

I FOUND THE ANCIENT WAY

By

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CHAPTER FIVE

TRANSUBSTANTIATION

IT IS SAD TO SAY, but when one who has served in the Catholic Church comes to know the pure concept of Christianity in an Evangelical church, he gets the impression that he is passing from a materialistic Christianity to a spiritual Christianity. This happens with several dogmas, such as the one about purgatory, and the worship of images, but especially with that of transubstantiation.

Nearly all the Evangelical churches celebrate the communion at least once a month; but what a difference between the Holy Supper of apostolic times, or of the Evangelical churches, and the Roman mass? Everything in an Evangelical church, sermons, readings, songs, prayers, is in a familiar language. All believers take part and everything invites one to lift his thoughts to the redemptive death of CHRIST.

With no image of the Crucified before them in material form, the thoughts of the faithful are on the summit of Calvary beholding the death of the Redeemer, remembering His love and reviving their own faith in the full effectiveness of the sacrifice made by the God-Man. There is nothing of the spectacular or ceremonious to distract the attention; everything helps to direct it toward spiritual feelings of love and gratitude.

In the mass, and of course I am speaking from experience, the faithful are attending a spectacle that cannot edify their souls, because the liturgical pageantry draws the attention of the one who is present to the act itself, not to what it represents, which ninety per cent know nothing about.

To begin with, the priest has to pay attention to the posture in which he has his hands, whether the bowing of his head is slight, medium or deep, whether his body should be bowed or erect, whether he has to cross himself so many times, whether he has to pronounce certain words while he is crossing himself that he cannot pronounce before nor after but only while he is doing it; for when he pronounces the words, especially in the consecration, the pronounciation, must be perfect, because it seems that GOD doesn't look at the spirit with which the priest says them but at the words themselves.

So that if this pronunciation should be faulty the mass would be worthless, since there would be no transubstantiation. When these matters no longer demand his attention, because after doing them so often they come to be done mechanically.

It also happens that the essential part of the mass, which is always the same, is memorized and becomes just a routine of words joined to some mechanical movements. With what chagrin more than once I watched the celebration of a mass!

The faithful Catholic, instead of thinking of the CHRIST of Calvary, thinks of what he believes he has before him. He awaits with emotion the supposed miracle of transubstantiation (if he really knows about it, for eighty to ninety per cent have neither heard of it nor do they know what the word means), providing he believes in it. (I have questioned many and when you press them a bit with questions they always end by affirming consubstantiation).

Catholic theologians never tire of quoting the words. of JESUS, *Hic est corpus meum* ("**This is my body**") without being willing to admit that the Lord is using a metaphor like the one He used when He said, "**I am the vine . . . I am the door.**"

What would the Catholic Church or its theologians say if a Protestant sect were to declare that when the words "**I am the vine**" were pronounced before a vine, CHRIST had been transubstantiated into that vine and they were to worship it as GOD? Or if they should do it before a door? Absurd? Of course!

Yet this is just what they do, and it doesn't seem as absurd to them as they would think it in a Protestant sect and with a door instead of a piece of bread. Do they say the error comes from centuries back? I don't believe that an error, no matter how ancient it is, ever ceases to be an error; and certainly it should not be followed.

In support of their audacious thinking they quote some other words of the Lord JESUS, found in John 6. But in this discourse the Saviour condemns the Catholic theory, as we shall see clearly in the explanation He gives of His thought, something that doesn't accompany the account of the Lord's Supper, which a person of evil intentions can twist because of its brevity.

I am not going to copy the whole discourse because I believe that any reader probably has a New Testament handy and he can follow the reasoning.

The Lord says: "**I am the living bread which came down from heaven**" (v. 51).

If the Catholic Church wants to interpret this expression literally, then JESUS CHRIST is not the Son of the Virgin Mary; for, taken literally, His flesh came down from Heaven, so His blessed mother could not have taken it.

In verse 63 JESUS tells us: "**It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.**"

The Jews understood the words of the Master in a literal way, just as the Catholic Church understands them today, and so they were scandalized and withdrew. But He wasn't referring to His material physical flesh, which He says profits nothing, but to His teachings, which had come from Heaven. **"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God"** (Matthew 4:4).

Let us compare verses 40 and 54 of John 6. **"And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life and I will raise him up at the last day . . . Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."**

Here we see that believing has the same reward as eating.

This joined to verse 63 that says the flesh profits nothing, gives us the solution: when JESUS talks about eating, He is not talking about material food but spiritual. That is, He is referring to the act of assimilating the Word of GOD. This is the way the Apostles themselves interpret it when they answer JESUS: **"To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."**

They don't say to Him, "Thou hast the flesh of eternal life."

So we Evangelical Christians say as the Apostle Peter said to JESUS: **"Lord, thou hast the words of eternal life and. we have believed [not eaten] and know that thou art the Holy One of God."**

It is very true that at the Last Supper the Master gave His disciples the bread to eat and the wine to drink, the symbols of His body and blood, with the words, **"Take, eat, this is my body."**

Well then, how does JESUS himself interpret these words? Unquestionably there is no one better than He to tell us what they mean. Do they perhaps express the idea that as a result of the words He had pronounced a miracle of transubstantiation had taken place in the elements He had in His hands? Not at all.

The account of the institution of the Eucharist doesn't end with verse 28, in spite of the fact that that is where the Roman Catholic authors are accustomed to cut it off, and they don't quote what follows.

When they finish narrating this scene, all the Evangelists add a statement by JESUS; since it is the same in all of them, we shall quote only Matthew 26:29: **"But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."** JESUS states, **"I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine."** But isn't it His blood that He had drunk? No, what He had drunk is wine, wine that is extracted from grapes. But this wine symbolizes His blood, and so we can say with Paul that **"he who drinks it unworthily is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord."**

In his first epistle to the Corinthians (11:23 ff.) the Apostle gives, three times in succession, the name of bread to what the Catholic Church says is the body of CHRIST: **"For as often as ye eat this bread . . . Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread . . . , Let him eat of that bread."**

I would recommend reading this very beautiful passage from Paul with care; we will see how the bread is only the symbol that announces to us the death of the Lord until He comes, and if we take it unworthily we make ourselves guilty of what it symbolizes. This is only natural.

If we offend a flag, which physically is only a piece of cloth, it makes me guilty in the eyes of the nation it symbolizes. So we ought to distinguish between the communion bread and other bread, not because it isn't made of flour, since then it wouldn't be bread and the Apostle would not give it that name, but because it symbolizes or represents the body of the Lord.

In a way we say that we receive the Lord since we receive what symbolizes Him. But it would be ridiculous to say that we devour the Lord, and that we are to understand it in a physical and literal way.

Many Fathers of the church interpreted it in the way Protestants do today, though it is also true that others went on into exaggerated interpretations and considerations.

Ignatius, the martyr of Antioch: "So then cloth yourselves with meekness. Become converted into new creatures through faith, which is the flesh of the Lord, and through love, which is the blood of JESUS CHRIST" (*Epistle to the Trallians* 8:1). If we compare these words with the ones on which we commented from in John 6, we shall see that they are simply a commentary on the others.

Tertullian says: "CHRIST having taken the bread and, having distributed it, he made it his body when he said: **'This is my body,'** that is, the representation of my body" (*Against Marcion*, bk. 4, chap. 40).

Theodoret states: "After its consecration, the mystical symbol doesn't change its own nature, for it remains in its original substance, figure and form" (*Dialogue* 2).

Ephrem said: "The Lord taking in his hands the bread gave thanks and broke it as a figure of his sacrificed body, and he blessed the cup as a figure of his precious blood" (*Dial. contr. Sertad. Nat. Dei*).

Eusebius declares: "We have been taught to celebrate at the table, according to the law of the New Testament, with the symbols of the body and the blood of CHRIST, the memory of that sacrifice" (*Demonstratio* 1: 1).

We shall end the quotations from the Fathers with two from Augustine.

"In most cases [the sacraments] in virtue of [their] likeness bear the names of the realities which they resemble . . . therefore, in a certain manner the sacrament of CHRIST's body is CHRIST's body, and the sacrament of CHRIST's blood is CHRIST's blood . . ."

And in another place he writes: "The Lord gives us His flesh to eat, and yet to understand it according to the flesh is death; while yet He says of His flesh, that therein is eternal life. Therefore we ought not to understand the flesh carnally . . . And He said, **"It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing"** (on John 6:60-72)."

The author of the anti-Protestant booklet, *This Is My Body*, recognizing the difficulty of the aforementioned quotations from Tertullian and Augustine, omits the last one from the famous Bishop of Hippo, doubtless to avoid difficulties.

I don't doubt that the Catholic Church will be able to find other Fathers that state the opposite, since there are ideas among them to suit all tastes. If I bring them in for each point, it isn't because I recognize in them any other authority than the purely ordinary authority of a man, but so the reader may see that already in the earliest times there were those who thought as we do; that we are not a modern religion, as we are very ignorantly told; that we are from the first century, that is, since there began to be Christians, which is what we are.

I must confess that I always believed strongly in the mystery of transubstantiation. But when once I had studied and compared the Gospel passages quoted above, I am surprised that I could be so simple as not to notice the clear symbolism until the Lord aroused suspicion in my soul with the following act.

I was serving as a priest in the Pyrenees of Aragon in 1950 and had several towns in my charge. That year the snows began very early and were exceptionally severe. I got a bad cold, which caused me to go for nearly a month without going up to one of those towns named Burgase.

When I did go, I found that all the communion wafers were wormy.

I did what the liturgy requires in such cases. Afterwards I prayed to the Lord for more than an hour that He would deliver me from a doubt that arose when I found myself in that moment with the reality of a thing I had studied theoretically, but for which I didn't find a satisfactory explanation when I was confronted with it.

My doubt was this:

If in the consecrated wafers there is nothing of the substance of flour, what were those worms feeding on?

Certainly not on the accidents, for any person of average intelligence knows that such things can't serve for food. It had to be either on the body of CHRIST or on the flour.

As for the body of CHRIST, the Scripture declares in Psalm 16:10 and Acts 2:27 that GOD could not leave Him to see corruption in some eucharistic vessel. So the worms had to feed on flour. If so, where was the transubstantiation? I studied, I consulted, I asked for advice, but there was no logic that could remove my doubts. In , my prayer times I said aloud, as if trying to convince myself by dint of hearing it, "JESUS leaves when the flour substance has to start rotting."

Then I thought, "But IS GOD a plaything in the hands of the priest, flour, climate, humidity, and worms?"

No, experience came to show me that there had been no transubstantiation there at all.

It was months before I found peace, and I found it concerning this matter only when I was convinced that I didn't cease to be a Christian because I doubted. Precisely in the measure in which I studied and read the Gospel I found myself farther away from the Catholic Church, but nearer to JESUS and I felt greater peace.

At the beginning it was a real torture, which can be understood only by one who has had a blind faith in a teaching and suddenly sees it all collapse.

But the Lord permitted it all, preparing my soul for other more astounding discoveries; these when I first made contact with an Evangelical pastor at the beginning of 1952.

That man thought along the same lines that my studies and meditations had led me. It was no longer I alone. It was not a hallucination of my mind. There, were other wise and, above all, good Christian people, who thought just as I did.

GOD always makes Himself known to the one who looks for Him willingly. His teaching went on falling on my heart with the softness of the dew from Heaven, and with His words I found a peace that I had long sought by every means without finding it. But in the end the triumph is always CHRIST's. How marvelous is His work in souls!

~ end of chapter 5 ~

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