

ASIAN
HORIZONS
Vol. 13, No. 4, December 2019
Pages: 671-678

New Scholars

PERSPECTIVES OF THE EUCHARISTIC CHANGE

A Systematic Study Based on the *Wandlung* Theology of Cardinal Kurt Koch with Special Reference to Jean-Luc Marion

Jomon Mularikkal Rappai ♦

University/Institution: Philosophisch-Theologische Hochschule
Vallendar (PTHV), Germany

Director/Promoter: Prof. Dr George Augustin, SAC

Year: 2019

This dissertation is a humble attempt to understand the eucharistic transformation in its real sense. For, the word 'transubstantiation' is used to explain the eucharistic transformation that is difficult for a simple believer to comprehend, because of its complexity, its relation to metaphysics, dogmatically defined nature, and an inappropriate interpretation in the postmodern period. As history and philosophy are sources in theological

♦ **Jomon Mularikkal Rappai** is a Catholic Priest from India, belonging to the religious congregation Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI). He has secured a Licentiate Degree in Systematic Theology from Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore. Recently he completed his Doctorate in Theology (*Doktor der Theologie*) at the faculty of Theology in the Philosophisch-Theologische Hochschule Vallendar (PTHV), Vallendar, Germany. His doctoral dissertation is a study of the perspectives of eucharistic transformation based on an inter-disciplinary dialogue. Email: jomonmularickal@gmail.com

research, I have outlined my work in the format of “eye of history, eye of philosophy and a brain of faith.”

1. Eye of History – Symbolism and Reality

The doctrine of transubstantiation has a long history before and after the council of Trent. The historical development of the doctrine of eucharistic change, which supports the doctrine of real presence, has gone through different accents during the course of time. In the Patristic age, especially the teachings of Augustine and Ambrose paved the way for different streams of thinking and the emphasis is given to “*res et signum*.” The Early Middle Ages witnessed two eucharistic controversies, but their intention was positive, i.e., to communicate the presence in its original sense in between “realism” and “symbolism.” Controversies paved the way for a definitive theory for the eucharistic change, i.e., transubstantiation. The main proponent of this theory, Thomas Aquinas, tried to meticulously articulate it with the help of Aristotelian metaphysics. The Council of Trent made his interpretation the official teaching of the Catholic Church against the arguments of protestant reformers. Controversies, different viewpoints and interpretations lead to substitute it with new words like “transignification” and “transfinalisation” for the time-hallowed term, “transubstantiation.” Even though the Eucharist remains central to the core of Christianity, theologians of twentieth century recognise that the majority of Catholics attend the eucharistic celebrations as passive spectators who have a little understanding of the true meaning behind the Eucharist. In many ways, the Eucharist had lost its transforming meaning. As a result, twentieth century liturgical movements in general and liturgical reform of Vatican II in particular made an attempt to a certain extent to revitalise the understanding of eucharistic transformation. Kurt Koch, a Swiss Cardinal and the one who is in forefront of ecumenical dialogue, takes a good effort to understand the eucharistic change in its real sense. The modern theologians consider metaphysics either as an “idol” or an insufficient starting point to interpret eucharistic mystery. The phenomenological shift in this eucharistic thinking is an attempt to go back to the very core of the mystery. It is sometimes difficult to determine with precision what really belongs to the core and what to the periphery of a divine truth. The concept of gift or givenness proposed by Jean-Luc

Marion, a French phenomenologist will help us to understand the eucharistic presence in another perspective.

2. Eye of Philosophy – Phenomenology of Givenness

According to Jean-Luc Marion, a contemporary phenomenologist and a mystical theologian, phenomenology can be used in theology in order to understand the significance of its content. Marion is known best for his phenomenology of givenness and the discovery of the “saturated” phenomenon. Marion connects the philosophical branch of Phenomenology with theology by the term of saturated phenomenon.

According to Marion, some phenomena give more intuition than is needed to fill a subject’s intention. Such phenomena are “saturated” with intention and exceed any concepts or limiting horizons that a constituting subject could impose upon them. It involves an intuition that exceeds the powers of any finite intentional horizon to condition, control, or anticipate it. It thus appears at its own discretion and by its own power. It appears neither as an object or a being, but he says it appears as an *event*. Marion does not hesitate to identify Revelation – the saturated phenomenon *par excellence* – with the person of Jesus Christ.

Marion holds the notion of givenness with the particularities of phenomenal possibility in his construal of the phenomenon of revelation: the saturated phenomenon that appears on the limited horizons of intentionality, saturating the intentional aim of the human subject with unrelenting intuition. For Marion, not only is Christ the doubly saturating phenomenon, Christ is to be worshipped and adored insofar as his bedazzling divinity calls forth such an absolute response, according to its unreserved giving to the point of abandonment. The Eucharist is the fullest expression of this total self-giving as it extends the sacrificial offering of Christ crucified, as well as the redemptive grace (gift) of his resurrection from the dead, under the most humiliating appearance of food and drink. It would be too reductionistic to limit a description of the Eucharist to the Eucharistic species alone. Without doubt, this is a phenomenon of personal encounter too.

3. The Brain of Faith – Perspectives of Eucharistic Change

In order to get a broader vision on Eucharistic transformation, I would like to introduce the “five-fold eucharistic changes”

proposed by Kurt Cardinal Koch, a Swiss theologian, the present President of Pontifical Council for Christian Unity. He is known for his theological deliberations and his innumerable books and articles regarding all kinds of theological themes especially connected with ecumenism.

According to Kurt Koch, "...the nature of Eucharist can be described as a whole *change*."¹ For him, *transformation* takes place not only in a particular moment, but it goes deeply into the whole celebration of the Eucharist. According to him, the eucharistic transformation which emphasises the vertical and horizontal dimensions, takes place in a fivefold sense.

Fundamental is the *transformation of death in love*. Jesus Christ has transformed death from within through a unique kind of divine and human love. This love is given to us again and again in the celebration of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is not only a memory of Christ's death for us, but of his *transitus from death to life*. This *transitus* of Christ is the prerequisite for his presence in the Eucharist and the incomprehensible transformation of the gifts of bread and wine into his body and blood. *The transformation of the gifts*, however, aims at the conversion of the faithful into the body of Christ (see 1 Cor 10:16f). In the Eucharist we receive the sacramental body of Christ and are thus *transformed into his body*. Finally, we also anticipate in the Eucharist his eschatological Parousia. The Eucharist therefore strengthens to hope for the final *transformation of creation*, where God will be all in all. With the *Ite missa est*, however, the celebration of the Eucharist, which leads us into the presence of God, discharges us in the end consistently into the time of our everyday life. The Eucharist aims at the *transformation of those who receive it and their lives*. Thus, the Apostle Paul calls Christian life a *λογικὴ λατρεία*, a spiritual worship, and exhorts the Christians to offer themselves as a "living holy sacrifice" as a "spiritual sacrifice" that pleases God. This is the true and appropriate worship for you (see Rom 12:1). Life itself wants to be "*Eucharistia*," thanksgiving, and that is: Gift.

4. Synthesis: Gift of Transformations

Jean-Luc Marion says that the Eucharist is a gift "and this one above all, does not require first that one explain it, but indeed that

¹Kurt Koch, *Eucharistie: Herz des christlichen Glaubens*, Fribourg: Paulus Verlag, 2005, 60.

one receive it.”² Starting from a phenomenology of gift, the Eucharist is unfolded as a “gift of a loving and life-giving offering in the liturgy,” as a “gift of presence and communion in the Church” and as a “gift of the horizontal ripples of Christian living.”

4.1. Gift of Sacrifice in the Liturgy

The Second Vatican Council called the memorial of the Paschal Mystery of Christ as the centre of the liturgy (SC, 5-7). In the liturgy, the work of our redemption takes place in a sacramental way (SC, 2). The liturgy of the Son with us humans aims to make our own bodily existence a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1), united with the life-offering of the Son. The life-giving of Jesus on the cross is not a physical gift, but all surpassing gift of unconditional forgiveness. The gift that is given to all in the death of Jesus is the ultimate gift which God gives all in his Son, the sacrifice of life that transformed violence. In this extreme gift God has given all the people who have turned away from him all the love that he could give. The gift given by God, whether in the creation, in the life-giving of Jesus, or in the justification of the sinner, breaks through the exchange economy of the *do ut des*. But when the Eucharist breaks through the economy of exchange, there is no longer a transaction, but only the transformation of the one who faithfully receives the gift of the Eucharist. The only possible answer is the attitude of the thanksgiving, the self-giving of the faithful, and the affirmative Amen. Therefore, the Eucharist can only be appropriately celebrated in the pragmatics of the Eucharist itself, the offering of thanksgiving. The Eucharist is an *oblatio* (offering, sacrifice) in the form of thanksgiving and memory. The Church therefore does not sacrifice the Christ to the Father, but our *oblatio* presupposes God’s gift to us. In our offering God recognises Christ, who has reconciled us with him.

4.2. Gift of Presence in the Church

The presence of Christ among us can only be understood from his bodily resurrection. His new form of the presence is a “believed physical presence in visible absence.”³ It is the presence of a “pure gift” which is not visible, yet no less real than the physical presence. The temporary presence of Jesus among his

²Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being: Hors Texte*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991, 162.

³Jean-Luc Marion, “Verklärte Gegenwart,” in *Credo: Ein theologisches Lesebuch*, ed., Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger and Peter Henrici, 182, Köln: Communio Verlag, 1992.

disciples has condensed with his resurrection and ascension into the gift of a “definitive presence” (*endgültige Gegenwart*),⁴ which is given to us in bread and wine. “Christ is neither present in visible flesh, nor is he absent, whose presence was commemorated in the spirit and memory, as his eucharistic body is presented to us daily.”⁵ If Jesus were still physically present, he could not be present to all people of all times and places in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

The more recent attempts at the presence of Christ in the Eucharist also strive to achieve a more dynamic, personal understanding of the eucharistic presence of Christ, thus freeing the concept of transubstantiation from the entanglement into which it has come through the advent of empirical natural science. The presence of Christ is personal, not material and is experienced in the Church. The grace that is given to us in the sacrament of the Eucharist is Christ himself in his self-giving for us. Christ is not present in the Eucharistic gifts as a natural thing, but “in a personal way and in relation to persons.”⁶ However, without the resurrected Crucified being present in the horizon of being, we could not receive him, since we exist temporally. The gift of the Eucharist cannot be given if it is not present to the one who receives it. In other words, the reception of the body of Christ presupposes our corporeality.

The presence of the eucharistic gift is a different presence than the presence of the surrounding things and elements. It is an eventful and at the same time a giving presence. This giving presence cannot be explained semiologically by another use of bread and wine, i.e., transignificantly or transfinally, by changing the characteristics of the property. For this would bind the giving presence of Christ to the consciousness of the faithful. But the real presence of Christ in the signs (species) of bread and wine does not depend on our imagination. Therefore, a substantiated presence is indispensable. The dialectic of nearness and distance, of presence and absence, which is determinative for our fellowship with the Risen Lord, is not abolished by its substantiated presence in the Eucharist.

4.3. Gift of Horizontal Ripples in the Daily Christian Living

A horizontal ripple effect enhances the real meaning and significance of the eucharistic transformation. Koch’s horizontal

⁴Marion, “Verklärte Gegenwart,” 181, 189.

⁵Marion, “Verklärte Gegenwart,” 188.

⁶Koch, *Eucharistie*, 57: “... auf eine personale Weise und in der Beziehung zu Personen.”

dimension of eucharistic changes (*Wandlungen*), namely, ecclesial, cosmic, eschatological and changes of the Christian living can be considered the ripples in the ocean of the world for its transformation. Without transformation, without resurrection and new life, the Eucharist would be merely a commemoration of the dead.

The Eucharist is the visible promise of the ultimate future with God in his kingdom. There we will see God as he is, and will sing his praise forever. So, we expect with full confidence the coming of our saviour Jesus Christ. From the celebration of the Eucharist, therefore, arises the responsibility to give to the people not only the bread of eternal life, but also the bread of daily survival, and to give the opportunity to those who hunger and thirst for justice and peace to live in dignity. The sacrament of Eucharist is not only the sacrament of gift. From the unique gift which we receive, at the same time, arises a *task* in every human being, even if he is still distorted and humiliated as a man (*Ecce homo*), who has given his life for us, to see the humanity which constitutes his dignity. We should love one's neighbour for his own sake, just as God loved us – kenotically and, as it were, self-forgotten. So, there are moments “in which the thought of God separates us from him.”⁷

The eucharistic transformation also has a cosmic dimension because it connects heaven and earth. In it the gifts of bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ. In the Eucharist the whole world is offered and there takes place a universal transubstantiation, because the words of consecration fall not only upon the sacrificial bread and wine but also upon the totality of joys and sufferings of human endeavour that brings to further progress in the world. In sum, through our discussion on the transformation of Christian living we were searching the possibilities for creating more positive ripples in our communities in the future.

5. Conclusion

If we understand the mystery of the Eucharist in an iconic horizon, then this understanding opens up different perspectives to see the event of the eucharistic presence as the source of the transformation of Christian living and to make the Christian life

⁷Simone Weil, *Das Unglück und die Gottesliebe*, trans. Friedhelm Kemp, München: Kösel Verlag, 1953, 152.

itself a Eucharist. The separation between liturgical transformation of gifts and soteriological transformation of the individual, the community and the world is artificial. A solution is pressing. Our common response depends on what will be possible in the church communities in the future for reconciliation and common Christian life. It should finally be said again: "The change is the key to unity." When our hearts are transformed by the Lord's Eucharistic presence, our lives also change, as Augustine states, "*Muta cor, et mutabitur opus.*"⁸

⁸Augustine, *Sermo Dolbeau*, Sermon 16: 4: "Transform the heart and the work will also change."