

THAT SINGULAR CONVERSION

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"If anyone says that in the sacred and holy sacrament of the Eucharist the substance of the bread and wine remains conjointly with the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and denies that wonderful and singular change of the whole substance of the bread into the body and the whole substance of the wine into the blood, the appearances only of bread and wine remaining, which change the Catholic Church most aptly calls transubstantiation, let him be anathema."¹

When the Catholic Church thus speaks it is not without grave reason. The power to speak with certainty in matters of doctrine is Hers from God through Peter, the rock which Christ Himself made the cornerstone of His Church. We have but to adhere by faith to Her teachings, that is if our faith is strong, but if our faith is weak we need to examine more closely the Divine Authority of the Church. Yet those of us who do adhere firmly to the word of God, proclaimed by His Church, might still find it profitable to consider briefly some aspect of one object of our faith.

The Eucharist is the most powerful of all the sacraments, since in it Christ Himself is contained. Not content with having provided us with His personal friendship during the thirty-three years of His life, He now offers mankind this same loving friendship by His continual presence among us. He makes Himself the object of our faith and our love: by dwelling in the tabernacles of our churches; by offering Himself as a perfect sacrifice in the Mass for the needs of mankind; by joining Himself in a bond of union to those who worthily receive Him. Without the Eucharist, man is bereft of the one perfect source that can elevate him to a level above his nature, join him to the supreme God, give him a spiritual and eternal life.

On the first Holy Thursday, Christ "took bread, blessed it,

¹ *Canons And Decrees Of The Council Of Trent*, Rev. H. J. Schroeder, O.P., Sess. 13, Can. 2, B. Herder Book Co., St. Louis, Mo. 1941, p. 79.

broke it, and gave it to His disciples saying: Take ye and eat ye all of this: For this is My Body: then taking the chalice He blessed it and gave it to His disciples saying: Take ye and drink ye all of this: For this is the Chalice of My Blood, of the new and eternal testament, the mystery of faith which shall be shed for you and for many unto the remission of sins."² "Do this for a commemoration of me."³

Today the priest in the holy sacrifice of the Mass, obedient to Christ, commemorates this twofold consecration of bread and wine. Christ commanded His priests to do this; He gave them the power to accomplish it. The priest as an instrument of God stands in the place of Christ and once again converts bread into Christ's body, wine into Christ's blood. But since the priest is only the instrument of God, it is God's power acting; God's power converting the substance of bread into flesh, the substance of wine into blood. How then does God work this conversion?

The priest is a man, a mere creature, whose powers are limited. He cannot work beyond the capacity of his own nature. He might take wheaten-dough which he already possesses, turn it into a loaf of bread or into biscuit, perhaps even bake a pie. In this manner he would place a new form on the substance of that dough: he would *transform* the dough, but for man to turn that same dough into the substance of a dove or a lamb is obviously beyond his greatest potentialities; neither can he change the substance of dough into the substance of man. Yet, the priest has the power of God in this instant of consecration. Has God then the power to change the substance of bread into the substance of flesh and blood?

God's power over all things can be summarized by saying that He created all things out of nothing. Now if He created all things out of nothing: water, land, air, fire, wheat for bread, grapes for wine, animals with flesh and blood, would His power be useless in the less difficult task of changing one of these into the other? No! Rather we should not wonder at such a change relative to the body of Christ. For in the Incarnation—the assuming of flesh by the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity—God produced the body of Christ from a Virgin. Now it isn't natural that a child be born of a virgin; neither is it natural, but supernatural, that Christ's human flesh should instantaneously be

² New Roman Missal

³ Luke 22, 19.

present at the words of consecration. We may restate these truths thus: God put a new substance where previously there was no substance whatsoever: creation; brought forth a substance from another substance, in a manner above nature: the birth of Christ from a Virgin; now He changes one substance into another substance: bread into the body of Christ, wine into the blood of Christ. This change is not a natural one. It is above the power of nature: it is a supernatural change. It is not a *transformation* of a substance; man himself can accomplish such a change by giving the form of either a biscuit or a pie to the substance of dough, but it is a *transubstantiation*. One substance—bread, is converted into the other substance—flesh; substance trans substance: transubstantiation. This change is like no other in the natural order, for this reason it is called that *singular change or conversion* technically known as transubstantiation.

Granted that this is true, what was bread is now Christ's body and what was wine is now Christ's blood, why do we still experience the presence of bread and wine: why do we see, taste, smell the bread and wine? There are three good reasons why Christ as God willed these appearances to remain. Firstly, because it is not normal for men to eat the flesh of another man or drink his blood, but it becomes acceptable under the appearances of foods we most frequently consume: bread and wine. Hence Christ would conserve man's dignity, since bread is a universal food and wine a standard drink at the meals of many nations. Secondly, if it were evident to all that the faithful ate the body and drank the blood of Him whom they professed to be God, it would be a great occasion of ridicule by infidels. Even the pagans had great reverence for their gods; to those who lacked the faith and a proper understanding of its truths, the destruction of a god by eating would have been wholly ridiculous. Thirdly, the presence of Christ under other appearances, bread and wine, provides a way of gaining merit from the practice of a deeper faith. If Christ were present to our senses in the Eucharist, there would be less merit in devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. Faith is proper to this life and necessary to gain eternal vision.⁴

Yet thoughts arise: only bread can have the appearances of bread, only wine the appearances of wine; how then can Christ's body appear as bread, His blood as wine? God is the creator of all things; if, in the natural order, He placed the appearance of bread

⁴ Cf. *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 75, a. 5c.

into the bread, the appearance of wine (taste, smell etc.) into wine, in the supernatural order He certainly should be able to attach these same appearances to some substance, namely His own flesh and blood. The natural order demands that a child be born of a woman from the seed of a man; God passed by this natural order to give us the Christ child from a Virgin. By His supernatural powers, He passed by the natural order to give us His own (Christ's) body and blood under the appearances of bread and wine.

What condition then does the body and blood of Christ assume at the moment of consecration, i.e. how is Christ present under the appearances of the bread and wine? The Church at the Council of Trent stated that the whole and entire Christ exists under the species of bread, and under whatever part of that species; the whole and entire Christ exists under the species of wine, and under its parts.

By this *singular change*, transubstantiation, the whole and entire Christ is present under the species (appearances) of bread and under the species of wine. Christ said: This is My Body: This is My Blood. When He said: This is My Body, He meant the body which was then visibly present to His disciples. However, the body which was visibly present to His disciples was composed of flesh, bones, nerves, sinew, blood etc. Since this was the true condition of Christ's body when He said: This is My Body, then in all truth the blood of Christ and therefore the entire Christ was present with the body under the appearances of bread alone. When Christ said: This is My Blood, He meant the blood which was then flowing through the veins of His body. In this manner the body of Christ and so the entire Christ was present with the blood under the appearances of wine alone.

The truth of this becomes more manifest when we consider the possibility of having Christ's body without the blood, or Christ's blood without the body. Christ, on Holy Thursday, had given the power of consecration to His disciples. Suppose then that, on Good Friday, as Christ hung dead on the cross, His side pierced and the blood separated from His body, anyone of His disciples would have pronounced the words: This is My Body. According to the true condition of Christ's body the blood was not present but separated from the body: therefore, the blood of Christ would not have been present in this consecration. Today, the body and blood of Christ are united in glory; thus under the consecration of either species, bread or wine, the body and blood are simultaneously present.

The whole and entire Christ is present under whatever part of these species. Whether there is only a small crumb of host or a drop of blood present, the whole and entire Christ is contained. His body,

blood, veins, bones, sinew, all are contained under the smallest part of either species. How? It is evident that the whole of Christ if present in the ordinary way would probably consume a space of approximately six feet; but Christ is not present in the Eucharist in an ordinary way. He is present under the appearances of bread and wine. The substance of bread is not there, but the substance of Christ; the substance of wine is not there, but the substance of Christ. Whatever is contained in the Eucharist is the substance of Christ and all that belongs to Christ is present as His substance. Christ's body, blood, veins, nerves, sinew, all are there.

At first this may seem confusing but consider something similar. We listen for an hour while someone delivers a speech. When it is over we reduce the speech to what all of us commonly refer to as the 'substance' of the speech. Does this 'substance' contain the entire speech? Yes, it does! Under what condition does it contain the speech: line for line, word for word, pause for pause? No! It contains the entire speech substantially. Yet, is all the speech present? It is! Is all the material of the speech present? It is not present as the material—the sentence, the word, the pause—but is somehow contained in the substance of the speech. Neither is the material: bone, nerve, sinew of Christ present materially but it is there substantially under the sacramental species. By this means the whole and entire Christ is present under the smallest host or drop of blood; because no special space is set aside for flesh, neither for blood, nor for bone, nor nerves, but all are a part of the *substance* of Christ, so that wherever there is a particle of the consecrated Christ, there is the entire Christ. The same whole and entire Christ who was born of the Virgin Mary; who, after He crossed the Sea of Galilee, multiplied the loaves of bread that He might expound to mankind the doctrine of heavenly bread, the Eucharist.

"And Jesus said to them: I am the bread of life. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven: that if any man eat of it, he may not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. Then Jesus said to them: Amen, amen, I say unto you: except you eat the flesh of the Son of man drink his blood, you shall not have life in you. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath everlasting life: and I will raise him up in the last day."⁵

⁵ John 6; 48, 50, 51, 64, 55.