

THE EUCHARIST

Italicized below are the **Authoritative statements of Roman Catholic Teaching** on the Eucharist

The Council of Trent

Session XIII: On the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist

Canon I. If any one denieth, that , in the sacrament of the most holy Eucharist, are contained truly, really, and substantially, the body and blood together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and consequently whole Christ; but saith that he is only therein as in a sign, or in figure, or virtue: let him be anathema.

Canon II. If any one saith, 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 denieth that wonderful and singular conversion of the whole substance of the bread unto the body, and of the whole substance of the wine into the blood—the species only of the bread and wine remaining—which conversion indeed the Catholic Church most aptly calls Transubstantiation: let him be anathema.

Note of definition: *anathema*: a-nath-e-ma n

1. a curse from a religious authority that denounces something or excommunicates somebody; 2. any forceful curse or denunciation.
Encarta® World English Dictionary

The Question and Answer Catholic Catechism

1212. *What is the center of the whole Catholic liturgy?*

The center of the whole Catholic liturgy is the Eucharist. The Eucharist is most important in the life of the Church because it is Jesus Christ. It is the Incarnation continued in space and time. The other sacraments and all the Church's ministries and apostolates are directed toward the Eucharist.

1214. *What is the sacrament of the Eucharist?*

The Eucharist is a sacrament which really, truly, and substantially contains the body and blood, soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ under the appearance of bread and wine. It is the great sacrament of God's love in which Christ is eaten, the mind filled with grace, and a pledge is given to us of future glory.

1217. *Is the Eucharist necessary for salvation?*

The Eucharist is necessary for salvation, to be received either sacramentally or in desire. Christ's words, 'if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you will not have life in you' (John 6:53), mean that Holy Communion is necessary to sustain the life of grace in a person who has reached the age of reason.

1223. *Is only the substance of Christ's human nature present in the Eucharist?*

Christ is present in the Eucharist not only with everything that makes him man, but with all that makes him this human being. He is therefore present with all his physical properties, hands and feet and head and human heart. He is present with his human soul, with his thoughts, desires, and human affections.

1224. *How does Christ become present in the Eucharist?*

Christ becomes present in the Eucharist by means of transubstantiation. Transubstantiation is the term used to identify the change that takes place at the consecration.

SUMMARY OF ROMAN CATHOLIC TEACHING

From the quotations given from the authoritative Roman Catholic sources, we learn that the Eucharist is the sacrament in which the priest has the power to transform the bread and wine into the literal body and blood of

Jesus Christ, a process known as transubstantiation. According to Roman Catholic teaching this enables the priest to offer Christ himself to the people to consume and eat literally, as well as to offer him on the altar in sacrifice. The Church derives this teaching from its interpretation of the passages in the Gospels dealing with the Last Supper and also from John chapter 6 where Jesus speaks of eating his flesh and drinking his blood.

When the Roman Catholic Church uses the term 'Eucharist' it quite often attaches to it the word 'sacrifice' to form the phrase 'Eucharistic Sacrifice.' Thus, essential to the Eucharist is the idea of sacrifice. According to the Second Vatican Council this is the major purpose of Christ in instituting the Eucharist: '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...' (*The Documents of the Vatican II*, p. 154).

We have already seen that the Bible teaches that there are no longer any sacrifices (Heb. 10:18) and the priesthood has been abolished. Consequently the Roman Catholic Church's interpretation of John chapter 6 and those passages related to the Last Supper must be unbiblical. Since there is no priesthood, there cannot be a special power given to a select group of men to enable them to change bread and wine into the literal body and blood of Jesus Christ.

But what exactly do these passages of Scripture mean? John 6:26-65 is the account of an incident where Jesus presents himself to the Jews as the Bread of Life:

Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst... For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day... Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life' (Jn. 6:35,40,47-48).

Jesus gives an illustration in order that these people might understand what he means by the word 'believe' which he has used five times in this section: 'This is the bread which comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; *if anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever*; and the bread also which I shall give for the life of the world is My flesh' (Jn. 6:50-51). Then Jesus makes this statement: 'It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life' (Jn. 6:63).

Jesus makes it clear that the significance of his words to the Jews is spiritual: 'The words I have spoken to you are spirit. The flesh profits nothing'. They must be interpreted in a spiritual and not in a literal or physical manner. Jesus is teaching them what it means to enter into a spiritual relationship with himself. Thus, when he speaks of them eating his flesh and drinking his blood he is not speaking literally. This is a figurative way of explaining the meaning of faith. True faith is an appropriation of the very life Jesus Christ himself into our lives so that he personally becomes the very life of our life. Jesus is not literal bread but he calls himself the bread of life. That is figurative language with a spiritual meaning. He goes on to say that 'He who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.' Here he speaks of coming and believing. What does it mean to come and believe in him? It means coming into a spiritual union with the Son of God, so that it is likened to eating his flesh and drinking his blood. Belief means far more than intellectual assent. It means the appropriation of the very life of the Son of God into my life, demonstrating that true Christian faith involves coming into a vital, living, intimate relationship with a person and not merely assenting to a set of doctrines proposed by a church.

When Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about the necessity of being born again, this Jewish religious teacher misunderstood the spiritual truth as something physical. 'How can I return to my mother's womb and be born again?' In a similar manner, the Roman Catholic Church misinterprets Jesus' words in John 6:53-54. It interprets them in a way that is completely independent of their context and assigns a physical and literal meaning to what was intended to be spiritual and figurative. Jesus himself said, 'The words I have spoken to you are spiritual. The flesh profits nothing.' By taking the verses out of context, the Roman Catholic Church falls into the same error as Nicodemus did, giving a physical interpretation to a spiritual truth.

The entire passage runs from John 6:22 to 6:65, so that any interpretation of Jesus' words in verses 53-54 must include the whole context in which those words are found. To interpret his words without careful reference to their context is bound to give a meaning to his words that he never intended.

John 6:40,47, and 54 are clearly intended to be equivalent statements:

For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and *believes* in Him, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day (Jn. 6:40).

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who *believes* has eternal life (Jn. 6:47).

He who *eats My flesh* and *drinks my blood* has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day (Jn. 6:54).

The terms 'to eat' and 'to drink' illustrate what it means to believe—and to believe in Christ results in eternal life and in being raised up on the last day. We receive eternal life by exercising faith in Christ where we receive him not physically, but spiritually into our hearts and he becomes our very life: 'But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name' (Jn. 1:12).

These words could not possibly refer to partaking of the Eucharist because they were spoken at least a year before the Last Supper took place. Jesus was stating the necessity of believing upon him—in the figurative sense of eating his flesh and drinking his blood—in order to receive eternal life, at the time the words were spoken, not for some time in the future. He speaks in the present tense: 'unless you eat [i.e. now, in the present], you have no life in you.' Only by taking John 6:53-54 out of context and assigning to it a physical interpretation, and then aligning it with their interpretation of the passages related to the Last Supper, can the Roman Catholic Church arrive at its teaching on Transubstantiation.

Transubstantiation means a change of substance. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that the whole substance of bread and wine is changed into the physical body and blood of Jesus Christ. This teaching is based on the words of Jesus in Matthew 26:26-28: 'This is my body, this is My blood.' The Roman Catholic Church teaches that these words are to be taken completely literalistically. They believe that in his command 'Do this in remembrance of Me', Jesus was authorizing and empowering the apostles as priests to carry on this practice of transubstantiation, that they might offer Christ to the people to be literally eaten and also to be continually sacrificed for their sins.

However, it becomes obvious that Jesus was not speaking in a literalistic, but in a figurative sense. He did this quite often when teaching and Bible itself is full of figurative teaching. Loraine Boettner expresses this well:

We believe that the real meaning of Christ's words can be seen when they are compared with similar figurative language...

He said, 'I am the door' (John 10:7)—but obviously He did not mean that He was a literal wooden door with lock and hinges. He said, 'I am the Vine' (John 15:5)—but no one understood Him to mean that He was a grapevine. When he said, 'I am the good shepherd' (John 10:14), He did not mean that He was actually a shepherd. When He said, 'Ye must be born again' (John 3:7), He referred not to a physical birth but to a spiritual birth. When He said, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up' (John 2:19), He meant His body, not the structure of wood and stone...He said, 'Ye are the salt of the earth' (Matt. 5:13), and 'Ye are the light of the world' (Matt. 5:14). He spoke of the 'the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees' (Matt. 16:6) (*Roman Catholicism*, pp. 177-78).

All through the Old Testament God speaks of himself figuratively, as possessing arms, hands, eyes, and ears. In Psalm 91:4 we read he has 'wings and feathers', but we know that God is Spirit and not physical. He does not have flesh, bones or feathers. This is a figurative language. In a similar way, none of these teachings or

statements by Jesus should be taken literally; they are figurative in meaning. So it is with the Lord's Supper. Jesus' words are figurative.

The accounts of the institution of the Lord's Supper, both in the Gospels and in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, make it perfectly clear that He spoke in figurative terms. Jesus said, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood' (Luke 22:20). And Paul quotes Jesus as saying: 'This is the new covenant in my blood...For as oft as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till He come' (1 Cor. 11:25-26). In these words He uses a double figure of speech. The cup is put for the wine, and the wine is called the new covenant. The cup was not literally the new covenant, although it is declared to be so as definitely as the bread is declared to be His body. They did not literally drink the cup, nor did they literally drink the new covenant...Nor was the bread literally His body, or the wine His blood. After giving the wine to the disciples Jesus said, 'I shall not drink from henceforth of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come' (Luke 22:18). So the wine, even as He gave it to them, and after He had given it to them, remained 'the fruit of the vine'! Paul too says the bread remains bread: 'Wherefore whosoever shall eat the bread and drink the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner...But let each man prove himself, and let him eat of the bread, and drink of the cup (1 Cor. 11:27-28). No change had taken place in the elements. This was after the prayer of consecration, when the Church of Rome supposes the change took place, and Jesus and Paul both declare that the elements still are bread and wine (Boettner, p. 176).

Christ's words to his disciples are not always to be taken in a literalistic manner. He was inaugurating a memorial feast by which the disciples would be able to keep his sacrifices in mind as a continuing remembrance. Jesus' own words, 'Do this in remembrance of me', demonstrate that this supper was to be a memorial feast much like the Old Jewish Passover. It was to be a supper of remembrance by which Christians would continually keep before them the sacrifice of the Lord on their behalf.

The Roman Catholic Church's teaching on the Eucharist as the literal body and blood of Jesus, and the means whereby he is sacrificed continually on the altar and then offered as the source of eternal life, is completely contradictory to the truth of the Word of God. There is no longer any priesthood or sacrifice and the words of Jesus are figurative and spiritual, rather than literal and physical.

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Webster, William. Salvation, The Bible, And Roman Catholicism, The Banner of Truth Trust: Pennsylvania, 1990.

The author expressed his thanks to the following publishers for permission to quote from their material (the documents below carry the official authorization of the Vatican):

I. The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, in Philip Shaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, Baker Book House (1919 ed.).

II. The Documents of Vatican II, Walter M. Abbott S.J., General Editor, Association Press, Follett Publishing Company, 1966.

III. The Code of the Canon Law, Prepared by the Canon Law Society of Great Britain and Ireland in Association with The Canon Law Society of Australia and New Zealand and the Canadian Canon Law Society, William Collins and William B. Eedmans Publishing Company, 1983. John Paul II makes the following comments concerning The Code of The Canon Law: "It is hoped that this English Version of the Code will be a fitting resource for an attentive and fruitful study for the law of the Church..." "We order that henceforth it is to have the force of law for the whole latin Church, and we commit its observance to the care and vigilance of all who are responsible."

IV. The Question and Answer Catholic Catechism, John A. Hardon S.J., Image Books, Doubleday and Company, 1981