

# This is My Body, This is My Blood

*by Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J.*

Saint Robert Bellarmine, writing in the sixteen hundreds, counted over two hundred interpretations of our Lord's words at the Last Supper, "This is my Body...this is my Blood." Over the centuries, this has been the principal source of division among the Protestant Churches of the world.

My purpose in this conference will be twofold: first to identify and explain what the Catholic Church understands by the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and then to see how basic to Protestantism is the denial of the Real Presence.

## Catholic Faith in the Real Presence

When Catholic Christianity affirms, without qualification, that "in the nourishing sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, after the consecration of the bread and wine, our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man," is present "under the appearances of those sensible things," it rests its faith on the words of Scripture and the evidence of Sacred Tradition.<sup>1</sup>

The beginning of this faith comes from the discourse recorded by St. John, writing toward the end of the first century. Christ had already worked the miracle of multiplying the loaves and fishes. He had also spoken at length about the need for faith in Him and His words as a condition for salvation. Then He continued:

I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the desert and they are dead; but this is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world.

Then the Jews started arguing with one another. Did they understand Him correctly? Was He actually telling them He would give His own flesh for food? "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" they asked. Instead of reassuring them that he did not mean to be taken literally, Christ went on:

I tell you most solemnly, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you will not have life in you. Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him. As I, who am sent by the living Father, myself draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will draw life from me. This is the bread that came down from heaven; not like the bread that your ancestors ate; they are dead, but anyone who eats this bread will live forever (John 6:48-58).

The evangelist explains that Christ taught this doctrine in the synagogue, but that hearing it "many of his followers said, 'This is intolerable language, How could anyone accept it?'" Jesus was fully aware that His followers were complaining and, in fact, asked them, "does this upset you?" But He took nothing back. Rather He insisted, "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. But there are some of you who do not believe." At the same time He explained that such faith is not of man's making, since "no one could come to me unless the Father allows him."

Following this animated dialogue, we are prepared for the statement, “After this, many of His disciples left Him and stopped going with Him.” Then, to make absolutely certain there was no mistaking what He was saying, Jesus said to the Twelve, “What about you, do you want to go away too?” To which Simon Peter replied, “Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe” (John 6:59-68).

The Church’s decisive revelation on the Real Presence is in the words of the consecration, “This is my body; this is my blood,” whose literal meaning has been defended through the ages. They were thus understood by St. Paul when he told the first Christians that those who approached the Eucharist unworthily would be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. There could be no question of a grievous offense against Christ Himself, unless Paul assumed that the true Body and the true Blood of Christ are really present in the Eucharist.

## The Rise of Eucharistic Heresy

The first ripples of controversy came in the ninth century, when a monk from the French Abbey of Corbie wrote against his abbot, St. Paschasius (785-860). Ratramnus (d. 868) held that Christ’s Body in the Eucharist cannot be the same as Christ’s historical body once on earth and now in heaven because the Eucharistic is invisible, -impalpable, and spiritual. He wanted to hold on to the Real Presence but stressed the Eucharist as symbolic rather than corporeal. His book on the subject was condemned by the Synod of Vercelli, and his ideas, it is held, influenced all subsequent theories that contradicted the traditional teaching of the Church.

Within two centuries the issue had reached such a point of gravity that a formal declaration was evoked from the Holy See. In 1079, Archdeacon Berengar of Tours who favored Ratramnus’ position and wrote against what he considered the excessive realism of Paschasius, was required by Gregory VII to accept the following declaration of faith in the Eucharistic presence:

I believe in my heart and openly profess that the bread and wine placed upon the altar are, by the mystery of the sacred prayer and the words of the Redeemer, substantially changed into the true and life-giving flesh and blood of Jesus Christ our Lord, and that after the consecration, there is present the true Body and Blood of Christ which was born of the Virgin and, offered up for the salvation of the world, hung on the cross and now sits at the right hand of the Father, and that there is present the true Blood of Christ which flowed from His side. They are present not only by means of a sign and of the efficacy of the sacrament, but also in the very reality and truth of their nature and substance. <sup>2</sup>

This profession of faith in the Real Presence was quoted verbatim by Pope Paul VI in his encyclical *Mysterium Fidei*. The Holy Father quoted this profession of faith in the Real Presence in 1965, during the sessions of the Second Vatican Council. The reason was because he saw a resurgence of the Eucharistic heresies which began to evade the Catholic Church almost a thousand years ago.

In my thirty years of working for the Holy See, I have learned many things. Among them was the rise of a widespread undermining of faith in the Real Presence.

## Protestant Roots of Heretical Catholicism

I never tire repeating the direct order I received from Pope John Paul II in 1986 and 1988 to do everything in my power to restore faith in the Real Presence in the United States, where it has been lost, and strengthen this faith where it still exists.

According to the Holy Father, unless this faith in the Real Presence is strengthened and restored, he feared for the survival of the Catholic Church in more than one diocese in our country.

It all began with the Protestant so-called reformation. In countries like ours, where Protestantism has become the prevailing culture of a nation, two truths of the Catholic faith have suffered profoundly. They are faith in the priesthood and faith in the Real Presence.

Whatever else Martin Luther denied, it was the existence of a priesthood instituted by Jesus Christ when He ordained the apostles bishops and priests at the Last Supper. Over the years one of my favorite definitions of Protestantism has been “priestless Christianity.” In the words of Martin Luther, the idea that there are two levels in Christianity, the spiritual and the temporal, is untrue. There is no basic distinction between priest and the laity. Says Luther:

It is fiction by which the Pope, bishops, priests and monks are called the spiritual estate, while the princes, lords, artisans and peasants are the temporal estate. An artful life and hypocritical invention, but let no one be afraid of it, because all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them, save office. For we are all consecrated priests by baptism. Since we are all priests alike, no man can put himself forward, or take upon himself without our consent and election to do that which we all have a like power to do. Therefore, a priest should be nothing in Christendom but a functionary; as long as he holds his office, he has precedence; if he is deprived of it, he is a peasant or a citizen like the rest. But now they have invented indelible characters and even imagine that a priest can never become a layman; which is all nothing but mere talk and human conjecture.

This was the beginning of the breakdown of Catholic Christianity. Once you deny that there is a priesthood, instituted by Christ, which alone has the power from Him to change bread and wine into His living Flesh and Blood, you have erased historic Christianity.

The full implications of Luther’s theology touched every aspect of Church and State relationship. Only civil laws have binding power on the citizens, since the State has a right to pass judgment on ecclesiastical legislation, but not vice versa. Civil officials may determine if churchmen are serving the common interest, and punish or depose as they please; but the Church does not have dual rights except those conceded by the State. Indeed, civil coercion can deprive any ecclesiastic, even the pope of his ministry and if need be, of the very title he pretends to have received from God.

Once we recognize this basic principle of Protestantism, we begin to see what happened in countries like ours. The priesthood, as a unique power instituted by Jesus Christ, has disappeared from all Protestant churches throughout the world. Inevitably this has deeply affected the Catholic church in Protestant-dominated nations like our own.

The impact of this heresy on the Catholic Church has been immense. Already in the sixteenth century, some six nations, all formerly Catholic, became Protestant. This includes England and, as a consequence, English-speaking countries like our own.

By now there are over four thousand Protestant denominations throughout the world. Mind you, these are not Protestant churches but denominations. Not a single one of them, anywhere in the world, believes in the

Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. Why not? Because they do not believe in the priesthood.

## Impact on the Catholic Eucharistic Faith

We could now begin not only another lecture on the widespread Eucharistic errors in the Catholic church today. We could literally speak for the next three months, seven hours a day, describing the widespread breakdown of authentic Catholic doctrine in the Real Presence.

Among the hundreds of false interpretations of the Real Presence, one of the most popular is to identify Christ in the Eucharist with the exercise of His extraordinary power.

The meaning of the phrase, "Body in Christ" (Romans 12:5), is that the Body by which Christians are formed is to be identified with the pneumatic Christ, who is the source of Divine Life, and the origin of charismatic graces and of (all) moral and religious activity...The indwelling of Christ in the faithful described in the expression, "Christ in us," is not to be limited to an impersonal force operating in the Christian. It should be taken literally to mean the presence and activity of the pneumatic Christ in man...The Body of Christ which constitutes the Church can be said to be Christ because the pneumatic Christ is incorporated in it, because He gives to it the principle of activity and manifests Himself visibly by means of it.<sup>3</sup>

What is the author saying? He is telling us that the Real Presence is the Body of Christ dwelling in the souls of all the members of the Mystical Body.

Another author is writing for Karl Rahner's *Encyclopedia of Theology*. It is a more than six-column article on transubstantiation. For one half of the article he describes what the Catholic Church over the centuries had understood by the term "transubstantiation." But the times have changed.

Modern theologians, he claims, have discovered that the centuries-old understanding of transubstantiation should be radically changed. It should now rather be called transfinalization. The quotation from Rahner's encyclopedia is a bit lengthy. But I think it should be given almost in full.

The more recent approaches suggest the following considerations. One has to remember that the words of institution indicate a change but do not give any guiding line for the interpretation of the actual process. As regards transubstantiation, it may then be said that substance, essence, meaning and purpose of the bread are identical. But the meaning of a thing can be changed without detriment to its matter.

A house, for instance, consists of a certain arrangement of materials and has a clearly established nature and a clearly established purpose. If the house is demolished and the materials used for building a bridge, a change of nature or essence has intervened. Something completely different is there. The meaning has been changed, since a house is meant to be lived in and a bridge is used to cross a depression. But there has been no loss of material. In an analogous way, the meaning of the bread has been changed through the consecration. Something which formerly served profane use now becomes the dwelling-place and the symbol of Christ who is present and gives himself to his own (Karl Rahner, *Encyclopedia of Theology*, pg. 1754).

So the writer goes on. And so scores of authors could be quoted, all professedly Catholic and all teaching the same thing. What the Catholic Church infallibly believes is the real physical Body and Blood of Christ has been reinterpreted to mean something else.

The result in a country like ours has been devastating. It is no coincidence that the number of Catholic seminarians in the United States has dropped by ninety percent since the close of Vatican II. Nor is it a coincidence that, in one Catholic Church after another, many of the people no longer genuflect before the Eucharist. Nor is it surprising that tabernacles have been removed from so many Catholic Churches.

But that is why we have this conference. We need to alert ourselves to the grave crisis through which the Church of Christ is going in our day.

There is only one solution. We must restore our faith in the Real Presence where it has been lost, and strengthen this faith where it still exists.

## Prayer

Lord Jesus, we believe you are present in the fullness of your divinity and humanity in the Blessed Sacrament. We further believe that at the Last Supper you told the apostles, "This is my Body, this is my Blood." We also believe that you told the apostles to, "Do this in commemoration of me," by which you ordained them as priests and gave them the power to ordain other priests until the end of time. This we believe, and we are ready to lay down our lives for this faith. Amen.

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1. Council of Trent, *Decree on the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist*, Denzinger 874 (1636).
  2. Fourth Roman Council, *The Most Holy Eucharist*: Denzinger 755 (700).
  3. Werner Gossens, "L'Eglise Corps du Christ" (Paris. 4949), 61-63.

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## The Real Presence

*Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J.*

When Pope Paul VI published his now historic Encyclical *Mysterium Fidei* on the Real Presence, he reminded especially us priests, that there is a crisis of faith regarding the Eucharist and that Catholics had better awaken to the fact. Otherwise they are liable to be swept off their feet by subtle theology and their faith in the Eucharist will be weakened - if not destroyed - by current assaults on this cardinal mystery of Catholic Christianity.

Somewhere near the center of the theological controversy about which the Pope warned us is precisely the question that no Catholic should raise, namely, "Is the Holy Eucharist Presence *or* Reality, or is it, as the Church teaches us, Presence and Reality?"

There is more at stake here than meets the eye.

My purpose will be to defend the following thesis: that the Holy Eucharist is Jesus Christ, who is in the Blessed Sacrament both as Reality and as Presence. He is in the Eucharist as Reality because the Eucharist is Jesus Christ. He is in the Eucharist as Presence because through the Eucharist He affects us and we are in contact with Him - depending on our faith and devotion to the Savior living really in our midst.

## Eucharist as Reality

There have been before modern times two major crises of faith in the Real Presence in Catholic history.

The first crisis occurred in the early Middle Ages when theological speculators, mainly in France, raised doubts about the reality of the Blessed Sacrament. The first crisis reached a peak in the person of one Berengarius of Tours who died in 1088 A.D.

Berengarius denied the possibility of substantial change in the elements of bread and wine and refused to admit that the body of Christ exists corporeally on the altar. His argument was that Christ cannot be brought down from heaven before the Last Judgment. He held that Christ's body, which exists only in heaven, is effective for humanity through its sacramental counterpart or type and that Christ therefore is not really in the Eucharist except, as he said, ideally.

Pope Gregory VII ordered Berengarius to subscribe to a profession of faith that has become the cornerstone of Catholic Eucharistic piety. It was the Church's first definitive statement of what had always been believed but not always so clearly understood. It is a declaration of faith in the Eucharist as unquestionable and objective and unqualified Reality.

"I believe in my heart and openly profess that the bread and wine placed upon the altar are, by the mystery of the sacred prayer and the words of the Redeemer, substantially changed into the true and life-giving flesh and blood of Jesus Christ our Lord, and that after the consecration there is present the true body of Christ which was born of the Virgin and offered up for the salvation of the world, hung on the cross and now sits at the right hand of the Father, and that there is present the true blood of Christ which flowed from His side. They are present not only by means of a sign and of the efficacy of the sacrament, but also in the very reality and truth of their nature and substance."

Words could not be clearer. If reality means actuality, and if actuality means objectivity, then the Catholic faith believes that the Christ who is in the Eucharist is the Christ of history, the one who was conceived at Nazareth, born at Bethlehem, died and rose from the dead at Jerusalem, and is now seated at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty. It is the Christ who will call us when we pass out of time into eternity. It is the Christ who will appear at the end of the world to judge the living and the dead. It is the Christ who is the Omega of the universe and the goal of human destiny.

Five centuries after Berengarius arose the second crisis of faith in the Eucharist at the time of the Protestant Reformation. Again, much the same objections were raised and theories disseminated as in the Berengarian controversy. And once again the Church countered at the Council of Trent to revindicate the Reality of the Christ who is in the Blessed Sacrament.

The Tridentine proposition of faith is not unlike that required of Berengarius a half millennium before. "The holy council teaches," declared Trent, "and openly and straightforwardly professes that in the Blessed Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist after the consecration of the bread and wine, our Lord Jesus Christ, true God

and true man, is truly, really and substantially contained under the perceptible species of bread and wine." But then Trent added, with characteristic vigor, that this is the plain meaning of Christ's words when at the Last Supper He said, "This is My body. This is the chalice of My blood." Consequently the faithful were told "it is an infamy that contentious evil men should distort these words into fanciful, imaginary figures of speech that deny the truth about the body and blood of Christ, contrary to the universal understanding of the Church."

The Reality of Christ in the Eucharist therefore is no figure of speech. It is no fanciful rhetoric. It is, in the clearest words that can be expressed, the Incarnation extended into space and time. It is literally the Emmanuel made flesh - the God-man who is here and now living in our midst.

## The Crisis of Today

Four Centuries after the Council of Trent the Church is now in another crisis of Eucharistic faith and specifically of faith in the Real Presence.

Palpable evidence of such a crisis is seen in the practical disappearance in not a few dioceses of the Forty Hours Devotion; the corresponding disappearance of Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament; the complete revision of constitutions of once flourishing contemplative institutes that specialized in worship of the Blessed Sacrament exposed on the altar, the widespread neglect of showing any of the customary signs of reverence to Christ's Real Presence in the tabernacle; the removal of the tabernacle in churches to some obscure and unobtrusive place where the Real Presence is isolated from even possible devotion by the faithful; the mounting literature in still nominally Catholic circles that seldom touches on the Real Presence or that explains it in a way congenial to Protestants who do not believe in Christ's corporeal presence in the Eucharist, but totally incompatible with the historic faith of Catholicism; the dissemination of religious education textbooks, teacher's manuals, and study guides that may make an apologetic mention of the physical presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament but leave a distinct impression that this presence is peripheral to Catholic faith and practice and is certainly not a cardinal mystery of the Church founded by Jesus Christ.

Although seldom adverted to, part of the same crisis about the Real Presence is the contemporary desacramentalization of the Catholic priesthood. Priests are said to be essentially preachers of the word or ministers of the Gospel or organizers of Christian communities, or spokesmen of the poor or defenders of the oppressed or social leaders or political catalysts or academic scholars or theological appraisers of the faith of believers.

So they are. But is that all? And is that the primary purpose of the Catholic priesthood? No. The primary meaning of the priesthood is its relationship to the Eucharist - as Reality, as Sacrament and Sacrifice. And among these three primarily as Reality, made possible by priestly consecration.

Once again as in previous ages the Church's magisterium has reaffirmed the Real Presence but in accents and with nuances that were not called for in previous times.

Pope Paul VI in *Mysterium Fidei* was concerned about those who in spoken and written word "spread abroad opinions which disturb the faithful and fill their minds with no little confusion about matters of faith."

Among these opinions was and is the theory that so redefines the meaning of the Eucharistic Presence as to obscure, if not deny, the fact of the Eucharistic Reality. It is as though someone said "I believe in the Eucharistic Presence but not as Reality, or as Reality which is only presence and not objective actuality."

## Eucharist as Presence

This brings us to the second dimension of our subject: the Eucharist as Presence.

The moment we hear the word "Presence" we think of a personal relationship between two or more people. We are present to someone or someone is present to us when we are aware of them and they of us; when we have them on our minds and hearts, as they think of us and sense a kinship and affection for us.

We are not exactly present to stones and trees nor they to us. So that presence implies rational beings.

Presence, as such, also transcends space and time. St. Paul or St. Augustine may be present to me although they are long since dead and although they are not physically where I am physically. They can be present to me mentally, volitionally, or as we say spiritually.

She can be in New York and he in San Francisco. Yet as soon (and as often) as he thinks of her with love, she is present to him. And whenever she does the same he is present to her, reaching over the distance of miles and irrespective of the fact that neither of them is where the other is in body. No matter - they are with each other in spirit.

Presence therefore does not deny physical reality, because two people can be both near to each other in body and intimately united in spirit. But neither does presence require nearness in body. It rather stresses intimacy of mind and heart.

Herein lies at once the dignity and danger of some current theories about the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. There are those who laudably emphasize the subjective aspect of Christ's presence but at the expense of the objective reality.

Let me not be misunderstood. There is great need, even crucial need, to talk about and act upon the awareness of Christ in the Eucharist and to raise our sentiments of love toward Him. But this cannot be at the expense of ignoring or transmitting the prior fact that Christ is actually in the Eucharist, that in the words of the Church's solemn teaching He is "contained under the perceptible species of bread and wine." What was bread and wine after the words of consecration is no longer bread and wine but a living, physical, bodily - in a word, the real - Jesus Christ.

We might then say that the Eucharistic Presence of Christ is at once a reality and a relationship. It is a reality because Christ really is in the Eucharist. So that the Real Presence of Christ postulates on faith the real absence of bread and wine. He *is* now where before the consecration *were* bread and wine. They are gone and He is there. What before was real bread and wine is now only the external properties of bread and wine. He is here in the Eucharist truly present. They are no longer present but only their species or, as we say, appearances.

Transubstantiation is a fact of faith and all the twisted criticism of the Church's doctrine as being Hellenistic or Aristotelian is learned naiveté. For the soul that believes, this is no Hellenism or philosophical terminology. It is

the expression of truth. In Greek equivalents the words of institution institute a *meta-ousiosis*. The ousia or being of bread and wine become the ousia or being of what constitutes Jesus Christ - body, blood, soul and divinity. In a word, in the Eucharist is present the *totus Christus* just as truly as He was present on earth in Palestine and as He is now in heaven. It is the total Christ in the fullness of what makes Christ Christ with no objective difference between who He was then (in the first century on earth) and who He is now (in the twentieth century on earth). Jesus Christ is [in New York] as He is also everywhere where a duly ordained priest has changed bread and wine into the body and blood of the Savior.

## Taken for Granted

Having said all of this, however, and how it needs repeating in today's confused Catholic world, we are not finished yet. As so often happens, error arises among men because they have been neglecting the truth. The hydra of Communism is partly God's visitation for the neglect by Christians of their practice of communal love.

So, too, with the Eucharist. Too many Catholics including priests had taken the Real Presence for granted. They complacently assumed that Christ is in the Eucharist and they proceeded to leave Him there. Empty churches, empty chapels, seldom a worshiper before the tabernacle and seldom a Eucharistic thought among millions of believers who would be offended if told they were ignoring the greatest Reality in the universe right in their midst.

These are not the words of mysticism or of poetry. They are the language of faith.

What to do? What we need today, in the present crisis regarding the Eucharist, is another Francis of Assisi raised by God to remind the world of his day of what a priest is and what his words of consecration can produce in this valley of tears.

Francis, as we know, was never ordained to the priesthood. But he had an extraordinary reverence for priests because he saw them as the divinely enabled consecrators of the Holy Eucharist.

In his last will and testament, Francis wrote what we today in our sophisticated age of agnosticism need to hear and listen to.

"God inspires me," he said, "with such great faith in priests who live according to the laws of the holy Church of Rome, because of their dignity, that if they persecuted me, I should still be ready to turn to them for aid. I do this because in this world I cannot see the most high Son of God with my own eyes, except for His most holy Body and Blood which they alone administer to others."

Francis concluded on a superlative tone that was not customary with him.

"Above everything else" - that is, more important than anything else he could urge upon his followers - "above everything else, I want this most holy Sacrament to be honored and venerated and reserved in places that are richly ornamented."

This is the simple Poverello whose name has become synonymous with total poverty, even to destitution in imitation of his poor Master. But it is also the mystic seer who saw more clearly than most of his contemporaries who it was who dwells among us in the Blessed Sacrament. It is, in Francis's words, "the most high Son of God" in human form who is always here in Reality, but He is not always present to us in spirit. We

do not always honor and venerate Him reserved in the Eucharist in places which are richly ornamented, not so-much in silver and gold as ornamented in the acts of faith, hope and love that reach out to Jesus who is constantly reaching out to us. That is why He is here; that we might also be where He is, united with Him in spirit as He has united Himself to us in body - as a prelude to that union where the Eucharist will be unveiled and where vision will replace what faith now tells us is true, because truth became incarnate to teach us how much God loves the sons and daughters of the human family.

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## Transubstantiation

*by Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J.*

### Objection:

The term "transubstantiation" depends upon an outdated concept of medieval scholastic philosophy. Today, we must speak of "transfinalization" or "transignification" of the bread and wine. The meaning or sign of the bread and wine changes, but not the matter.

### Reply:

Somewhere near the center of the crisis in the Catholic Church today is confusion about the meaning of the Real Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist. Pope Paul VI recognized this crisis before the close of the Second Vatican Council. He identified the two principal errors about the Real Presence that were already current in his day. The errors were capsulized in two words, "transfinalization" and "transignification."

Transfinalization is the view of Christ's presence in the Eucharist that the purpose or finality of the bread and wine is changed by the words of consecration. They are said to serve a new *function*, as sacred elements that arouse the faith of the people in the mystery of Christ's redemptive love.

Transignification is the view of Christ's presence in the Eucharist which holds that the meaning or significance of the bread and wine is changed by the words of consecration. The consecrated elements are said to signify all that Christians associate with the Last Supper; they have a higher value than merely food for the body.

Both transfinalization and transignification were condemned by Pope Paul VI in the encyclical *Mysterium fidei* which he published in 1965.

Transubstantiation is not an outmoded concept of medieval scholastic philosophy. It is an article of faith defined by the Council of Trent as the "wonderful and singular conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the body, and the whole substance of the wine into the blood" of Christ.

The term transubstantiation is taken from the Latin words *trans* (change) and *substantia* (substance). This term was incorporated into the decree of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. However, its antiquity goes back to the early Greek Fathers of the Church who used the word *meta-ousiosis*. Literally, this means change of one *ousia* or being—that of bread and wine—into another *ousia* or being, that of Christ's living body and blood.

As understood by the Catholic Church, transubstantiation means that the whole substance of bread and wine cease to exist at the consecration at Mass. What we must be very clear about is that it is the whole substance of bread and wine which becomes the whole humanity of Christ. It is not only that the substance of bread and wine becomes the substance of Christ's body and blood. No. The substance of bread and wine becomes everything which makes Christ Christ.

Normally we speak of the substance of anything as that which makes a thing what it is. With transubstantiation, however, the substance of bread and wine becomes everything which Christ is. After transubstantiation, the physical properties of bread and wine remain. But the "itness" or "thingness" of bread and wine ceases to exist. What had been the substance of bread and wine now becomes the whole Christ, in the words of the Council of Trent, the *totus Christus*.

Is Christ, therefore, present in the Holy Eucharist with everything that makes Him who He is? Yes. In other words, it is not just the substance of Christ's humanity which becomes present on the altar through transubstantiation. It is Jesus Christ whole and entire.

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## The Sacrifice of the Mass

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We know that in Sacred Writing and in the teachings of the Church, the Mass has acquired a variety of synonymous names. It is called the Eucharistic Sacrifice, the Eucharistic Liturgy, or simply, the Liturgy; it is the Eucharistic celebration, the Holy Sacrifice, or the Sacrifice of the Altar.

All of this reflects the richness of mystery revealed to us by Christ when He instituted the Mass on the night before He died. It also indicates that there has been a remarkable development of doctrine regarding the Mass. We know of course that revelation itself has been, as we believe, completed at the end of the Apostolic Age. But there is such a thing as the Church's growth in understanding the meaning of what has been revealed. Development of doctrine, therefore, means progress in the understanding of the mysteries of the Faith, here of the mystery of the Mass. The modern liturgical movement, which the Second Vatican Council developed to a degree never before known in the history of the Church, is only a reflection and expression of a development of doctrine. The Church now more clearly and deeply understands what the Mass means and desires that this deeper understanding reflect itself in the lives of the faithful.

My plan is to see something of the riches of faith revealed to us in the mystery of the Mass as sacrifice. It is sacrifice not once but many times over, as we should remind ourselves: a sacrifice of propitiation, of petition, of praise, of gratitude, and of love. And all the while, in reflecting on the mystery of the Mass from these different perspectives, we should apply the insights to ourselves.

## **How is the Mass a Sacrifice?**

Before we begin to reflect on each of these different perspectives of the Mass, we might ask ourselves and briefly answer, "How is the Mass a sacrifice?" In general, any sacrifice is the surrender of something precious to the deity in whom the person or people believe. In this sense, sacrifice is perhaps the most common denominator of man's religion. All religions have sacrifice insofar as they believe in any transcendent being, or for that matter, beings. They also practice sacrifice whereby they give up or destroy, or do without, or give away something they like that is precious to them, in response to or recognition of the deity in whom they believe.

The sacrifice of the Mass began at the Last Supper and it ended on Calvary. It began at the Last Supper because it was there, surrounded by the Twelve, that the Savior did two things. He first transformed the elements of bread and wine into His own Body and Blood and by separately consecrating each element, signifying the separation of His Body and Blood that would be the expression of His death on the next day. He therefore both transubstantiated bread and wine into Himself and He offered Himself to His heavenly Father.

That first Mass began in the upper chamber in Jerusalem; it finished when Christ died on the Cross. But as we believe, He not only did this Himself but gave to His Apostles, and through them to their successors until the end of time, the power to do the same. They therefore were ordained priests on Holy Thursday night and by the laying on of hands over the centuries, other priests have been ordained.

But now an important qualification before we begin our more particular analytic reflections. Where Christ, from the Last Supper to Calvary sacrificed only Himself in His own physical person, once He died (and because He had anticipated and had given the Apostles the power to do the same) the Mass since Calvary is not only Christ's sacrifice of Himself, but it is also the sacrifice of ourselves. The Mass now, unlike Calvary, is not only the oblation of Jesus in His own physical person; it is the oblation of Him as Head of the Mystical Body and of us, His members. He is then making the sacrifice in the Mass of Himself and us and is bidding us to join in sentiment by offering ourselves along with Him, once offered and now continuing to offer Himself on our altars.

Consequently the Church bids us say: the Mass is the sacrifice of the Mystical Body, Head and members – the Head first. It is Christ reenacting just what He did on Calvary though now His part of the sacrifice is unbloody, because He can no longer die. Ah, but ours can and should be quite bloody, whether by the shedding of the blood of our bodies if it is God's will, but certainly by the shedding of the blood of our spirits. So, it is He and we together, offering the Eucharistic Sacrifice.

Having said that as a backdrop, we wish now to reflect not only doctrinally on the Faith, but ascetically insofar as we are to learn from the Faith what we should do about it. The Mass is not merely to be believed, it is to be lived; and we live the Mass insofar as we live lives of sacrifice.

# What are the Different Ways in Which the Mass is a Sacrifice?

The questions that we now ask ourselves is, “What are the different ways in which the Mass is a sacrifice?” And because it is our sacrifice, “What are the different ways in which we, along with Christ, are to offer ourselves with Him to the heavenly Father?” We begin by observing the obvious. There is of course only one sacrifice of the Mass, the same today that has been offered ever since Calvary. But, while the sacrifice qua sacrifice in reference to God is only one, it can and does have different purposes from our viewpoint for which it may and should be offered. We used to talk about the different ends of the Mass. Even the word was unfortunate, “ends”. So what’s an end? The end is the edge of something. Yes. But the end, properly speaking, is the purpose. It is the motive, or reason why something is done. There are, we believe, five purposes, each one enveloping the others. We distinguish them in mind. In reality, every Mass is always all five; yet for our purpose of reflection, we should separately meditate on each to see how differently we are to practice sacrifice in union with the sacrifice of the Mass. Given different purposes there will be different volitional responses.

We speak with the Church about the Mass as having different motives for which we unite ourselves (our oblation) with the oblation of the Savior on the altar. These purposes are not the same, differing according to the volitional motive or stimulus that Christ has and that we now have for making the sacrifice.

Before we begin reflecting in more detail, let me say that no one makes any sacrifice without a purpose; hence the importance of strongly convincing ourselves that we have not one, but many purposes for offering sacrifice, always joining our oblation with Christ’s.

## The Mass is a Sacrifice of Propitiation for Sin

First, the Mass is a propitiation for sin. On Christ’s side, when He offered Himself on Calvary or now offers Himself in the Mass, the sacrifice as a propitiation for sin cannot be for His own sins. He is sinless but we are sinners. Consequently, while His purpose in offering the Mass is to expiate the sins of mankind, it is not as though the Mass adds to Calvary because man’s sins have been expiated as to merit; but while they have been expiated in the sense that Christ merited all the graces that mankind needs to be saved, there must continue to be sacrifice. Christ wants it in order to apply these merits – this means especially to dispose sinners to receive the merits which He gained on the cross.

We however, when we offer the Mass as a propitiation for sin, clearly begin with our own sins. We are first of all sinners in having a sinful nature, so we offer the Mass as a sacrifice in order to obtain grace from God to gain more mastery of this sinful nature than we have. The Church has defined that the Mass is the most powerful means we have for reducing concupiscence. It is especially through the Mass that our passions are mastered; that our evil tendencies are controlled; that the risings of our fallen nature are kept in check. Also, when we offer the Mass, we offer it in expiation for our past sins. Haven’t our sins been forgiven? Yes they have, but we know there is such a thing as expiating something that has already been forgiven, by making up the debt that we owe because we have sinned. There is a debt of penalty for sin. Our union of sacrifice with the Mass reduces the punishment that we have deserved for our sins.

Saint Leonard observed that except for the Mass being offered on thousands of altars throughout the world, the world by now would long ago have been destroyed because of its sins.

## The Mass is a Sacrifice of Petition

Secondly, the Mass is a sacrifice of petition for our needs. How much we need! Although there are physical needs of which we are painfully conscious, actually they, whether of body or of emotion, are only God's ways of reminding us of our deeper, spiritual needs. In a word, we need grace – light for the mind, strength for the will. It is not only grace to save our souls but it is especially grace to grow in holiness.

Saint Ignatius put into the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus this statement at the head of the means by which the Society would both survive and do its work for the good of souls: "The most important and powerful means that the Society of Jesus has for obtaining the grace it needs is from the Sacrifice of the Mass." He led the way when there was a question of getting the Society's Constitutions approved, as there were serious doubts as to whether they would be approved. He ordered the priests, just a handful, to offer three thousand Masses without asking how long it would take. "I don't care how long it takes! Three thousand Masses!" Well, they said them. Thanks to those Masses the Order was approved. It is the only Religious Order in the history of the Church that has been approved not only by the Pope but by a Solemn Eucumenical Council, the Council of Trent. And ever since, every priest in the Order is ordered (Saint Ignatius started the pattern) to offer about four Masses a month for the intention of the Father General. Since we have about seventeen-thousand priests, that means seventeen-thousand times fifty Masses offered each year for the Society of Jesus and her multitudinous, desperate needs.

The Mass is the most powerful means we have to obtain the graces we need. It is a sacrifice of praise; in other words, it is a sacrifice of adoration of the Divine Majesty. We adore the Divine Majesty and Christ in His human nature, because Christ was, and is, priest as man. It is the human nature of Christ (Jesus as man) and we as human beings who together offer the Mass, Christ, His, and we ours, in acknowledgment of God's greatness compared to our nothingness; His Wisdom compared to our plain, crass stupidity; His goodness compared with our wickedness; His holiness compared with our unholiness. God not only desires this, He demands it. He demands adoration. We might say the Mass as a sacrifice of praise is the first commandment of the Decalogue lived out in the Christian world.

You might ask, "Why consider a sacrifice, any sacrifice, and least of all the Eucharistic Sacrifice as an expression of adoration?" Behind the explanation of why, stands something that is so deep and ultimately impenetrable that only God fully understands it. But He wants us to acknowledge His Divine Majesty, His Godhead, by our consciously and deliberately giving up, putting away, destroying, or theologically speaking, immolating something of ourselves which we like; something that we call either 'us' or 'part of us'.

This is the heart of what the Mass is all about. Because we are human and have such a propensity to self-sufficiency, God demands as proof and evidence of our sincere adoration that we give up ourselves; as proof of our contingency, which means our total dependence on Him, that we let go, destroy, put away; or as the ancient Romans did with their precious wine, pour it out; or as the Hebrews did, slay their sheep and oxen, and allow their blood to spill over the altar. It is in this that the essence of sacrifice consists. We somehow immolate ourselves as evidence of our truly acknowledging God's Allness and our nothingness, and this kind of acknowledgment God requires. The difference (and what a difference!) between other sacrifices as those of the Old Law and this sacrifice, is that it is not only we who are doing this, but God who became man in order that He might make a whole burnt offering, a holocaust of His humanity; and by dying prove He is man. He wants us to join in that acknowledgment of God's total greatness and our total dependence so that any reluctance on our part to give up of ourselves to God (thank God we are not so conscious when we do it) is a failure in this acknowledgment.

## The Mass is a Sacrifice of Gratitude

The Mass is a sacrifice of gratitude. There is such a thing as thanks-thinking, where frankly a lot of people stop. Somebody does them a favor and they feel grateful. Others go further; they also express their gratitude in words and that is better. But better than thanks-thinking or thanks-saying is thanks-giving. In gratitude for all the good things that God has done for us, what will we do? In acknowledgment of all the good things that He has done for us, we will do good things for Him. You might say we can't give God anything. Yes and no. Truly, we cannot enrich God, otherwise He would not be God. He needs nothing. But saying that is not the same as saying that God does not want anything. He wants us to do good things in order to show our appreciation for the good things He has done for us. How instinctive this is in the human heart! Christmas cards are a notorious example. People keep a check list of the people they have received cards from the previous year so they will be sure to send cards to those who gave them greetings the year before. One of the deepest instincts in human nature is to do good to those who have done good to us. So the Sacrifice of the Mass means that we not only assist at the Mass but that we live it by doing good things for God. Why? Just because God has been so good to us.

## The Mass is a Sacrifice of Love

Finally and in a way summarily, the Sacrifice of the Mass is the great sacrifice of love. We know what love means, seeking to please the one we love, giving ourselves to the one we love. In the language of all nations and understood by all peoples is the fact that when the love is genuine, it is shown in sacrifice – so much so that if we claim we love God and do not sacrifice for Him, our love is not genuine. It is here especially that in joining ourselves with Christ in the Mass we give ourselves up: in Christ's words, we deny ourselves, which is not just mortification of the body or of the palate. It is the total giving up of ourselves to the will of God. We live out the Sacrifice of the Mass as an oblation of love to the extent to which we surrender our wills to the will of God. That is real love; all else is either a derivative from this or it is not love.

One final observation. Each of the aspects of the Mass that we have considered briefly, covering a vast panorama of faith, should be for all of us a distinctive motive for not only attending Mass or just living the Mass, but of growing in holiness through the Mass. There are many ways of doing this. May I just suggest that in every Mass we attend, we reflect even if it is just for a moment on one or more of these perspectives. Some are in the habit of spending a week or even a month on uniting themselves with Christ in the Mass as a sacrifice of gratitude; or as a sacrifice of petition, and they specify the petitions. It is well to be definite, particular, specific in order that both our assistance at the Mass that we attend, and in the almost half-million Masses that are offered throughout the Catholic world each day, might obtain for us what God wants to give us - the fullness of His grace through the principle channel of salvation which is the reenactment of His own sacrifice on Calvary, which is to be relived by us every day.

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