

SESSION FOUR: THE DOCTRINE OF TRANSUBSTANTIATION AND THE CONTROVERSIALISTS

“He fed them with the finest wheat and satisfied them with honey from the rock.”
(Ps. 81:17)

“I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now.
But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth. He will not speak on his own, but he will speak what he hears, and will declare to you the things that are coming.” (St John 16:13)

The term ***trans-substantiation*** (*trans+substantia*) is a word of Latin origin, which may be a translation of the Greek word ***metousiosis*** (*meta+ousia*), i.e, a description of, or name for, the change or conversion of the essence or reality or nature of a thing to something else. Both words are used to describe the same mystery of faith: the conversion or change of bread and wine to the Body and Blood of Christ through the Eucharistic miracle of the Altar. In the Catholic sense, transubstantiation is the official theological expression to describe how the Real Presence of Christ becomes present to us in the Holy Sacrament and which affirms the doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.

“By the consecration, the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ is brought about. Under the consecrated species of bread and wine Christ himself, living and glorious, is present in a true, real, and substantial manner: his Body and his Blood, with his soul and his divinity.”
From the **Catechism of the Catholic Church** (Part II, 1413)

To the present time, the Catholic Church establishes this truth by her received authority as the Supreme Teacher of Christians on earth. Such explains the meaning of the gestures and words of Christ at the Last Supper and the consistent understanding of those words by the Church throughout the ages.

"At the Last Supper, on the night when He was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice of His Body and Blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the Sacrifice of the Cross throughout the centuries until He should come again, and so to entrust to His beloved Spouse, the Church, a memorial of His Death and Resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet in which Christ is eaten, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us."
From the documents of the **Second Vatican Council, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy**, 1963A.D.

In the middle of the controversies of the 16th century, when every Catholic doctrine of faith and precept of morality seemed to be under attack by one faction or another under the same premise of alleged ‘Biblical superiority’ or ‘the Bible alone’ over the

teachings of churchmen and saints, the bishops and theologians of the Catholic Church took a lengthy review of all of the ideas of the protestant reformationists, including those subjects associated with the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. The nature of the Real Presence, the powers of the Priesthood of the New Covenant, the question of Communion under both kinds (consecrated hosts distributed with the chalice), the efficacy of the Catholic Mass for souls living and deceased, and the proper language for usage at worship and prayer. Premises asserted in protestant books were quoted verbatim for refutation and rejected by the Council in favor of the formulation of the traditional doctrines of Christendom. For the second session of the Council of Trent, against a myriad of protestant opinions, the fathers of the renowned ecumenical council summarized Catholic teaching on the Holy Eucharist.

"Because Christ our Redeemer said that it was truly his body that he was offering under the species of bread, it has always been the conviction of the Church of God, and this holy Council now declares again, that by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation."

From the decrees of **The Council of Trent**, given in 1551A.D.

By this decree, the Council of Trent repeated and spoke again what the Fourth Lateran Council had decreed over three centuries before as the correct and true doctrine of the Church. One of the great ecumenical councils of the High Middle Ages, held at Rome in the 13th century, its canons articulated and confirmed the doctrine and discipline of the Church and, in so doing, utilized the term 'transubstantiation' as the verb to describe the conversion of bread and wine to the Body and Blood of Christ:

"And finally, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God made flesh by the entire Trinity, conceived with the co-operation of the Holy Ghost of Mary ever Virgin, made true man, composed of a rational soul and human flesh, one Person in two natures, pointed out more clearly the way of life. Who according to His divinity is immortal and impassable, according to His humanity was made passable and mortal, suffered on the cross for the salvation of the human race, and being dead descended into hell, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven. But He descended in soul, arose in flesh, and ascended equally in both; He will come at the end of the world to judge the living and the dead and will render to the reprobate and to the elect according to their works. Who all shall rise with their own bodies, which they now have that they may receive according to their merits, whether good or bad, the latter eternal punishment with the devil, the former eternal glory with Christ.

There is one Universal Church of the faithful, outside of which there is absolutely no salvation. In which there is the same priest and sacrifice, Jesus Christ, whose body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the forms of bread and wine; the bread being changed (*transsubstantiatio*) by divine power into the body, and the wine into the blood, so that to realize the mystery of unity we may

receive of Him what He has received of us. And this sacrament no one can effect except the priest who has been duly ordained in accordance with the keys of the Church, which Jesus Christ Himself gave to the Apostles and their successors.”

From **Canon One, the Fourth Lateran Council**, 1215A.D.

These explicit decrees and canons of the Church were necessary to combat and extinguish errors and outright heresies, which had arisen from time to time in the course of church history on questions about Eucharistic theology. Naturally, theologians were always concerned to make clear and precise statements about this most important Sacrament within the life of the Church. Much of the past discussion is quite technical with issues of language, especially definitions of words from Latin and Greek, essential to understanding these theological debates in the Middle Ages and beyond. A good example is the definition of the term *corpus*, ‘body’ in Latin:

- 1) The historical Body of Christ as the physical/spiritual body of Jesus (the Incarnate Word of God and 2nd Divine Person of the Holy Trinity)
- 2) The Church as the Body of Christ (the mystical body Christ as the extension of His life, comprised of the clergy and laity of the visible Church on earth)
- 3) The holy Eucharist as the Body of Christ (the Sacrament of the ‘living bread come down from heaven’ to nourish and nurture the souls of Christians)

Each of these concepts are meaningful, interconnected, and important for understanding Holy Communion, since Christ is fully present in the holy Sacrament by virtue of His historical and metaphysical dimensionality, because the grace of the holy Sacrament builds up confirms the Church as the Body of Christ, and for the reason that the holy Sacrament provides true food the People of God, the ‘holy bread of Life and the chalice of Eternal Salvation,’ to give strength and virtue to the worthy recipient thereof.

In the development of the Church’s public prayer, ceremonial, and worship, in the course of the centuries from the Apostolic Age, various challenges to Eucharistic doctrine have been confronted with Magisterial Teaching from Councils, local synods, heroic bishops of great faith, saints, and scholars. These Catholic truths have often been incorporated into the Church’s liturgy, especially when judged necessary to affirm the mystery of faith. Several examples are noted:

1) Pneumatomachiamism was a late 4th century heresy against the dogma of the Holy Spirit as the third Divine Person of the Holy Trinity. To refute this serious error, the Eastern rites incorporated numerous prayers into the liturgical rite of the Eucharistic, including the invocation of the Holy Spirit known as the *epiclesis*. It is an invocation in which the priest/celebrant asks the Holy Spirit to infuse the sacred gifts with grace to unify and fortify the Church. The First Council of Nicaea (325A.D.) and the First of Constantinople (381A.D.) recognized the Holy Spirit as the Third Divine Person of the Most Holy Trinity, the gift of the Father and the Son to the Church. The Eastern rites especially confronted this heresy by adding the *epiclesis*

invocations to directly call upon the Holy Spirit within the context of the Eucharistic prayer the *anaphora*).

2) Iconoclasts, 8th century, literally 'image destroyers' were heretics who preached against the use of sacred art and images in the Church (probably under the nefarious influence of Islamic belief). The Second Council of Nicaea (787A.D.) condemned iconoclasm and approved the employment of more and more sacred images and holy icons to tell the stories of the Bible and invoke the intercessions of the Saints. As a result, such decoration within church interiors was deemed most appropriate and even incorporated into liturgical worship.

3) Berengar of Tours, 11th century heretic, began to teach against the literal interpretation of the Eucharistic Presence of Christ and sent a letter to that effect to the theologian Lanfranc, Abbot of Bec in Normandy. Lanfranc made the letter known to various bishops and Berengar was summoned to answer for his assertions at local councils and at Rome. By the end of the controversy, Berengar had repented and accepted the formulation "the bread and wine that are placed on the altar are through the mystery of the sacred prayer and words of our Redeemer substantially changed into the true and proper life giving flesh and blood of Jesus our Lord," dying in exile at an island off of the coast of France. Because of this provocation, Lanfranc clarified several important issues, including that the species (the appearance) of bread and that of wine contain in themselves the fullness of the Real Presence of Christ and are not separated as distinct elements of Christ's Body and Blood.

4) The Cathars or Cathari of 12/13th century were heretics who attempted to create their own 'church' in a region of southern France and represented a revival of Manichean 'dualism'— that the 'spirit' (good) is opposed to the 'body' (evil) with the parallel precept that the essence of religion is spiritual and must necessarily reject whatever is material. Such a heresy likewise generated a refusal to accept Catholic teaching on many subjects, including the Holy Eucharist, and the authority of the Catholic kings. Pope Innocent III fought these errors by promulgation of the Canons of the Fourth Lateran Council and also wrote a famous treatise, 'On the Sacred Mystery of the Altar,' through which he upheld the Doctrine of the Real Presence and explained matters about the Catholic ceremonial, including the use of incense, liturgical colors for vestments, the particular types of vestments to be worn, and the roles undertaken by bishops, priests, deacons, and acolytes during the celebration of Mass. In addition, his approval of the Franciscan Order of priests and brothers assisted in the dissemination of the codified Roman Missal for pastoral usage in the missionary efforts of the Church against the heretics and to convert foreign peoples.

5) In the 16th century, a number of dissenters under the guise of reformation, Luther, Calvin, Wycliffe, and Zwingli, held divergent views on the Holy Eucharist and found themselves hopelessly divided on the meaning of the Biblical texts and the proper understanding of the nature of Holy Communion. The Council of Trent refuted all of their suppositions during its second session and formulated the principles of Catholic Eucharistic doctrine, theology, and practice with integrity to the tradition and clarity in elucidation (1551-1552A.D). For example, multiple genuflections as signs of reverence accompany the liturgical action of the Mass from the consecration of the sacramental elements to their consumption by the priest/celebrant. In the context of Mass, these gestures emphasize those critical

moments in which the Body and Blood of Christ are recognized as the reality of His Divine Presence in our midst.

On the eve of the arrival of so many challenges to the authority of the Catholic Church, Raphael, the great artist of the Italian Renaissance, designed and executed a number of beautiful frescoes at the Vatican, including a masterpiece with the Holy Eucharist as its thematic agenda.



The Adoration/Disputation of the Holy Sacrament by Raphael (completed for the Apostolic Palace at Rome in 1510). Commissioned by Pope Julius II, the 'Disputation' is a true marvel of color, geometry, theology, and devotion centered upon the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in celebration of the Faith of the Catholics in the miracle of the Altar. It depicts the adulation of the Holy Eucharist as the object of worship and awe of the worshippers before the glory of the exalted person of Christ in Heaven and on earth! In the upper panel, we see the Holy Trinity, the host of angels in heaven, and a semi-circle of saints from the Old and New Testaments, with the Blessed Virgin Mary and St John the Baptist closest to Christ. In the lower part, the Church on earth has gathered around the altar where the Sacred Host, the Body of Christ, is displayed from the monstrance; the great Fathers of the Church, numerous saints, artists, theologians, scholars, and contemporary figures such as Pope Julius II, who commissioned the work for his personal library, seem to grapple to understand the mystery of Faith yet in the final analysis this belief is an Act of Faith that demands complete trust in the Real Presence of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ— for which the young Raphael represents the ultimate attitude of faith as he points to the Sacrament with a fleeting glance at the architect, Bramante, who is trying to work out a solution!

A few quotations follow from great Papal documents which teach great truths on the mystery of the Holy Eucharist:

Pope Leo XIII (deceased 1903A.D.)

“Moreover, in this most admirable Sacrament, which is the chief means whereby men are engrafted on the divine nature, men also find the most efficacious help towards progress in every kind of virtue. And first of all in faith. In all ages faith has been attacked; for although it elevates the human mind by bestowing on it the knowledge of the highest truths, yet because, while it makes known the existence of divine mysteries, it yet leaves in obscurity the mode of their being, it is therefore thought to degrade the intellect. But whereas in past times particular articles of faith have been made by turns the object of attack; the seat of war has since been enlarged and extended, until it has come to this, that men deny altogether that there is anything above and beyond nature. Now nothing can be better adapted to promote a renewal of the strength and fervour of faith in the human mind than the mystery of the Eucharist, the "mystery of faith," as it has been most appropriately called. For in this one mystery the entire supernatural order, with all its wealth and variety of wonders, is in a manner summed up and contained: ‘He hath made a remembrance of His wonderful works, a merciful and gracious Lord; He hath given food to them that fear Him...’ (Psalm 111:4&5). For whereas God has subordinated the whole supernatural order to the Incarnation of His Word, in virtue whereof salvation has been restored to the human race, according to those words of the Apostle; ‘That He might make known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure, which He hath purposed in Him. In the dispensation of the fulness of time, to reestablish all things in Christ, that are in heaven and on earth, in Him’ (Eph. 1:9&10), the Eucharist, according to the testimony of the holy Fathers, should be regarded as in a manner a continuation and extension of the Incarnation. For in and by it the substance of the incarnate Word is united with individual men, and the supreme Sacrifice offered on Calvary is in a wondrous manner renewed, as was signified beforehand by Malachi in the words: ‘In every place there is sacrifice, and there is offered to My name a pure oblation (Mal. 1:11). And this miracle, itself the very greatest of its kind, is accompanied by innumerable other miracles; for here all the laws of nature are suspended; the whole substance of the bread and wine are changed into the Body and the Blood; the species of bread and wine are sustained by the divine power without the support of any underlying substance; the Body of Christ is present in many places at the same time, that is to say, wherever the Sacrament is consecrated. And in order that human reason may the more willingly pay its homage to this great mystery, there have not been wanting, as an aid to faith, certain prodigies wrought in His honour, both in ancient times and in our own, of which in more than one place there exist public and notable records and memorials. It is plain that by this Sacrament faith is fed, in it the mind finds its nourishment, the objections of rationalists are brought to naught, and abundant light is thrown on the supernatural order.”

From the encyclical, *Mirae Caritatis*, 1902A.D.

Pope Pius XII (deceased 1958)

Having described the powers of the ordained priesthood in his encyclical *Mediator of God*, the Holy Father notes the importance of the priestly people in the exercise of liturgical worship:

85. All this has the certitude of faith. However, it must also be said that the faithful do offer the divine Victim, though in a different sense.

86. This has already been stated in the clearest terms by some of Our predecessors and some Doctors of the Church. "Not only," says Innocent III of immortal memory, "do the priests offer the sacrifice, but also all the faithful: for what the priest does personally by virtue of his ministry, the faithful do collectively by virtue of their intention." We are happy to recall one of St. Robert Bellarmine's many statements on this subject. "The sacrifice," he says "is principally offered in the person of Christ. Thus the oblation that follows the consecration is a sort of attestation that the whole Church consents in the oblation made by Christ, and offers it along with Him."

87. Moreover, the rites and prayers of the Eucharistic sacrifice signify and show no less clearly that the oblation of the Victim is made by the priests in company with the people. For not only does the sacred minister, after the oblation of the bread and wine when he turns to the people, say the significant prayer: "Pray brethren, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God the Father Almighty;" but also the prayers by which the divine Victim is offered to God are generally expressed in the plural number: and in these it is indicated more than once that the people also participate in this august sacrifice inasmuch as they offer the same. The following words, for example, are used: "For whom we offer, or who offer up to Thee . . . We therefore beseech thee, O Lord, to be appeased and to receive this offering of our bounded duty, as also of thy whole household. . . We thy servants, as also thy whole people . . . do offer unto thy most excellent majesty, of thine own gifts bestowed upon us, a pure victim, a holy victim, a spotless victim."

88. Nor is it to be wondered at, that the faithful should be raised to this dignity. By the waters of baptism, as by common right, Christians are made members of the Mystical Body of Christ the Priest, and by the "character" which is imprinted on their souls, they are appointed to give worship to God. Thus they participate, according to their condition, in the priesthood of Christ.

From the encyclical, *Mediator Dei*, 1947A.D.

Pope St. Paul VI (deceased 1978A.D.)

There are, however, Venerable Brothers, a number of reasons for serious pastoral concern and anxiety in this very matter that we are now discussing, and because of Our consciousness of Our Apostolic office, We cannot remain silent about them.

False and Disturbing Opinions

10. For We can see that some of those who are dealing with this Most Holy Mystery in speech and writing are disseminating opinions on Masses celebrated in private or on the dogma of transubstantiation that are disturbing the minds of the faithful and causing them no small measure of confusion about matters of faith, just as if it were all right for someone to take doctrine that has already been defined by the Church and consign it to oblivion or else interpret it in such a way as to weaken the genuine meaning of the words or the recognized force of the concepts involved.

11. To give an example of what We are talking about, it is not permissible to extol the so-called "community" Mass in such a way as to detract from Masses that are celebrated privately; or to concentrate on the notion of sacramental sign as if the symbolism—which no one will deny is certainly present in the Most Blessed

Eucharist—fully expressed and exhausted the manner of Christ's presence in this Sacrament; or to discuss the mystery of transubstantiation without mentioning what the Council of Trent had to say about the marvelous conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the Body and the whole substance of the wine into the Blood of Christ, as if they involve nothing more than "transignification," or "transfinalization" as they call it; or, finally, to propose and act upon the opinion that Christ Our Lord is no longer present in the consecrated Hosts that remain after the celebration of the sacrifice of the Mass has been completed.

12. Everyone can see that the spread of these and similar opinions does great harm to belief in and devotion to the Eucharist.

From the encyclical, *Mysterium Fidei*, 1965A.D.

Three years later, the Holy Father issued an apostolic letter to insist on doctrinal integrity for clergy and laity in regard to the Profession of the Faith by affirming the doctrine of the Catholic Church in the strongest terms. This is a section on the Holy Eucharist:

Sacrifice of Calvary

We believe that the Mass, celebrated by the priest representing the person of Christ by virtue of the power received through the Sacrament of Orders, and offered by him in the name of Christ and the members of His Mystical Body, is the sacrifice of Calvary rendered sacramentally present on our altars. We believe that as the bread and wine consecrated by the Lord at the Last Supper were changed into His body and His blood which were to be offered for us on the cross, likewise the bread and wine consecrated by the priest are changed into the body and blood of Christ enthroned gloriously in heaven, and we believe that the mysterious presence of the Lord, under what continues to appear to our senses as before, is a true, real and substantial presence.

Transubstantiation

Christ cannot be thus present in this sacrament except by the change into His body of the reality itself of the bread and the change into His blood of the reality itself of the wine, leaving unchanged only the properties of the bread and wine, which our senses perceive. This mysterious change is very appropriately called by the Church transubstantiation. Every theological explanation which seeks some understanding of this mystery must, in order to be in accord with Catholic faith, maintain that in the reality itself, independently of our mind, the bread and wine have ceased to exist after the Consecration, so that it is the adorable body and blood of the Lord Jesus that from then on are really before us under the sacramental species of bread and wine, as the Lord willed it, in order to give Himself to us as food and to associate us with the unity of His Mystical Body.

The unique and indivisible existence of the Lord glorious in heaven is not multiplied, but is rendered present by the sacrament in the many places on earth where Mass is celebrated. And this existence remains present, after the sacrifice, in the Blessed Sacrament which is, in the tabernacle, the living heart of each of our churches. And it is our very sweet duty to honor and adore in the blessed Host which our eyes see,

the Incarnate Word whom they cannot see, and who, without leaving heaven, is made present before us.

From the Apostolic Letter, **Credo of the People of God**, 1968A.D.

To conclude and summarize with a question of Charles the Bald, grandson of Charlemagne, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, to the theologian and scholar, Paschasius Rabertus: "About that which is received by the mouth of the faithful, namely the Body and Blood of Christ, your Excellency, be It in mystery (*mysterio*) or in truth (*veritate*)?"

The answer of course is both! In mystery, by way of the Sacrament of the Mass, the Holy Eucharist conveys the sanctifying grace of unification with Christ and His Church, fortifying the baptized soul with virtues for the cause of the Kingdom of God. Other Sacraments convey the grace particular to the Sacrament by words, gestures, and outward signs. But, in truth, the Holy Eucharist also conveys the reality of the fullness of Christ's presence through the 'species' or 'accidents' (the mere appearance) of bread and wine, which by transubstantiation (in the power of the Holy Spirit) become the true body and blood, soul and divinity of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

His Real Presence in the Holy Eucharist is spiritual and physical at once, for as much as "He sits at the right hand of the Father" in Heaven, yet is He present to us through the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Because His body is not limited by time and not confined by place; He remains, by virtue of His exalted Person, in the same body that was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the virginal and miraculous conception, born of the Virgin Mary at Bethlehem, the same that walked grew up in Nazareth of Galilee, walked the roads of Judea, and the streets of Jerusalem, the same crucified on Good Friday, arisen on Easter Sunday, and ascended to the glory and majesty of the heavens.

So, we can assert with confidence, the celebration of Holy Mass or the Divine Liturgy (as it is called by the Eastern rites) brings the heights of Heaven to earth and the worthy reception of Holy Communion in turn brings God to our souls, lifting us to the heights of Heaven.

Final thoughts from the Gospel of St. John, chapter 6:51-69—

"I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world."

The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us (his) flesh to eat?"

Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you."

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day.

For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.

Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me.

This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever."

These things he said while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

Then many of his disciples who were listening said, "This saying is hard; who can accept it?"

Since Jesus knew that his disciples were murmuring about this, he said to them, "Does this shock you? What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe."

Jesus knew from the beginning the ones who would not believe and the one who would betray him.

And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by my Father."

As a result of this, many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him.

Jesus then said to the Twelve, "Do you also want to leave?"

Simon Peter answered him, "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God."