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# TRANSUBSTANTIATION AND THE REAL PRESENCE

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IN order to understand what Catholics mean by the Real Presence, it is necessary first to understand what is meant by Transubstantiation.

Take a solid body of any kind, *e. g.*, a piece of stone or wood.

It has shape, size, weight, color, hardness, taste, smell, etc., but not one of these qualities, nor all of them together, make it what it is, namely, stone or wood. They might all be changed or taken away, and yet it would remain what it is, stone or wood.

These qualities, therefore, are accidental, not essential. Philosophers call them briefly "*accidents*," and that in which they are found is called "*substance*," or the thing that *underlies* them.

Now if the body we are examining be a piece of stone, we can fancy the "substance" of stone being withdrawn, and the "substance" of wood being put in its place the "accidents" remaining the same as before.

That would be Transubstantiation. And this is what we believe takes place at the Consecration; the "substance" of bread and the "substance" of

wine are withdrawn, and their places supplied by the "substance" of Christ's glorified and living Body, the "accidents" remaining the same as before. Thus we have, not wine nor bread, but Christ under the *appearances* of bread and of wine.

The doctrine of Transubstantiation is clearly taught by the Fathers of the early Church. St. Cyril of Jerusalem (4th century) writes:—

"What seems to be bread is not bread, but the Body of Christ: and what seems to be wine is not wine, but the Blood of Christ."

Of this great mystery, Cardinal Newman asks in his *Apologia*:—

"What do I know of substance or matter? just as much as the greatest philosopher, and that is nothing at all."

This subject might be discussed either from a philosophical or from a spiritual point of view. I am now going to discuss it under the latter aspect, and I hope to show that the Catholic doctrine is clearly proved by Holy Writ.

Christ said to the Jews: "I am the Living Bread which came down from heaven; if any man eat of this Bread he shall live for ever, and the bread that I will give is *My Flesh*, which I will give for the life of the world."<sup>1</sup>

We maintain that these words support the Catholic doctrine of Transubstantiation. Protestants deny it.

Let us hear first what they have to say. They say the words we have quoted are to be taken in a

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<sup>1</sup> St. John vi. 51. All texts used in this tract are designedly quoted from the Protestant version of the Bible.

figurative sense, that "giving bread" and "partaking of food" were common expressions among the Jews in speaking of *doctrine* and *faith*, and that they are to be taken in this sense here.

To which I reply that I quite agree as to this figurative meaning of these words. They are so used in this very chapter of St. John from v. 26 to v. 48 or 50. But at v. 50, if not at v. 48, there is a change of subject, and Christ begins to speak about eating, not bread, but *flesh*. This is an expression which certainly is never used in Scripture figuratively of faith. To eat the flesh of a man had a very decided figurative meaning in the language spoken by our Lord, as it has to the present day in the land in which He lived. It was something like our word *backbite*. It meant to calumniate or injure. See Psalm xxvii, 2 (Catholic version, Psalm xxvi. 2), Job xix. 22, Micha iii. 3, and Eccles. iv. 5.

In all other places where it is used in Scripture it is to be taken *literally*, and we maintain that it is to be so taken in the above passage from St. John.

Those who contradict us, and hold that it is to be taken figuratively, *must* take it as meaning to calumniate or injure. And then they will have this difficulty staring them in the face, that at v. 54, in the same chapter, Christ says: "Whoso eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood," *i. e.*, whoso calumniateth or injureth Me, "hath eternal life!" Protestants sometimes condemn our interpretation as involving a moral impossibility. I think we may now fairly say the same about theirs.

But after all, it is only a waste of time for us Englishmen to dispute about the meaning of an expression employed by our Lord, when we have evidence of how it was understood by the persons who spoke the language He was using. The Jews surely understood perfectly what Christ said. Then how did *they* take it? Look at verse 52. The figurative meaning, so dear to Protestants, never occurs to them. It was too absurd. How could the spiritual life of the world depend on calumniating Christ?

Therefore they took His words literally. It was their only alternative. And then they began to do what Protestants do: "*they strove among themselves, saying: How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?*"

Were they wrong in taking Him literally? Let us see. What did Christ do when He saw how His words were taken? Usually, when His figurative language was misunderstood, He explained Himself, *e. g.*, St. John iii. 3-5. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be *born again* he cannot see the Kingdom of God?" His figurative expression "born again" was misunderstood by Nicodemus, and accordingly, as we might have expected from His charity, He explains it. "Except a man be born *of water and of the Spirit*, he cannot," etc.

So, too, St. John xi. 11. "He saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus *sleepeth*." The disciples miss His meaning, and immediately He explains Himself: "Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus *is dead*."

On the other hand, when people took Him in the

*right* sense, but *objected* to it, He used to *insist*. Thus in St. John viii. 56, etc., His words implied that He was living in the time of Abraham. The Jews so understood Him. They were *right*, but *they objected*: "Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast Thou seen Abraham?" Christ *insists*: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am."

Take another example: St. Matthew ix 2. "Jesus said to the man sick of the palsy: Son, be of good cheer: thy sins be forgiven thee." The Jews took Him literally, and they were *right*; but they *objected*, and "some of the scribes said within themselves, This Man blasphemeth." What does Christ do? He *insists*, and to prove the likelihood of His having power to forgive sins, He showed that He had miraculous power of another kind, for He cured the man on the spot.<sup>1</sup>

Now which of these methods did He follow in the case that we are engaged upon? Did He explain His words away? By no means. He acted as He usually acted when people understood Him aright but refused to accept what He said: *He insisted*. "Verily, verily I say unto you, except ye eat the *Flesh* of the Son of Man, and drink His *Blood*, ye have no life in you."<sup>2</sup> And then, as if He wished to close every avenue of escape, He put it in another way. "Whoso *eateth My Flesh* and drinketh My *Blood*, hath eternal life . . . My *Flesh* is meat indeed, and My *Blood* is drink in-

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<sup>1</sup> See Card. Wiseman's *Lectures on the Real Presence*, Lect. III.

<sup>2</sup> St. John vi. 53.

deed. He that *eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood* dwelleth in Me and I in Him.”

What was the consequence? “Many of His disciples murmured, and said, ‘This is a hard saying; who can hear it?’ And from that time many of them went back and walked no more with Him.”<sup>1</sup>

And Christ allowed them to go. What! The Saviour of men to allow souls to be lost so easily? Could He not have cried out to them: “Wait a moment! Let Me explain. I do not mean what you thought just now, when you asked each other, ‘How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?’—I was only talking figuratively.” Could He not, nay, ought He not, to have spoken in this sense, and saved them? No; He ought not, because He could not. They understood Him aright. There was nothing to explain away, and, as they would not believe what He said, He had to let them go.

“Then said Jesus unto the twelve, ‘Will ye also go away?’ Simon Peter answered Him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.’”<sup>2</sup> A passage which reveals to us that even the twelve were almost staggered at what they had heard, but that they submitted their judgment to Christ’s. Poor human nature was under trial, but it triumphed in the light of faith, and dashing aside all doubts and hesitation, exclaimed: “Thou hast the words of eternal life!”

Such, too, is the exclamation of the Catholic.

The expression “drinking blood” is, if anything, still less favorable to the Protestant interpretation

<sup>1</sup> St. John vi. 66.

<sup>2</sup> St. John vi. 67, 68.



than that of "eating flesh." To a Jew the idea was most revolting and most sinful. The practice was threatened with terrible chastisements. "I will even set my face against that soul that eateth blood, and will cut him off from among my people."<sup>1</sup>

Scripture everywhere speaks of it with horror. Then why did our Lord adopt such an expression, it, as Protestants say, He was only talking figuratively of faith or doctrine? Do people usually make a point of disgusting their audiences when they wish to get a hearing? And are we to suppose that our Lord, full of solicitude as He was to spread the new faith, would have made use of expressions and ideas associated in the minds of His hearers with guilt the most revolting?

The only explanation of the use of such language by our Lord is that He meant literally what He said, namely, that we were to drink His Blood if we would have life. He would not have used the expression unless He had been obliged, and He would not have been obliged, had He not meant it literally.

The conclusion, therefore, at which we arrive is that, in the passage quoted from St. John, we have our Lord's word for it that He would give us His flesh to eat and His blood to drink. We have only to add that he redeemed this promise when He instituted the Blessed Sacrament, saying: "This is My Body . . . this is My Blood."<sup>2</sup> He then gave a command: "Do this in remembrance of Me,"<sup>3</sup> leaving power in His Church to celebrate

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<sup>1</sup> Lev. xvii. 10.

<sup>2</sup> St. Matt. xxvi. 26-28.

<sup>3</sup> St. Luke xxii. 16.

the same mystery for all time; so that whosoever eats this Bread or drinks this Cup unworthily, "eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning *the Lord's Body*." <sup>1</sup> If he is to be punished for not discerning It, *It must be there*.

At page 1 I have said that, in the Consecration, the "substance" of bread and the "substance" of wine are withdrawn, and their places supplied by the "substance" of Christ's glorified Body.

It is necessary to bear in mind that it is His *glorified* Body. It is His Body endowed with the qualities of immortality, impassibility, etc. It could appear in the room, *the doors being shut*.<sup>2</sup> It could be whole and entire in many places at the same time, or as life is in all the individuals of a species at one and the same time. It could be broken, yet remain whole in every part, something like the life of the tree, which is as whole in the slip cut from it as it is in the tree itself.

Some people say they believe in the Real Presence, but not in a *carnal* sense. They hold that Christ is present in a spiritual sense in the Holy Eucharist. Now what do these people mean? Do they mean that only His *Soul* is present? If they do they are dividing Christ, soul from body, whereas Christ "dieth no more."<sup>3</sup> Or do they mean that He is present in spirit, in the same way as friend writes to friend, "I am with you in spirit"? If they do, it is no doubt something beautiful and consoling, and ought to cheer one amidst the trials of the world. But if I knew anybody who professed belief in Christ's *spiritual* Presence, not His

<sup>1</sup> Cor. xi. 29.

<sup>2</sup> St. John xx. 26.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. vi. 9.

*carnal*, in the Blessed Sacrament, I would ask him to settle decisively in his own mind, before going further, whether or no this be what he means, and *not to read another word of what I am going to say until he has made up his mind.*

If, after duly considering the question, he answered No, I would then ask him, Well what *do* you mean? Tell me clearly in plain English, for I protest that I can see no other meaning except the two I have given, and neither of them will stand examination.

If, on the contrary, he answered Yes, then I should ask him to consider with himself what it is we mean when we say to each other the kindly and consoling words, *I am with you in spirit.* And he would find that we mean, *I am NOT with you REALLY; I wish I were.*

Hence it follows that he who holds this sort of Real Presence believes, when we come to examine him, in a real *absence.*

Some say Christ is present *along with* the bread and wine. In this phrase they think they see an escape from the difficulty of Transubstantiation, because the bread remains bread, and the wine is still wine—the “substances” are there still.

But what does the phrase really mean? Let us understand in what way exactly Christ is present, according to this theory. Is He only *spiritually* present, or is He *substantially* present? If only *spiritually*, then, as we have already seen, He is *really absent.* If *substantially* then the “substance” of His Body is present, *divested of its*

own "accidents" and under those of bread and wine.<sup>1</sup> But this is Transubstantiation, one-sided Transubstantiation, involving all the difficulties of Transubstantiation in the Catholic sense, and entailing some more.

It involves all the difficulties of the Catholic doctrine, because Transubstantiation in the Catholic sense means (a) the severance of "substance" from "accidents," and (b) the placing of the said "substance" under another set of "accidents."

Now, according to the theory in question, all this is done in the case of Christ. The "substance" of His Sacred Body is separated from its own "accidents," and placed under that of bread and wine. Surely there can be no difficulty in doing, in the case of bread and wine, what is done with Christ, in removing, *i. e.*, the "substance" of bread and wine to make way for the "substance" of the body of Christ. Yet the upholders of the theory will not hear of it.

This brings me to my second point, that this one-sided Transubstantiation entails additional difficulties.

What I mean is this, that by it we are obliged to hold that Christ's Body is united with the bread in one or other of two ways, *i. e.*, either (a) as the Divine and human natures are united in our Lord in the Hypostatic Union, or (b) as the sap and the

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<sup>1</sup>I pass over a third alternative, that He might be *sacramentally* present, because a sacramental presence need not be an *objective* presence, that is, a presence in the bread and wine, but only a presence in the *subject* or person who receives, and this is less than those whom I am speaking about would claim.

wood are united in the tree, merely by juxtaposition, both remaining distinct and separable. This last is the Impanation of Luther, and the difficulty of admitting either theory arises from this, that by each is an indignity offered to our Lord.

I. An indignity is offered to our Lord by Impanation, because according to it the words of our Lord, "This is My Body," would not be true. Let me try to show why.

"Substance" is not perceptible to the senses, and therefore we know things only by their "accidents." Their "accidents" are the sign of their presence. So that when we point to an object, and say, *This* is so and so, we mean that the thing to which these "accidents" belong or the thing of whose presence these accidents are the sign, or the thing which these accidents make perceptible to you, is so and so.

Therefore, when Christ says, "This is My Body," He means, The thing to which these "accidents" belong, or The thing of whose presence these "accidents" are the sign, is My Body. But according to the Impanation theory this would not be true, for the "accidents" which are perceived do *not* belong to, and are *not* a sign of the presence of, Christ's Body. They are a sign of the presence of, and belong to, bread. So that Christ, if Impanation were true, might say, This is bread, or Along with this is My Body; but He could not say, "This is My Body," any more than one could say truly, pointing to a tree, This is sap.

If we may take the Rev. J. W. Hicks as an exponent, the doctrine as to the Real Presence now

held by the High Church party is Lutheran Impanation; for, in a lecture given at Cambridge, 1885 (*Lectures on Church Doctrine*, First Series), he says: "There is no '*corporal* Presence of Christ's natural Flesh and Blood' in the Sacrament, *i. e.*, no Presence after the manner of material bodies in the natural world. What *is present* after that manner is *bread and wine*" (p. 9).

The above passage suggests the question how the Body of our Lord can be present while "there is no *corporal* Presence"? Mr. Hicks would answer, that "the Presence of Christ in the Sacrament is the presence of a spiritual body" (p. 10). Then does he think that a spiritual or glorified body is not a body, is not "corporal"? What does he make of our Lord's words: "Behold My hands and My feet,, that it is I Myself . . . for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see Me have" ? (St. Luke xxiv. 39). . Would he say there was here no "corporal" Presence? Scarcely; and yet it was that same Body which had entered the room "when the doors were shut" (St. John xx. 19).

Mr. Hicks seems to have rather hazy ideas of bodies "natural," "spiritual," "corporal," etc. He speaks, *e. g.*, of Christ's "natural Body" being in heaven, and explains "natural" as "having the natural properties of a body, of being in a certain place, of a certain form, and material composition, and the like." But if the Body of Christ in heaven has "the natural properties of a body," and of "material composition," could it enter a room while "the doors were shut"? And, if not, is the Body of Christ in heaven different from the glorified

Body of Christ as it was on earth after the Resurrection?

In the Preface to these Lectures we read: "One of the chief dangers to which members of the University and others engaged in intellectual pursuits are exposed . . . in regard to the Christian faith, arises from the vagueness of the notions prevalent about certain doctrines which are, or ought to be 'most surely believed among us.'" We should think that highly probable.

And *The Church Times* of August 27, 1886, urges the study of this Lecture as "one of the most temperate and scholarly statements of the doctrine published," words which suggest another question, What is the meaning of a *temperate* statement of doctrine? One might just as well talk about a temperate statement of the propositions of Euclid. A statement of *doctrine* ought to be a *truth*, and there is neither "more" nor "less" in *truth*. If you overstate it, it is no longer truth.—Ah, yes. Under a very thin skin you have in your "English Catholic" a genuine, sturdy Protestant, to whom doctrine is still *opinion*—a statement of opinion may of course be "temperate."

Even the doctrine of the Real Presence (which if true in the Protestant's Communion, is, without doubt, practically the most momentous dogma of his Creed, and the most replete with vital consequences for all the members of the Church), is to him, after all, only a matter of opinion; for the formularies do not insist upon it, and therefore nobody is obliged to believe it. This at any rate is a fair deduction from another passage in Mr.

Hick's Lectures. Speaking of the "receptionist" view, according to which Christ is somehow present, but only "in the worthy receiver," and "*not* in the Sacrament," so that the "objective" Presence for which he is contending is completely swept away, he says: "I desire to speak with reverence of many pious and learned and Catholic-minded members of the English Church who have held this 'receptionist' view; and *I do not for a moment believe that our formularies were meant to exclude them*" (p. 13).

But fancy a Church holding the doctrine of the Real Presence, and not insisting on it! Still worse, fancy a Church teaching it without being *infallibly* certain that it is true! Such a Church is teaching her children to give divine honor to what may *possibly* be only bread; a just retribution on those who have persistently accused Catholics of idolatry. This is something for all those who profess to believe in the Real Presence, but scoff at Infallibility, to think about. A Church which holds to the Real Presence as an incontrovertible fact cannot leave belief in it to the discretion of her children, without exposing the Holy of Holies to disrespect. And she cannot, without exposing her children to idolatry, teach it as an incontrovertible fact unless she is infallible.

II. An indignity is offered to our Lord by the hypostatic theory. For according to this theory the Body of Christ is united to the bread either exactly, as the divine and human nature are united in the Hypostatic Union, or *not exactly*. If not exactly, then we fall back into some sort of Impana-



tion. If *exactly*, then there are in Christ three natures—the nature of God, the nature of man, and the nature of bread. So that this theory ends in an absurdity, not to call it by the more fitting name of blasphemy.

As Dryden well writes of such modes of explanation in his “Hind and Panther,”

“The literal sense is hard to flesh and blood,  
But nonsense never can be understood.”

In the case “Sheppard *vs.* Bennett,” the Dean of Arches ruled that it was not contrary to the law of the Church of England to teach that the mode of presence is “objective, real, natural, and spiritual.” This decision was hailed as a triumph by a certain party in the Protestant Church, but it contains not a word to save their doctrine from the difficulties, or themselves from the inconsistencies which we have pointed out above.

An objection is often raised against the Catholic doctrine, founded on the words: “It is the spirit that quickeneth: the flesh profiteth nothing.”<sup>1</sup>

From these words it is urged that our Lord’s expressions, in the preceding part of His discourse, are to be taken *spiritually*, and not literally.

This is what is called “a popular objection,” *i. e.*, one which has a plausible look about it, and “goes down” easily with uneducated and inaccurate minds. Learned Protestants have long since given it up. Kühnoel, for instance, says: “This interpretation cannot be maintained according to the ordinary use of words in Scripture.” Bloom-

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<sup>1</sup> St. John vi. 63.

field says the same. So does Schleusner in his *Lexicon of the New Testament*.<sup>1</sup>

If, in the text quoted above, "the spirit" means the figurative interpretation of Christ's words, which Protestants contend for, then "the flesh," being in antithesis, must mean the literal interpretation of them. But who ever heard before of such a meaning being attached to those two words? In Scripture, at any rate, there is not a single example of it.

If, on the other hand, "the flesh" means simply the flesh, then "the spirit" must mean simply the spirit. If one is to be taken literally, so must the other also, and figurative meaning vanishes altogether.

The fact is that in the New Testament "the flesh" means human nature, with its depraved and vicious tendencies. "The spirit" means that elevation of thought which comes of grace. The passage therefore, "It is the spirit that quickeneth: the flesh profiteth nothing," contains a passing commentary by our Lord on the whole case. It is as if He said: In the words that I have spoken there are thoughts of life, thoughts that would quicken and raise up anybody who received them; but so depraved is the nature of this people that they profit nothing by them!

How many there are in our own day over whom our Lord has to utter the same lament!

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<sup>1</sup> See Card. Wiseman's *Lectures on the Real Presence*, Lect. IV.



