

The Most Holy Eucharist Series

PART I: EUCHARISTIC DOCTRINE ON THE REAL PRESENCE

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During the 1500's, a form of Christianity developed that was consciously not Roman Catholic. This form of Christianity withdrew six whole nations from the Catholic Church and has determined the culture of most of North America, including the United States. Moreover, this form of Christianity, on principle, denies that Christ, at the Last Supper, instituted the priesthood and empowered ordained priests to offer the Sacrifice of the Mass – at which bread and wine are changed into the living Flesh and Blood of Christ. Consequently, it is imperative to know what the Catholic Church taught as infallible doctrine during this most divisive era of Christian history. The main source of information is found in the Council of Trent, which met for eighteen years from 1545 to 1563.

Since our focus here is on the Real Presence, we will concentrate on what the council was called to defend and declare as defined doctrine on the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. There are five canons specifically defining the Catholic Church's faith in the Real Presence, and each canon is worded in the form of an "anathema". *Anathema* means "accursed". Each canon states: "If anyone says... let him be anathema." This means anyone who denies one of these five dogmas is thereby denying a divinely revealed mystery of faith and ceases to be a Catholic. We will identify each teaching with a title, quote what the Council of Trent defined and briefly explain each definition.

Part One (*found in this pamphlet*)

- 1. Meaning of the Real Presence**
- 2. Transubstantiation**

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- 3. The Extent of Christ's Presence**
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1. MEANING OF THE REAL PRESENCE

The first definition of the Council of Trent is on the Catholic meaning of the Real Presence. The definition reads: "If anyone says that the Body and Blood together with His whole Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore the whole Christ, is truly, really and substantially contained in the Sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist, but says that Christ is present in the Sacrament only as in a sign or figure or by His power, let him be anathema." (Session 13, can.1)

There are four key terms in this solemn definition: "the whole Christ," "truly," "really," and "substantially" contained. What are we being taught by these definitions?

We are being told that the Holy Eucharist means "the whole Christ." Everything which belongs to Christ - everything which makes Christ Christ - is present in the Blessed Sacrament. This

consequently means that Christ is present in His divinity as God and in His humanity as man. Christ is present in the Eucharist with His human body and human soul, with His bodily organs and limbs and with His human mind, will and feelings - "the whole Christ." Latin reads *Totus Christus*.

Then we are told Christ is present "truly" and not only symbolically. He is present objectively and only subjectively in the minds of believers. He is contained in the Blessed Sacrament. Consequently, if our minds realize this objective fact, we possess the truth. There is no more precious truth revealed by Christ than the truth that He is on earth, the whole Christ in the Eucharist.

We are taught that Christ is "really" present and not only figuratively. The Eucharistic presence is not a metaphor or figure of speech. It is reality. Christ exists in the Holy Eucharist. During the century when this Real Presence was defined by the Council of Trent, St. Robert Bellarmine counted the number of meanings given to Christ's words at the Last Supper: "This is My Body, this is My Blood." He found among the Protestant scholars more than two hundred interpretations except the one which says Christ is "really" present in the Eucharist.

Finally, this definition tells us that Christ is present "substantially" and not merely by the exercise of His power. True, Christ is everywhere exercising His power. Thus, we can legitimately say that Christ is present in every person in the state of grace. Christ confers His grace on those who are in His friendship. But being in the state of grace is not the same as having the Real Presence of Christ in our bodies and souls.

The Real Presence in the Eucharist is absolutely unique. Christ is not present everywhere with the wholeness of His divinity and humanity - only in the Eucharist. In the Eucharist, Christ is present in the *fullness of His being*.

A simple comparison may help to explain what this means. When the angel Gabriel appeared to our Lady at Nazareth and announced to her that she was chosen to become the Mother of the Most High, God as God was present at Nazareth, He was present in the archangel, He was present in our Lady. Otherwise there would have been no Nazareth or Gabriel or Mary. A good definition of nothing is where God is absent. But the moment Mary told the angel, "Be it done unto me according to your word," (Luke 1:38) at that instant God began to be present as the God-man in the womb of His Immaculate Mother. We may therefore literally say that the Holy Eucharist began at the moment of the Incarnation. It is the second person of the Holy Trinity, which assumed a human nature, which began to be present at the Annunciation, which was born at Bethlehem, died on the cross and rose from the dead on Easter Sunday. It is this Incarnate God who is present in the Holy Eucharist.

There is an analogy which may help explain the distinction. When an American author writes a book that is published worldwide, is he present to those people in Japan who read what he has written? Is his influence present in their hearts and minds? Of course. But unless he flies to Tokyo, he is not "substantially" present to those people.

The Eucharistic Christ is present on earth not only in the sense that He exercises His divine influence on the hearts and minds of human beings. Christ Himself is "substantially" present on earth in the Blessed Sacrament. Only in the Eucharist is Christ present with the wholeness of His divinity and humanity.

That is the first defined dogma on the Real Presence: "the whole Christ" is "truly," "really," and "substantially" contained in the Eucharist.

If the verb "contained" seems strange, it should not be. Why not? Because the physical properties of what had been bread and wine are, as it were, the container which holds the whole Christ within the limits of their physical extension. You might say that Christ is circumscribed within the limits of the accidents or properties of what, before consecration, had been bread and wine.

2. TRANSUBSTANTIATION

Having defined the existence of Jesus Christ, true God and true man in the Eucharist, the Council of Trent then concentrates on *how* bread and wine are changed into the whole Christ. It had better be changed, otherwise, there is no Real Presence: "If anyone says that the substance of bread and wine remains in the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist together with the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and denies that wonderful and extraordinary change of the whole substance of the wine into His blood, while only the species of bread and wine remain, a change which the Catholic Church has most fittingly called 'transubstantiation,' let him be anathema." (Session 13, can.2)

As often as we have heard the word "transubstantiation," few Catholics fully know what it means. Transubstantiation means that the substance of bread and wine - what makes them bread and wine - is replaced by the whole Jesus Christ. The "breadness" and "wineness," so to speak, are changed into the living Jesus, true God and true man, whole God and whole man. It does not merely mean that the substance of bread and wine becomes the substance of Christ. The Real Presence is not only the substance of Christ, but the whole of Christ - His substance plus all the human properties of His humanity.

Finally, transubstantiation describes how the physical qualities of bread and wine - their color, texture, taste and whatever else is perceived by the senses - remain, but they lose their substance. The qualities of bread and wine remain, but their substance is replaced by the whole Christ.

We get some idea of how Protestants look upon our faith in transubstantiation by what they write in a standard book entitled *Roman Catholicism*. The following quotation is a bit long but deserves to be given to help Catholics know what they are expected to believe about the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

The priest supposedly is endowed with power by the bishop at the time of his ordination to change the bread and wine into the literal living body and blood of Christ, which is then known as the "host," and so to bring Him down upon the altar. And that body is said to be complete in all its parts, down to the last eyelash and toenail! How it can exist in thousands of places and in its full proportions, even in a small piece of bread, is not explained, but is taken on faith as a miracle.

It must not be supposed for a minute that modern Roman Catholics do not literally believe this jumble of medieval superstition. They have been taught it from infancy, and they do believe it. It is the very sternest doctrine of their church. It is one of the chief doctrines, if indeed it is not the chief doctrine, upon which their church rests. The priests preach it literally and emphatically several times a year, and Roman Catholic laymen do not dare express any doubt about it.

After the adoration of the consecrated "host," the uplifted hands of the priest pretend to offer to God the very body and blood of Christ as a sacrifice for the living and the dead. Then, in the observance of the Eucharist he pretends to eat Him alive, in the presence of the people, also to give Him to the people under the appearance of bread, to be eaten by them.

This doctrine of the mass, of course, is based on the assumption that the words of Christ, "This is My Body," and "This is My Blood" (Matt. 26:26-28), must be taken literally (Lorraine Boettner 175-176).

Since transubstantiation means the Real Presence of Christ, it also means the real absence of bread and wine. To believe this is to be a Roman Catholic.

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