

Book Review: Perspectives of the Eucharistic Change

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Dr. Jomon Mularikkal CMI has recently brought out a new Book: “Perspectives of the Eucharistic Change.” It is a systematic study based on the *Wandlung* theology of Cardinal Kurt Koch with special reference to Jean-Luc Marion. This unique book boldly takes us to the most authentic horizons of Eucharistic theology by disclosing in front of us diverse perspectives of the Eucharistic change and persuades us to have a deep impact on the Sacrament of Eucharist. 2000 years and more, the Eucharistic celebration gave strength to the Catholic communities all over the world to relish the vibrant and living presence of the risen Lord Jesus Christ and facilitated to be united with each other, one in mind and one in heart to worship the heavenly Father and to be sent in the mission towards the ends of the world as the living witnesses of self-sacrifice and Good News for the glory of God and the prosperity and blessing of the whole human race. The greatest mystery and miracle was God’s becoming Man and further grander is the mystery enshrined in the process of this God transforming the bread into his own Body and the wine, into his precious Blood. The disciples and followers are nourished both physically and spiritually by this great Sacrament of love. It led to the redemption and liberation of themselves and the world. The true Calvary sacrifice began at the Last Supper and through the ritual commemoration of Jesus’ Last Supper with his disciples; Jesus continues his same redeeming sacrifice in the hearts of his followers and upon the altars of the churches in the world. The ascended Lord becomes intimately available in the Eucharistic presence as an inestimable gift and as an indwelling presence that

invites the faithful, to rediscover something incomprehensible and to make their lives more dignified and transformed. At the beginning of this book, Dr. Jomon gives a soul-touching poem on Eucharist (p.v). Let me quote four lines out of his 32 lines:

In the tininess of this Bread, you hide,
A priceless Treasure for the human race.
For this Divine Sacrament, You paid,
With Your life, Oh! Invisible Grace

The author writes that this work is a result of his rational pilgrimage with the ‘eyes of faith’ to explore the perspective of the Eucharistic change within the experience of the living faith of the Church (p.vii). This book is the result of Fr. Jomon’s doctoral thesis which he defended at *Philosophisch-Theologische Hochschule, Vallendar*, Germany. It was directed by Prof. Dr. George Augustin SAC, the Chair of Fundamental Theology and Dogmatic and the Director of *Kardinal Walter Institut Vallendar*. He succinctly describes the metabolic realism of St. Ambrose of Milan and the Symbolism and sacramental realism of St. Augustine of Hippo for a vital grasp of Eucharistic change (pp.14-21). The author outstandingly brings the concept of Transubstantiation from the High Scholasticism to the Reformation and the Council of Trent (pp.35-65). Thus the perspectives of St. Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli, and John Calvin are radiantly expounded in this book (pp.36-60). So too, the Pre and Post Vatican Council’s perspectives are presented by corroborating the writings of theologians-Edward Schillebeeckx, Piet Schoonenberg, Paul Tillich, and Karl Rahner (pp.66-76). Accordingly, there emerged the conviction that the Eucharist is not only a sign that points out the paschal mystery, but it is also a profound encounter with the ineffable love of the Incarnational reality. Dr. Jomon observes that the phenomenological concept of “*givenness*” would help us understand the Eucharistic change with a better perspective (p.84).

In this book, the author deals in detail a new way of interpreting the Eucharistic presence by a profound study on Jean-Luc Marion. According to Marion, a postmodern theologian, the Eucharistic presence must be understood phenomenologically rather than metaphysically (p.86). According to Marion love must be experienced rather than known and the Eucharist must be seen as the supreme gift of love experienced. God always seeks to make Godself was known in the world of human experience (p.86). The author focussing on Marion

describes that Western philosophy has imposed on God's metaphysical names, such as the First Cause and the Ground of all being, and this approach distracts us from the biblical revelation on God as someone who 'gives' (p.98). Hence, we need to comprehend God in terms of 'giving' rather than 'being' (p.99). Marion believes that God gives in abundance and over-brimming excess of His self-disclosure (p.116). Moreover, every giving is in a sense a handing over of oneself to the one who receives (p.118). God gives the divine presence sacramentally but maintains the divine identity apart from the gift (p.118). We find that Christ's love loves without condition, simply because it loves and that too for no reason (p.119). This book broadens our wisdom by elucidating the concept of *givenness* that is present in the Eucharist and invites us to become a living *givenness* in our world. What we need is to move away from metaphysical concepts while interpreting theological doctrines. The 'Marion' vision helps us to view the *givenness* and interpret the theology of Eucharistic presence in a fresh and significant category.

Dr. Jomon introduces also a mystagogical analysis of Eucharist explicated by Kurt Cardinal Koch, a contemporary theologian who is the president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Koch believes that our faith in the Eucharistic presence of Jesus Christ directly leads us to the worthy celebration of this mystery and further to everyday Christian living (p.141). Koch wants that the Church may rediscover the patristic principle of Local Church, which is based on Eucharistic ecclesiology. The Church is most clearly visible in the Eucharistic assembly and it builds up everyone. In essence, the Church is the Eucharistic communion of believers (p.147-48). The Church understands itself as a liturgical community at II Vatican Council. Hence the worship of God is the central aspect of the Church. This book vividly proves that the Eucharistic celebration is at the center of the Church and that signifies Church's very nature. In short, the Church is the answer to God's salvific action and it is the sacrament of the salvation of whole humanity. In this context, Kurt Koch brings forward the ecumenical implications and stresses that the visible unity of the churches is the precise goal of ecumenism (p.153). Kurt observes that the Eucharist has to be a celebration of thanksgiving in which we thank and celebrate our eternal life in Christ Jesus (p.166). The root cause of many of our problems in postmodern times is our thanklessness. Due to a lack of gratefulness people do not appreciate and participate in the Divine Liturgy. This could be also applied to the family life with parents

and children, between life partners and when thanksgiving is being taken for granted and miss it in life, the lack of gratefulness turns out to be the root cause for much mental illness and broken relationships. Koch sincerely shares that our inability to be thankful becomes the root cause to avoid prayer and worship. A deep study of Kurt Koch has been presented in the pages of this book which glaringly exposes the real traumatic cause of a dying Christian spirit because of thanklessness and as the way out, to make a true Christian renewal, gratefulness is recommended (pp.166-67). The modern man has an impression that the hopes and fears of his own life are not present in the celebration of the Eucharistic mysteries. Hence an urgent requirement for the Church must be to explore new approaches that make Eucharist the center of man's life. Dr. Jomon's research is a valid tool for helping our current situations by making the Eucharist the center of the Church and the heart of Christian life.

The word *Wandlung* is a dominant expression in this book which denotes the *change* that is inherent everywhere and in every living being. For Koch the whole Eucharist is a *Wandlung* (p.205). It goes deeply into the whole celebration of the Eucharist. We find in Eucharist the transformation of death to love; transformation of gifts of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ; transformation of the Church into the Body of Christ; final transformation of creation into the divine; transformation of the Christian life; and transformation of the recipient. Loving and life-giving changes are considered here as the vertical dimensions of Koch's *Wandlung* theology. For Koch, worship is our first service to God and here we pass on what we have received from God. Then the worship becomes our service of gratitude to God (p.261). This vertical aspect of the Eucharist binds us with God. God's love is the very foundation of the change that is being created in the Eucharist. The uniqueness of the change is that Jesus transformed the violence into life and the curse into blessing at the cross. This mystery is contemplated with Christ in the Eucharist by every believer through the celebration of the Eucharist. Focussing on the horizontal dimension of the *Wandlung*, Koch speaks of ecclesial change, cosmic-eschatological change, and transformation in Christian living. According to Kurt the fruits of horizontal changes are: ecumenical fraternity, eco-friendly lifestyles and transformed human life (p.263). These are counted as the expectations of God from Christian disciples by the participation in the Eucharistic celebration. Accordingly, the Church is the Eucharist in its deepest nature.

Dr. Jomon says that the main concern of a pastor and his parishioners must be the celebration of the Eucharist; because it is the centre of all pastoral and community life. All activities resulting from the Eucharist (pp.328-29). According to Pope Francis, “the Church evangelizes and is herself evangelized through the beauty of the liturgy, which is both a celebration of the task of evangelization and the source of her renewed self-giving” (*EvangeliiGaudium* #24). The horizontal and vertical dimensions of *Wandlung* are not meant for competing with each other but complementing each other. Eucharists must purify and transform us to become the living witnesses of risen Christ and make our human presence into a divine one, inspired and nourished by the celebration of the Eucharist. As Dr. Jomon presents in his book the Eucharistic meal must remind us of our responsibility to share the food with the hungry here in the world and experience the foretaste of the eternal banquet (p.332). In our celebrations of the Eucharist, we have to keep the balance between the earthly and heavenly invitations to make the Church a living Eucharist.

The book of Dr. Jomon is distinctive with its contents on Eucharistic theology and it helps us interpret the supreme role of the Eucharist well-matched to today’s postmodern contexts. Surely, it is not an easy reading book but we need to put our whole attention and devotion to understand the depth of the matters discussed in it. This book is a response to a global revival of the Christian faith and for the understanding of the deep meaning of our Eucharistic mission. The research results of Fr. Jomon bring before us the invaluable history of the Church’s understanding of the Eucharistic change right from the beginning to the postmodern days and enable every Christian to transform oneself as a living gift by carrying the feast of love in one’s daily life. I strongly recommend this amazing book for all those who want to comprehend the deep meaning of the Eucharist and lead a life centered on the Eucharist. This book would be the right choice for the theologians and philosophers who would enjoy the results of modern research sharing insights from the interdisciplinary scholarship. Particularly this serious book will clarify many questions on Eucharistic mysteries.