

2. *The Confession.* This is the last declaration of the priest at the conclusion of the liturgy. In it, the real presence is described in concrete terms:

This is the life-giving Body which thy only-begotten Son, our Lord,
 Our God and our Savior Jesus Christ, took from our Lady,
 The Queen of us all, the Mother of God, the pure St. Mary.
 He made it one with his divinity,
 Without mingling, without confusion, without alteration
 Truly, I believe that this is in very truth, Amen.

Part III

THE REAL PRESENCE OF THE LORD (IN THE FLESH) IN THE EUCHARIST

Western Questions in the Middle Ages and their Repercussions in the East

How? When? Who?

- *This is my Body . . . This is my blood (Mt 26:28).*
- *As Jesus Christ our Savior, having been made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of his word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh (First Apology of St. Justin 66).*

How are the elements changed into the Body and Blood of our Lord?

When and at what time in the liturgy does the change occur?

Who changes the bread and wine? Does the change occur by the words of Christ recited by the priest or by the action of the Holy Spirit in the epiclesis?

The Orthodox East has not tried to deviate from the biblical and patristic teaching about the Eucharist. All Orthodox Churches followed the Apostolic Tradition of accepting the words of Christ in faith, without philosophical analysis or mental research. A leading contemporary Orthodox theologian writes:

The Orthodox Church believes that after consecration the bread and wine become in very truth the Body and Blood of Christ: they are not mere symbols, but the reality. But while Orthodoxy has always insisted on the *reality* of the change, it has never attempted to explain the manner of the change: the Eucharistic Prayer in the Liturgy simply uses the neutral term *metabolo*, to “turn about,” “change,” or “alter.”²³

Catholic Scholasticism and the Eucharist

On the other hand, Western churches tried to explain what happens to the bread and wine by the use of current scientific and philosophical theories. Probably they were forced to do that by the many heresies which appeared in the Middle Ages that taught that the Eucharist is merely a symbol for the Lord’s Body and Blood. These heresies, however, have left no permanent impact upon ancient belief till the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century. From the 12th and up to the middle of the 20th century, the Roman Catholic Church and the West in general explained Christian dogmas by the use of Scholastic Theology. This was the only system of theology known through all these centuries. Scholastic theology was based upon the philosophy of Aristotle as translated from the Arabic version of his works. These were mixed with the teaching of Moslem scholars; works of Ibn-Rushd and Ibn-Sina became very popular in the West. The scholastics explained the change in the Eucharist as a change in the essence (i.e. the whole substance of the bread and wine are converted to the whole substance of Christ’s Body and Blood), while the accidents (i.e. the appearances of the bread and wine) remain the same. Catholic theologians started these Latin terms in the thirteenth century. They were officially used in the Council of Trent (1545-1563), which the Roman Catholic Church held in order to respond to Protestant questions.

Using the scholastic system, both Catholic and Protestant missionaries spread their respective beliefs to all Orthodox churches. At a time when patristic writings were only in the original languages, the Orthodox had no way of defending their faith against the Protestant missionaries except by using Roman Catholic material. This is how the whole system of Scholasticism entered into Orthodox manuals of theology. Since the 15th century the Eastern Orthodox Church has used the Greek word *metabole* to translate the Latin term *transubstantiation*. The doctrine was given formal approval in 1672 by the Synod of Jerusalem.²⁴ Transubstantiation and the terms used by Aristotle, like “essence” and “accident,” became familiar terms in Orthodox books.²⁵

²³ Bishop Kallistos (Timothy) Ware: *The Orthodox Church*. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1963: 290.

²⁴ F.L. Cross & E.A. Livingstone, *The Oxford dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd edition, 1997: 1637

²⁵ *The Orthodox Church*, *ibid.* 223; Habib Guirgis: *The Seven Sacraments*; Samuel Azer Guirgis: *The Eucharist*, 2nd edition, n p. 223.

Actually the use of the term transubstantiation was not intended to start a new doctrine. It was an attempt by Western theologians to explain what happens in the Eucharist and to answer the old question of the Jews that was renewed by those who started to challenge the ancient belief of the “real presence” in the Sacrament. However, the use of old scientific theories about the structure of matter (essence and accident, etc.), and even the simplistic thought that the change is a material change subject to the observation of the human senses, made the whole doctrine of substantiation incapable of standing against modern scientific discoveries about matter. Instead of essence and accidents we now have atoms, electrons, protons, and all the new discoveries of modern science. This is the problem that has faced Roman Catholic theologians in the twentieth century.

During the last few decades some Roman Catholic theologians have tried to introduce other terms (such as *transignification*) instead of transubstantiation, without reaching any unanimous agreement. Different theologians have understood even this term in different ways. The only way out of this dilemma is to go back to Tradition. This is the conclusion reached by a leading Roman Catholic authority:

The real presence of Jesus is the center of this church teaching. Even a name for this change, *transubstantiation*, though used by the bishops at Trent, was not defined. Consequently teachers should never say: the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on the real presence is transubstantiation. Rather, the defined teaching of the Church is centered exclusively on the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.²⁶

Protestants and the Real Presence

From the early years of the Protestant Reformation, there was no uniform teaching about the Eucharist. Luther accepted that Christ was really present in the Sacrament. He insisted on the literal sense of the words of Christ in the Last Supper, and he declared in 1534, “The papists themselves are obliged to praise me for having defended the doctrine of the literal sense of these words much better than them.” The Confession of Augsburg, the primary Lutheran Confession of Faith, declares that the Lutherans “teach that the Body and Blood of Christ are truly present in the Lord’s Supper and that they are distributed to the communicants.” However, Luther refused the idea of transubstantiation, insisting that the Body and Blood of Christ are present in the Sacrament together with the bread and wine. Later the term ‘consubstantiation’ was used to describe this belief. Other Protestant leaders denied the real presence, ending with a total schism in the movement. Calvin taught that in the Eucharist Jesus bestows his Spirit on the spirit of the believer who partakes of the bread and wine. Gregory Dix comments on Calvin’s

²⁶ K.B. Osborne, *Sacramental Guidelines*. Paulist Press, 1995: 81.

doctrine: "He does not meet the difficulty that what our Lord had said He was giving was not his Spirit but his Body. The Last Supper is not Pentecost." Zwingle, one of the Reformation leaders, denied even that spiritual presence of Christ, saying that in the Eucharist there is but plain bread and wine, a reminder of the salvation achieved long ago on Calvary. Gregory Dix summarizes the Eucharistic teaching of Zwingle: "The Eucharistic action consists in a vivid mental remembering of the passion as the achievement of 'my' redemption in the past."²⁷

When and by Whom Does the Eucharistic Change Happen?

Beside the confusion in the West concerning the change in the elements of the Eucharistic oblation, another question has been raised: When does the change occur? A third question is related: Is the change the work of the Son or the Holy Spirit? In the sixth century, the Roman Catholic Church removed the Prayer of the Descent of the Holy Spirit, the Epiclesis, from her Liturgy; which had been in the Roman Liturgy from the earliest centuries. This issue may look irrelevant now since the Roman Catholic Church has re-inserted the Epiclesis, the prayer for the descent of the Holy Spirit on the elements, a tradition that had been interrupted for more than thirteen centuries. Yet two reasons make such study essential:

- (1) *The need to know the present teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.* This is still ignored at the parish level and in many Orthodox Sunday school curricula.
- (2) The second reason is more important because it is related to the Orthodox faith itself and how far Orthodox churches are following Church Tradition. Contrary to what happened with the doctrine of transubstantiation, in which Orthodox teachers everywhere followed the Roman Catholics, here they preferred not to follow them and kept the Epiclesis. Although they kept the ancient liturgical formula, yet they thought in the same scholastic mind as the Roman Catholics, but in an opposite direction. While the Roman Catholics spoke of 'the Institution Narrative' (the words of Christ) as the moment of consecration, that moment for the Orthodox became the Epiclesis. Evelyn Underhill describes the belief of the early Church: "For the early Church, the whole of this great prayer (*the Eucharistic Liturgy*) was a single act of worship

. . . . There was no attempt to identify the consecration with any one formula or moment; whether the recital of the Words of Institution or the Epiclesis."²⁸

As early as the eighth century St. John of Damascus writes in the East:

²⁷ For more details of the history of the Eucharistic controversy among Protestants see G. Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* 629- 636, op. cit., and Philip Schaff: *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 7, 1910 (reprinted by Eerdmans, 1978): 612- 682.

²⁸ *Worship*, op. cit., 136.

The bread and the wine are made over into the Body and Blood of God. If you inquire into the way in which this happens, let it suffice to you to hear that it is through the Holy Spirit that the Lord took on himself the flesh from the mother of God The bread on the credence table, as also the wine and water, through the epiclesis and coming of the Holy Spirit, are supernaturally changed into the Body of Christ and into his Blood.²⁹

Father Tadros Malaty, an Orthodox theologian, comments on this: “St. John of Damascus says that the consecration is not effected by the Institution Narrative, but only by the Invocation of the Holy Spirit The celebration of the Liturgy cannot be divided into separate parts. We cannot separate the positive action of Christ in the mystery of the Eucharist from the action of the Holy Spirit.”³⁰

The Chalcedonian division that affected the Orthodox east did not prevent the spread of new doctrines, as well as liturgical rites, prayers, feasts and fasts, from one church to the other. Father Youhanna Salama writes in 1909 in his book on the rites and doctrines of the Coptic Orthodox Church, that was probably the earliest book of Coptic Orthodox doctrine ever printed: “The Church believes that the bread and wine change into the Body and Blood of Christ at the moment of the invocation of the Holy Spirit by the priest.”³¹ The Coptic Orthodox Church has not been isolated from both the Eastern and the Western innovations in doctrine.

Ironically, in their teaching on a moment of consecration, both Roman Catholic and Orthodox theologians and liturgical scholars were mistaken and have deviated from the patristic Tradition in two main issues:

- (1) Applying the dimension of time to the Holy Eucharist, which is an eternal Sacrifice.
- (2) Limiting the Eucharistic action to a single hypostasis in the Holy Trinity.

And now it is to the patristic Tradition that we have to turn, where theologians from all churches have now found their common roots.

²⁹ Jrgens WA: *The Faith of our Fathers*, volume three. Liturgical Press, 1979: 339.

³⁰ T. Malaty, *Christ in the Eucharist*. Alexandria (Egypt), 1973: 472

³¹ Fr. Youhanna Salama: *Precious Pearls on the Rites and Doctrines of the Church* (in Arabic), Cairo (third edition), 1965: 460