint and a check on my evil and wicked way of life, for the mortification of passions, for the keeping of Thy commandments, for an increase of Thy divine grace, and for the advancement of Thy Kingdom. For it is not insolently that I draw near to Thee, O Christ my God, but as taking courage from Thy unspeakable goodness, and that I may not by long abstaining from Thy communion become a prey to the spiritual wolf. Therefore, I pray Thee, O Lord, Who alone art holy, sanctify my soul and body, my mind and heart, my emotions and affections, and wholly renew me. Root the fear of Thee in my members, and make Thy sanctification indelible in me. Be also my helper and defender, guide my life in peace, and make me worthy to stand on Thy right hand with Thy Saints: through the prayers and intercessions of Thy immaculate Mother, of Thy ministering Angels, of the immaculate Powers and of all the Saints who have ever been pleasing to Thee. Amen.” (Liturghier 2000, 321-3). Recollected in Christ, we believe and pray to God that “all of us who partake of one bread and one cup may be united to one another through the sharing of the same Holy Spirit” (Liturghier 2000, 234).

This liturgical experience of Eucharistic communion is placed by the Church Fathers of the Church in the foreground of our spiritual life, as the beginning of the new life. In this regard, St. Stephen the Elder says: “Thus man is born again, and for him begins an entirely new life, which cannot continue without food; but we need food that is suited to the nature of life, and this food is the Body and Blood of the Lord, who said, ‘My body is true food, and my blood is true drink’ (Jn 6:55). He who begins his new life should begin with these things, for we must eat them when we take our first steps on the path of new life. It is said that the first food given to the baby influences its later physical development and establishes its later food needs. What should the life of the repentant be like? Let it be a life in Christ Jesus our Lord. What should be his most pressing need? The need for union with Christ. He should hasten, in the first movement of the new life, to taste of the Body and Blood of the Saviour, to lay the foundation of his life and to develop a burning need to be permanently in union with Him through this tasting” (St. Theophan the Recluse 1999, 199). The same Church Father points out that the sweetness of nourishment with Christ then works as a continuous call to communion, understood by man as a continual hunger and thirst for God: “He who partakes of the sweetness of this heavenly Hand will always be hungrier and thirstier to taste again of the Lord’s Supper” (St. Theophan the Recluse 1999, 199). However, St. Theophylact

of Ohrid assures us, “let us know that Christ leaves no one hungry, but wants all to partake of his gifts, especially those who *have been with him three days* (cf. Mk 8:2), that is, those who have been baptised” (St. Theophylact of Ohrid 1998, 218). And wishing to show how important it is to be freed from the bondage of the senses and to experience the spiritual, St. Theophylact exhorts us: “So take the seven loaves, that is, the most spiritual words, for the number seven is a sign of the Spirit – and the Spirit is the One who accomplishes all things – and in this number our life and this age are accomplished. And those who are enlightened eat and are satisfied and remain and are superfluous, for not all the divine meanings can be grasped by all the Christian people. At the first miracle, of the five loaves, twelve baskets were left over, for there were five thousand, that is, they served the five senses, and therefore they could not comprehend many, but with a few they were satisfied, and therefore many were also superfluous. And here are seven baskets and few crumbs, for there were four thousand, that is, they were trained in the four good works, and therefore as strong men they ate much and left little. For only the most spiritual and deepest they could not contain, for this shows the seven baskets” (St. Theophylact of Ohrid 1998, 218).

“Therefore, we eat the most holy food of Holy Communion and drink from the holy chalice, so that we may commune with the very Body and Blood of Christ, which He took upon Himself from the womb of the Virgin. Thus, strictly speaking, we become one with Him who became incarnate and was deified, with Him who died and rose for us – says St. Nicholas Cabasila.” (St. Nicholas Cabasila 2009, 26-7) By receiving the Risen Christ in the Eucharist, man no longer dies to sin, since the Life of Christ is communicated to the one who receives it, as the Saviour entrusts to us: “Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (Jn 6:54). Commenting on these words, St. Cyril of Alexandria says: “But it is a sure sign that the Son is properly and truly the Bread of life: that he has made those who partake of him and are united in a certain way with him, through communion with him, stronger than the bonds of death” (St. Cyril of Alexandria 2000, 396). St. Theophylact points out that precisely “because all had been killed, the Lord raised us up through Himself”, entrusting us with this first metaphor of the bread which, embracing all the grains of wheat in a single kneading of the dough baked by the fire of God, embraces each one of us in this holy and saving work: Christ “is bread, because we believe that the dough of human kneading was baked by the fire of God” (St. Theophylact of Ohrid 2009, 174).

Remaining in the hermeneutics of the same chapter of the Gospel of John, St. Theophylact of Ohrid, comments on the text “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst” (Jn 6:35), shows that hunger and thirst are removed by feeding on the word of God: And the bread of life is the Lord. Not of this ordinary life, but of the life that has been changed and is not cut off by death. And “he that believeth” in this “bread” “shall not hunger”, nor hunger to hear the word of God, nor thirst for thoughtful thirst” (St. Theophylact of Ohrid 2009, 174).

Conclusions

In the Old Testament, knowledge of God is often presented in language specific to the act of feeding, and wisdom is presented to us as the fruit and fruitfulness of man’s faith, righteousness and holiness. The abundance of food is a sign of divine mercy, always in texts of an eschatological nature, as deliverance from death and removal of the curse of human sin and disobedience.

Wisdom, by taking up its abode in the soul of man, transforms man into the medium of revelation, the elect receiving the knowledge of God through holy fear of the divine commandments, laws and judgments. Their observance means “inclining the ear” to wisdom, “inclining” the heart to right thinking, foresight, good contemplation, and “straightening” the voice (Prv 2:1-3). As the wellspring of knowledge and foresight, God gives man wisdom, together with fear and knowledge of the Lord. The author of *the parables* assures us that when “wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; discretion will watch over you, understanding will guard you, delivering you from the way of evil, from men of perverted speech” (Prv 2:10-12).

The placing of the knowledge of God at the centre of our lives, understood as the dwelling of the Word of God in the heart, soul and mind of man, is interpreted by the Church Fathers in a Eucharistic key, as the nourishment of doxological words and the sharing of the divine Word. To this theological expression is added the prayer of the Church, which hymnographically affirms the Incarnation of the Son of God from the Blessed Virgin Mary as the foundation of the incarnation of the Word in us, which makes possible our humble communion with the Eucharistic Word, the Body and Blood of Christ, the theophanic celebration of the unity and discovery of the knowledge of God in the ecclesial body of Christ – the Church.

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