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## Ontological Issues of Eucharistological Discussions in the Works of Representatives of Russian Spiritual and Academic Philosophy of the late 19<sup>th</sup> - early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries

### Abstract

In this article the author speaks about the discursive possibilities and perspectives of the Christian eucharistology on the basis of the Russian religious thought of the late XIX - early XX centuries (the pre-revolutionary period). Discussions about the transubstantiation in the modern Russian theology typologically correspond to discussions in the pre-revolutionary period. The author systematizes the basic conceptions of



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the Eucharistic transubstantiation, shows their complementarity and talks about the possibilities of the Orthodox attitude toward the scholastic eucharistology.

## Keywords

Russian orthodox theology, Catholic theology, eucharistology, transubstantiation, scholastic theology

### **1 The beginning of discussions about the transubstantiation: substantial and anti-substantial interpretations**

The participation in the sacrament of the Eucharist is the center of the ecclesiastic and moral life of the Orthodox Christian. By the faith of the Church, during the Divine Liturgy is produced a great (in its incomprehensibility and soteriological significance) miracle of the transposition or transubstantiation - the bread and the wine become the Body and the Blood of Christ God. Eating the Flesh of Christ Himself, resurrected and exalted to the right hand of God the Father, believers receive an opportunity to intimately connect with their Lord - the Source of grace and salvation.

The dogma of the transubstantiation, as any revealed truth of Orthodoxy, has got its fundamentally unfathomable sacred depth, the mystery of which is qualitatively superior not only to the abilities of ordinary reason, but also to the subtlest dialectic (similar to the dogmas of the Trinity of God, of the Godmanhood of Christ, of the general Resurrection, etc.).

Nevertheless, the Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church indicates the most pious way of mind in the direction of one of the most striking manifestations of the same "abyss of wisdom" of God (Rom. 1:33). In this case, patristic statements about the transubstantiation direct the human mind to the "jump" of belief in the incomprehensibility of the Eucharistic mystery. In parallel with the process of approval and preservation of the Church's faith in the mystery of the Eucharist, "once delivered to the saints" (Jude 1:3), in the Universal Church had repeatedly occurred discussions on various aspects of this sacrament, in particular, on the question of the ontology of the transubstantiation: how to interpret and to conceive the wonderful transformation of bread and wine into the Body and the Blood of the Lord, which are recognized entirely identical to that historical body of Christ that was born of a Virgin, resurrected and exalted to the right hand of God the Father?

At the dawn of the Middle Ages - in the age of the early scholastics - the theologians of the Roman Church was plunged into controversies on the Eucharist. Paschasius Radbertus, in 831 and 844, writes the treatise "De corpore et sanguine Domini", which initiates active discussions on the transubstantiation. The position of Radbertus about a realistic or objective identity of the historical and the Eucharistic Flesh of Christ became an official doctrine of Catholicism, while Radbert's opponents - Ratramnus and Berengar of Tours - in one or another form denied any change in the consecration of bread and wine at their substantial level.

Ratramnus insisted on the spiritual presence of Christ's Body in the Eucharist, emphasizing the symbolic significance of the sacrament, while Berengar offered to understand the transubstantiation as a link of the invariant bread and wine with the Body and the Blood of Christ: "the Bread, consecrated on the altar, while maintaining its essence, is the Body of Christ,

not losing what he was, but sensing what he was not"<sup>1</sup>. Thus, in the early scholasticism were defined key ways of understanding the Eucharistic "transition": the substantial and the anti-substantial. Later, the Protestants became the opponents of the substantial change of bread and wine.

In connection with the establishment and the spread of the Reformation, the Eastern Church decided to re-define her position in the face of Western Christianity. Let's pay attention to some conciliar definitions. The Constantinople Synod of 1691 suggests that after the transposition "no longer remains the essence of bread and wine, but under visible images (έν τοῖς φαινόμενοις εἶδεσι) of bread and wine the essence is truly and really the Body and Blood of the Lord (...) the bread and wine themselves are transformed into the very Body and Blood significantly (οὐσιωδῶς)"<sup>2</sup>. The same idea is repeated in the Epistle of the Eastern Patriarchs of 1723, where is condemned the Lutheran look at the insightful co-presence of the essence of the Body and Blood in substance of bread and wine after their consecration ("a significant - υποστατικῶς - occurrence of" Christ in the immutable essence of bread and wine). Along with this, was convicted an "energetic" interpretation of the transposition, where the presence of Christ in the Holy Gifts was conceived as a "superabundance of grace", as in all the other Sacraments.

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<sup>1</sup> A. Fokin, Berengarij Turskij (Pravoslavnaja jenciklopedija, 2009), pp. 652-655.

<sup>2</sup> M. Bernatskij, Konstantinopol'skij Sobor 1691 g. i ego recepcija v Rossii v kontekste evharisticheskikh sporov poslednej chetverti XVII veka (Bogoslovskie trudy, 2007), pp. 133-145.

## **2 Eucharistological discussions in Russia about scholastic and substantial interpretations: reception, rethinking and overcoming**

In Russia, at that time, was producing a reception of theological judgments of the Greek and Roman Catholic origin that formed the focus of anti-protestant direction of the national eucharistology. Gradually, Russian theology has shaped its own attitude to the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, in line of the historical and theological self-reflection. And at the turn of the XIX and XX centuries, we can detect a noticeable intensification of eucharistological discussions in our theological and academic environment. A critical analysis of the Latin concept of transubstantiation, at that time, was motivated by the attempts of reunification of Old Catholics and Anglicans with the Christian East, which required a clarification of the confessional specifics of Orthodoxy in the face of Catholicism. A number of authors either do not see any fundamental difference between the Catholic and the Orthodox ontologies of the Eucharist, or conceived the present differences formal or purely terminological. Some Russian scholars sharply disagreed with the Roman Catholic ontology of transubstantiation.

A special attention, at the time, was paid to the question of the possibility of applying of the Thomistic discourse, of the Aristotelian conceptual, categorial and terminological framework in order to understand the Eucharistic transition of bread and wine in a different ontological status. The philosophical interest was mainly focused on the Aristotelian concepts of “substance” and “accidence”, which are traditional for the Christian East as for the West. It is noteworthy that in a special elucidation of denominational differences on this question, scholars often resorted to a historical and philosophical analysis of the ontological doctrine about the Eucharist and the relevant terminology, since the time of early scholasticism and even earlier – since the age of Aurelius Augustine.

It should be noted that the content of the pre-revolutionary discussions on the transubstantiation matches the contemporary theological dispute about the Eucharist among ecclesiastic and academic intellectuals, almost with detailed precision. We have to admit that all discursive possibilities in resolving the issue of transubstantiation were marked at the time with much greater thoroughness than now. Unfortunately, we have to state that the fragmentariness and the bias are typical for the current literature on this subject; often there is no metaphysical analysis of the core concepts of "substance", "accidence", "kind"; the pre-revolutionary heritage is ignored due to the indiscriminate imposition of the stigma of the "Latin captivity" of the entire theology of that age. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the debate on the issue of transubstantiation occurred between A. Gussev, V. Kerensky, A. Kireyev. It is especially necessary to note the specific criticism that A. A. Bronzov rained down on the position of Andrew, the Bishop of Ufa (very close to the position of our contemporary A. I. Ossipov)<sup>3</sup>. Archpriest Nikolay Malinovsky, in his dogmatic system, criticizes the Roman Catholicism for an excessive materialistic view of transubstantiation<sup>4</sup>.

In general, the theologians of the late XIX - early XX centuries, in this matter, have sought to build on that paradigm, where the Orthodox position on controversial confessional matters often represents a middle between opposing extremities of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. This "Golden mean", at the same time, was considered as qualitatively superior to the possibility of rude and mechanical coupling of opposing confessional positions at the expense of some mutual concessions (which is

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<sup>3</sup> A. Bronzov, «Prelozhenie» i «Presushhestvlenie» (Petrograd, 1916), pp. 1-2

<sup>4</sup> N. Malinovskij. Pravoslavnoe dogmaticheskoe bogoslovie (Sergiev Posad, 1909), p. 184

characteristic of the Anglicanism). Following this paradigm allowed us to identify all possible historical and logical options of understanding of the matter under consideration, that gives an opportunity to fix the Orthodox ontology of transubstantiation in not only a "positive" way but also in a "negative" - by the exclusion of extremities.

### **3 The conceptual systematization of Russian theological interpretations of the Eucharistic miracle**

So, given the pre-revolutionary experience, all the available and, of course, all the possible metaphysical constructs on the nature of transubstantiation can be divided into two groups: substantial (recognizing the miraculous change of bread and wine on the essential level) and anti-substantial interpretations. Substantial interpretations can be divided into 1) purely materialistic understanding of the mysterious substance of bread and wine as a phenomenon of the natural and real order in the style of a certain alchemical, mechanical and geometric substitute one by another without emphasis on the transfigured state of the Body and of the Blood of Christ in the Eucharistic Gifts (a Roman Catholic viewpoint); 2) the Orthodox understanding of the transubstantiation, as a phenomenon of a supernatural order, having an apophatic "core", not dismembered by the mind, which suggests a more subtle understanding of the relevant ontological concepts, allowing, in turn, two private options: a) some believe that bread and wine properties, with its actions (for example, heady) disappear together with the substantial content of bread and wine, while the appearance of bread, wine, and their actions is spawned by God as "an optical illusion"; b) others recognize that after the consecration, bread and wine properties are realistically and objectively saved; the bread and wine, losing their substantiality (and in Russian - the real content of their auto-stability), gain stability on the soil of a

new natural content, having the Body and Blood of Christ as their internal essence after the consecration. Supporters of the positions "A" and "B" are apparently in the space of the Orthodox faith, although second place seems to be most patristic, as the ancient thinkers of the Church meant, rather, something real and objective than an "optical illusion", under non-substantial or accidental properties, taken "in themselves", as such (which already do not form a separate substance by themselves). Properties-accidences as such are considered by them as a real ontological content of external manifestation of this or that thing, but not as a "distortion" of reality in the mind of the subject and not towards a confrontation between the phenomenal and the noumenal in the philosophy of I. Kant.

In line with an anti-substantial interpretation of transubstantiation, there are two possible discourses, which remain after deduction of the substantial: 1) the discourse of hypostatical incarnation, when we believe that absolutely immutable bread and wine are taken in the Hypostasis of Christ ("are hypostatically incarnated") - very roughly speaking - in the integrity of the "personal space" of the inner life of the God-man, similarly to the acceptance by God the Word of an animated flesh from the Virgin Mary in the act of the incarnation of God (the position of A. Ossipov and A. Zaytsev); 2) the discourse of a "co-presence" when we are talking about a subtle hypostatic, essential or engerical "penetration" of the immutable bread and wine by the God-man. If the latter interpretation is purely Protestant, the first one, despite the attraction to the Patristic thought, also cannot be considered a classic one for the Christian East. *Consensus patrum* does not explicitly develop or endorse this discourse in connection with eucharistological issues, for example, if we examine the works of such a dialectic and a scholastic, as His Reverence John the Damascene. Some concepts of transubstantiation, as a rule, because of its vagueness, may occupy an intermediate position in this scheme, but additional solutions to the problem,

apparently, cannot be determined, if we remain within the paradigm of more or less traditional Christian worldview.

#### **4 The Orthodox understanding of the Eucharistic miracle as the overcoming conceptual extremes: the deepening of the scholastic rationalism through the mystical apophaticism**

In the taxonomy of conceptual options of the transubstantiation ontology, we have to reject the scholastic positivism in this topic firmly. In addition to the incomprehensibility of the act of the miraculous "transition" itself, the sheer speculation of entities (substances), with their accidents, possess an insurmountable apophaticism in the Orthodox philosophy, which suggests a more subtle and pure understanding of the concepts, operated by the Holy fathers in connection with the transubstantiation, overcoming physical and mechanical understanding of the marvelous act, the geometrism in distinguishing the essence from the accidents, a roughly sensual objectivism in the knowledge of the very essences of bread and wine, that will later become characteristic for Roman Catholic eucharistology.

St. Basil the Great, in his letter against Eunomius, says: "So, who brags about That Who is from the beginning, let him explain first the nature of an ant, and then let him talk about the Power that transcends every mind. Moreover, if you do not come upon you the conduct and the nature of the smallest ant, how do you glory as that you had presented by the inconceivable power of God by your mind?"<sup>5</sup>.

Many modern theologians, criticizing their opponents for the objective conceptual flaws, often begin to go beyond the space of the Orthodox thought. Some, criticizing the Protestants, state

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<sup>5</sup> Vasilij Velikij. Protiv eretika Evnomija (Saint-Petersburg: Knigoizdatel'stvo P.P. Sojkina, 1911), pp. 30-31.

the full identity of the Orthodox and Catholic eucharistology, the others, in an anti-Latinist fit, design the eucharistology in the Protestant spirit. In a similar way, at the turn of the XIX - XX centuries, the anti-papist denominations of the West and the Russian Orthodoxy came together in the criticism of the extremities of the Catholic eucharistology, but the Old Catholicism and the Anglicanism still could not resist at the level of the "Golden mean" of the Orthodox discourse, by choosing the Protestantism as the final destination of their anti-papist intentions, as prevailed in the West. The dialogue of Orthodoxy with the Western anti-papism was not successful; it failed to adopt the ancient wisdom of the Orthodox East.

The Orthodox understanding of the transubstantiation is a confession of a substantial transition towards a limiting apophatism. We can say that, according to Orthodox doctrine, the bread and wine after the consecration lose the contents of their substantiality in favor of the substance of the body and the blood of Christ, while in the aspect of their external manifestation, the Eucharistic Gifts remain unchanged and, therefore, perceived in their normal forms. Orthodoxy, thus, at the level of higher metaphysical synthesis efficiently overcomes the extremities of the rough natural Catholic chemism and the Protestant symbolism. It is also evident that this paradigm of perception of Orthodoxy as of the middle between the metaphysical extremities has great theoretical potential.

## **5 A new view on eucharistological discussions: the complementarity perspective and conservation of religious identity**

A modern Christian theologian can also see an opportunity for the development of the Ecumenical dialogue in these types of understanding of the transubstantiation. In general, all the attempts to comprehend the transubstantiation use, as a rule,

one of the three possible rational discourses to deepen in this Ordinance. Some theologians, in this case, think the change in "substance," others – "in the hypostasis, and others offer to speak personally about the subtle personal and engerical presence of Christ in the bread and wine. The strongest opposition is between those who believe that the bread and the wine lose something in the transubstantiation and those who do not want to think of any deformation in the ontological "content" of bread and wine.

Despite the apparent opposition, we can state a deep affinity of different approaches. First, we shall tell about the proximity of the substantial and hypostatic understanding of the miraculous transformation. The terms "substance" and "hypostasis" are etymologically traced back to the mean "that which is (exists) in itself" (with varying degrees of independence). These two approaches have got the common understanding that the bread and wine, after the transubstantiation, lose its autonomy in its existence, that ceases to exist "of itself." In the first case, its existence after the transubstantiation does not "rest" on itself, but on the substance of the Body and Blood, which is already in the Hypostasis of the Word, and in the second case – on the hypostasis of the Word, which contains in Itself the substance of the Body and Blood.

A substance does not exist without a hypostasis, a hypostasis cannot exist without substance, according to the philosophy of the Holy Fathers. He who receives the substance of the Body and Blood in the Eucharist is connected with the Hypostasis (the Person) of the Son, and he who receives the bread and wine that are included in the Hypostasis of the Son, is connected with the substance of the resurrected Body and Blood.

After the adherents of the substantial approach (in modern Russian Orthodox theology), we must also note the proximity of the two opposite positions: of the hypostatic change of bread and wine and of the personal and engerical presence of Christ (the "occurrence" of Christ in the unchanged bread and wine) in

the transubstantiation. According to the hypostatic approach, in the transubstantiation, actually, there is an "Absorption" of bread and wine in the personal existence of Christ, that is, the bread and wine, after the accomplishment of the miracle, get a real specific existence not from its hypostasis, but from the Hypostasis of God the Word Incarnate (just as God the Word assumed a reasonable flesh from the Virgin Mary without deformation of human nature). According to the personal and energeical approach, Christ's Identity is included in the bread and wine, drains them.

Thus, we can say that for the proponents of the hypostatic change in the act of transubstantiation, occurs the entry of the Gifts in the Person of Christ, and for the supporters of the personal and energeical approach, in this case, the process is reversed, that is, the Person of Christ enters in the Gifts. According to the principles of patristic philosophy, hypostasis does not exist without substance and substance without its characteristic actions (actions, in turn, point to some substance that cannot be without hypostasis).

Therefore, they who receive the bread and wine that Christ penetrates by his Person or energies, are also connected with the substance of his Body and Blood. We can only in mind separate the hypostasis from the substance and energies from the substance, which is certainly in the incarnation, while in reality, the hypostasis, the substance and its energies exist inseparably. Thus, there is an association of the concept of the personal and energeical occurrence of Christ in the bread and wine with a substantial approach.

The substantial, the hypostatic and the personal and energeical approach, to some extent, require each other and even pass each other on the level of dialectics and in the historical process of development of the eucharistology. Each of the outlined approaches was processed with the help of the philosophical apparatus in opposition to other approaches, which is typical for the modern theology. In each of the positions can be seen a

sincere desire to preserve the integrity of Christ's presence in the Eucharist. In the opinion of the Protestants and of some Orthodox Christians, Roman Catholics make the understanding of transubstantiation too materialistic and biological. In the opinion of Roman Catholics and of some Orthodox Christians, Protestants make the presence of Christ in the Eucharist too delicate.

In this case, they who are disputing, understand the coarsening and the thinning, as the loss of authentic fullness of Christ's presence. It seems that only the mutual influence of the three possible approaches will be able to warn a human from the confluence of this extreme coarsening, as from that extremity of the thinning.

Sometimes, the tension between the confessions just occurs because of the lack of information. For example, in the modern Orthodox eucharistology in Russia, there is a popular judgment that the Roman Catholics, as the supporters of the substantial approach in the understanding of the transubstantiation, are supporters of illusionism, while Orthodox theologians should be their opponents, that is, the Orthodox believe that the concealment of the Body and Blood after the transubstantiation under the species of bread and wine is carried out in objective reality, and not just in the mind of the believer, to whom the Body and the Blood must seem like a mirage in the desert.

Not all the Orthodox know that Thomas Aquinas, in one of his writings, spoke out against the gross illusionism in favor of the objective existence of properties of bread and wine after the transubstantiation: "Nevertheless, we do not say that the forms that appear in the Sacrament are just in the imagination of the viewer, as happens in magical tricks, because any deceit is unworthy of this Sacrament. However, God, who is the creator of substance and accidents, can preserve sensible accidents in existence even when the substance is changed into something else. For he can produce and preserve in existence the effects of

secondary causes by his omnipotence without secondary causes”<sup>6</sup>.

Unfortunately, the text is still not translated into the Russian language in a scientific format.

## 6 Conclusion

Each of the three approaches requires the presence of another, for not to become an extreme position, in which the fullness of the presence of Christ is in some sense lost. When we say that each approach complements the other, we do not claim that it is necessary to merge all three approaches into one indistinguishable whole. In each of the three approaches is an honest Christian orientation, not evil, but a sincere requirement that a theologian of any denomination needs to hear. Being in the positions of a deep hearing, we can detect a deep historical and dialectical relation between different approaches in the understanding of the ontology of the transubstantiation. Most importantly, we must understand the untold news of the miracle of the Eucharist.

The fullness of Christ's presence in the bread and wine after the transubstantiation exceeds all the possible rational constructions. The untold news of the sacrament of transubstantiation corresponds to the mystical understanding of the ecclesiological fullness of Christ's presence in His Church, and to the mystical depth of the love of Christ, "which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:19).

Guided by the principle of Christ's love, a theologian of one denomination can look at the concept of another confession

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas Aquinas. De rationibus fidei. – URL: <http://www.dhspriority.org/thomas/Rationes.htm>.

without a feud. Not taking conceptual constructions of another confession, a true theologian must deeply understand its theology and make, in the love of Christ, the identity of the bearer of other beliefs.

*Table 1. The discursive possibilities of the philosophical reflection and the exposition of the sacrament of transubstantiation*

<b>THE INTERPRETATIONS OF "TRANSITION" OF BREAD AND WINE INTO THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST</b>			
<b>SUBSTANTIAL</b> For changing the essence of the bread and wine		<b>ANTISUBSTANTIAL</b> Against changing the essence of bread and wine	
a materialistic, physicochemical, rude mechanical, geometric substitution; as a phenomenon of the natural and real order; an "alchemical magic."	a focus on transubstantiation as on the phenomenon of a supernatural order		the hypostatic incarnation of bread and wine in the Hypostasis of the God-man; of bread and wine in the integrity of the "personal space" of the inner life of God-man; the hypostatic and personal assimilation of bread and wine by Christ, analogously to the act of the incarnation of God
	bread and wine properties with their actions are illusory as an optical illusion, as a distortion of reality	bread and wine properties with their actions are real, "capping" with themselves the essence of the Body and the Blood	
<b>THE LIMITS OF THE TRADITIONAL CATHOLIC THOUGHT</b>	<b>THE BOUNDARIES OF THE ORTHODOX THEOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT</b>	<b>THE LIMITS OF THE CLASSICAL THOUGHT</b>	<b>THE LIMITS OF THE PROTESTANT THOUGHT</b>