

The Eucharist

Some Answers - Apologetics.

By "Observer".

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IN some districts and towns in the North of Ireland, it is quite customary to assail Catholics on account of their religion.

Catholic servants and those employed at public works are very frequently annoyed in this respect; and, sometimes, such, sadly, are badly prepared to give a reason for the faith that is in them.

The following pages have been composed and compiled in hours of leisure, with the object of supplying Catholics with arguments, which, it is hoped, will enable them to vindicate the truth of their holy religion, and, at the same time, to confute their adversaries.

There is, perhaps, very little new advanced, as a few well-known authors — to whom, for the sake of brevity, no reference is made in the text — have been put under contribution in the composition of the work: but there is a new arrangement of matter, which may be attractive and useful.

The writer has selected the Church's doctrines and practices to which exception is most commonly taken, and which are often made the subject of scoffs and sneers. If the little book prove in any way advantageous to those for whom it has been written, the labour undergone in writing it shall be more than rewarded.

The Author.

THE subject of the Eucharist is one which appeals to the hearts of all Catholics. They cannot bear to hear it spoken of disrespectfully. It is, moreover, usually considered the touchstone of the Catholic and Protestant claims to the true faith. Hence, although it is hard to be obliged to defend the truth of God against His creatures, yet such a duty devolves on the faithful with regard to this ineffable mystery. Protestants, of course, do not agree among themselves on this more than on any other subject. A short time after the so-called Reformation, they gave no fewer than sixty-five different interpretations to the four words, "This is my body." It is only in opposition to the Catholic doctrine of the Real Presence that Protestants find themselves at one.

There were many figures of the Eucharist in the Old Law. The manna was notably so. Now, if Protestant views about the Eucharist be correct, the manna was superior to the Eucharist — that is, the type was superior to the thing typified. (1) The manna was produced by the immediate action of God, whereas the Eucharistic bread is produced by a baker. (2) The manna descended from heaven, the Eucharistic bread is brought forth from the oven. (3) The manna was a particular food, miraculously given to the people of God; the bread of the Eucharist is a common food for the salvation of all men, provided they be properly disposed by faith and graces, Jews and Turks as well as Christians. But the superiority of the Eucharist over the manna in Catholic belief, is evident.

The doctrine of the Catholic Church is defined most clearly in the Council of Trent, Session 13: "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." Christ is in the Eucharist "truly" that is, the words "This is My body" are not, as the Zwinglians contended, a mere figure. He is there "really," so that His presence does not depend, as Calvin taught, on the faith of the receiver. He is there "substantially:" these words exclude another error of Calvin, who held that Christ's body is in heaven and nowhere else, though it exercises its virtue and power in the Eucharist.

The proofs of the Catholic doctrine are deduced from various sources — Sacred Scripture, Prescription, and Tradition. Large volumes have been written in the development of these proofs, but we shall touch only on a few of them as sufficient for our purpose.

The first proof is taken from Saint John, chapter 6, where we have a promise of the Eucharist.

After the record of a stupendous miracle, which our Lord performed, whereby the wants of five thousand men, with women and children, were supplied by the use of five loaves and two fishes, the Evangelist states that Our Lord took occasion to speak of the Sacrament of His body and blood, which was to be distributed, not to a few thousands, but to countless millions of souls, not in one place, but in every place "from the rising of the sun to the going down," not at one time, but in all days, "even to the consummation of the world."

Jesus said (verse 48, and following) "I am the bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the desert, and are dead. This is the bread, which comes down from heaven: that if any man eat of it, he may not die. 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 for the life of the world." The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying: "How can this Man give us His flesh to eat? Then Jesus said to them: "Amen, amen, I say unto you: except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you... For My flesh is meat, indeed, and My blood is drink, indeed." Our Divine Lord here speaks literally of His body and blood; and the multitude so understood Him. For "the Jews strove among themselves, saying: How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?" Even some of the disciples, though avoiding the disrespectful language of the multitude, gave expression to their dissent by saying (verse 61): "This saying is hard, and who can hear it?"

Both Jews and disciples evidently showed by their words and conduct that they understood Our Lord to have spoken literally: for had they interpreted His words in a figurative sense, the "saying" would not have been hard, neither would it have led them to abandon Him, as they did.

Now if our Lord had intended His words to be taken in a figurative sense, would He not, in His infinite goodness, have explained them? There is a number of passages in the New Testament where Christ's words were taken literally, whereas He intended them to be taken figuratively, and in those passages, He corrects the mistakes, though from some of them no great error could result. For example, He says (Saint John, chapter 11): — "Lazarus, our friend, sleeps." Taking His words in their literal sense, the disciples said: "Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well:" but our Lord corrected the mistake by saying: "Lazarus is dead." In the present instance, does He alter His language? Does He soften down the expressions used? By no means; but He repeats more emphatically than before: "Amen, amen, I say unto you, except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you." "He that eats My flesh and drinks My blood has everlasting life."

"My flesh is meat, indeed, and My blood is drink, indeed." "He that eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him." "He that eats Me, the same also shall live by Me." Could words be more clear? Could language be more emphatic? Five times, after exception was taken to His words, Our Divine Lord repeats that we must eat His flesh and drink His blood; and when, in consequence of these words, "Many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him" (verse 67), He offered no explanation, but merely turned to the chosen twelve, and feelingly said to them: "Will you also go away?" Whereupon Peter, in the name of the others, replied: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." Peter's words have been re-echoed by every Catholic who ever lived, and will be re-echoed by every Catholic who ever shall live on the face of the earth. Neither Peter nor they could or can comprehend this adorable mystery; but they "have believed and know Christ to be Son of God," and, therefore, that He can accomplish what He says. "His words are the words of eternal life."

From the conduct of our Divine Lord, from the incredulity of the Jews and faithless disciples, and from the fidelity of the chosen twelve, we are compelled to believe that Christ promised to give to his faithful followers His real body and His real blood in the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

The words of institution are recorded by Saint Matthew, Saint Mark, and Saint Luke in almost the same terms. Saint Matthew says — chapter 26 — "And while they were at supper, Jesus took bread, and blessed and broke, and gave to His disciples, and said: Take ye and eat: this is my body. And taking the chalice He gave thanks, and gave to them, saying: "Drink ye all of this: for this is My blood of the New Testament, which shall be shed for many unto remission of sins." How faithfully here has our dear Lord fulfilled the promise He had made? Could language be more clear? "This is My body: this is My blood." Catholics take, and always have taken, these words in their literal sense, nor have they any difficulty in doing so, for they believe that "With God all things are possible." — Saint Matthew 19:26. Protestants, however, take them in a figurative sense, because they do not understand how God could effect a mystery* so stupendous?

(Footnote: A mystery of faith, is a revealed truth, which is so much exalted above human intelligence that man could never have soared to its heights unaided by the light of faith; and which, when he is thus enabled to know, he still remains incapable of understanding or explaining. It is above human reason without, however, being contrary to it. A miracle, on the other hand, is a sensible event, which takes place contrary to the ordinary laws of nature, by the special intervention of God. Such, for instance, is the resurrection of Lazarus, as reported by Saint John in his chapter 11.)

The Eucharist is a mystery, which transcends human comprehension. There are many mysteries revealed in the Sacred Scriptures. The Trinity is a mystery, not only above, but apparently contrary to human reason. The Incarnation is a mystery; does it not contradict all the senses except the sense of hearing? Those who saw the Divine Infant in the crib of Bethlehem were impressed, by the testimony of their senses, that they beheld nothing but a mere child; but the voice of the angelic choir proclaimed the Child to be "A Saviour, who is Christ the Lord;" and as "faith comes by hearing," if Protestants applied this principle, they would get over all doubts and difficulties suggested by the senses against the mystery of the Eucharist. Protestants are very inconsistent on this point. They believe the mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation, but reject the mystery of the Eucharist, which is more clearly revealed. That Rationalists should reject all mysteries is comprehensible; but that Bible Christians should believe some and reject other mysteries equally or more clearly revealed is incomprehensible, indeed!

The circumstances in which our Lord was placed at the Last Supper oblige us to take His words in their plain, literal sense. To whom did He address Himself? At what time did He speak? He was addressing His chosen disciples, to whom, in private, He was accustomed to explain the difficulties, which appeared to be in the discourses, which He addressed to the multitudes. He was addressing them, too, for the last time. He was speaking to those whom He had destined to establish His holy religion. He was instituting a Sacrament, which He then bequeathed, as the most precious legacy, to His Church. He was, in fine, legislating for His Spiritual Kingdom.

Did not all these circumstances require the greatest perspicuity? Is it less than blasphemy to say that He spoke in a manner calculated to convince mankind of the real presence of His body and blood in the Eucharist, if His body and blood were not truly, really, and substantially present therein? As a living parent, He was bound to couch His last will and testament in terms not likely to introduce error and discord among His children after His death.

As a Divine legislator, He was obliged to promulgate His law in terms conveying a clear knowledge of the law to those whom He destined to be its expounders. Was not our Divine Lord omniscient? Did He not foresee that the countless millions of Christians who lived from the first to the sixteenth century would believe the doctrine of the real presence? Did He not foresee, too, that countless millions of Catholics — after the sixteenth century — would still believe the same doctrine? If such were not His doctrine did not His own words lead them, all into error? The assertion is blasphemy!

It must be borne in mind that on the occasion of the institution of the Holy Eucharist, at His Last Supper, Our Lord commanded His disciples to do what He had done till the end of time. "Do this for a commemoration of Me" (Saint Luke, 22:19). Now, the belief and practice of the Apostles on this point are vital. Did they merely bless bread and wine, and distribute them to the faithful: or did they consecrate the body and blood of Jesus Christ? If we find that the Apostles and their successors from the first till the nineteenth century, the twentieth [and now the twenty-first] century, professed to consecrate and dispense the body and blood of Christ, by virtue of the command of our Divine Lord, then the Catholic doctrine is triumphant.

Saint Paul wrote Epistles to the Corinthians, and in the first Epistle (10:16), these words occur: "The chalice of benediction, which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? And the bread, which we break, is it not the partaking of the body of the Lord?" Again (1 Corinth 11:23-29): "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread, and giving thanks, broke, and said: 'Take ye and eat: this is My body, which shall be delivered for you: this do for the commemoration of Me.' In like manner, also, the chalice, after He had supped, saying: 'This chalice is the New Testament in My blood: this do ye, as often as you shall drink, for the commemoration of Me'; for as often as you shall eat this bread and drink the chalice you shall show the death of the Lord until He come. Therefore, whosoever shall eat of this bread or drink the, chalice of the Lord unworthily shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man prove himself: and so let him eat of that bread and drink of the chalice; for he that eats and drinks unworthily eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord."

Could Saint Paul express more clearly his belief in the real presence? He distinctly and clearly affirms that the chalice and bread, which he and the other Apostles bless, are a participation of the body and blood of Christ. He says: "Whosoever shall eat this bread or drink the chalice of the Lord unworthily shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." But could Saint Paul be so

unreasonable as to declare a man guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord, if the man had received in the Eucharist only bread and wine?

Again, Saint Paul says: "He that eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord." The unworthy receiver is condemned for not "discerning" the body of the Lord in the Eucharist; but could he be blamed for not discerning the body of the Lord if there be only bread and wine before him? Hence, Saint Paul, both by his belief and practice, confirms the doctrine of the real presence of Jesus Christ in the adorable Sacrament of the Eucharist.

The Catholic doctrine is proved, too, by prescription. At the time of the so-called Reformation, all Christians in the world except the handful of Vaudois or Waldensians, believed in the real presence — the Nestorian (or Assyrian Chaldean and Indian 'Church of the East') and Eutychians (or Monophysites of Egypt, Ethiopia, Syria, Armenia and India), who had separated from the Catholic Church in the fifth century; the Greek Church, the Russian Church, the Egyptian 'Orthodox' (as well as the Copts), the 'Orthodox' Syrians, Cypriots, and all the Oriental and Eastern European 'sects' (properly called 'churches'), which had long been separated from the communion of Rome; and all these sects still believe in the real presence. Now, this fact alone is sufficient to establish the truth of the Catholic doctrine.

It is a doctrine, which includes a Sacrament and a sacrifice of daily use among the faithful. The reformers come forward and say, "This doctrine was not taught by the early Church, but was introduced afterwards." Now, to say that at any time the Church could teach error is a blasphemy; for the assertion is based on a supposition that Christ either could not or did not fulfil his promises when he said: "I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world;" or when He said; "The gates of hell shall not prevail against His Church."

At the time of the so-called Reformation, the Church was in possession of the doctrine of the real presence. The reformers impugned it; and it was their duty to show that a change had taken place, and to show where and by whom it was made. Did they do so? No; nor will they ever do so. They cannot produce a single page of history, either sacred or profane, which will sustain them in their thesis. Are we, then, to believe that this great change, about which Protestants now clamour so loudly, took place, and that no alarm was raised either by vigilant pastors or faithful people? Are we to believe that the Universal Church — pastors and people — retired to rest one night believing in a figurative presence, and arose next morning all believing in a real presence, and that not a trace of this change is recorded in history? A supposition of the kind is outrageously absurd. No such change was ever made: no such error was ever introduced. Therefore, the doctrine taught and believed at the time of the Reformation was the doctrine taught and believed in every age back to the days of the Apostles, and was consequently the doctrine received by them from Christ Himself.

We are now come to the last argument — Tradition. Saint Ignatius, a disciple of Saint Peter, and who died a martyr in the Coliseum, says of the Docetae, who denied that Christ had a real body (and thus the doctrine of Docetism): "They abstain from the Eucharist because they confess not that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins, and which the Father raised from the dead." What a glorious testimony to our holy faith. Eighteen hundred years and more have rolled by, and still the faith of Rome is as vivid as on the day of the martyrdom of Saint Ignatius.

Saint Justin, in the second century, writes, in an apology to the Emperor Antoninus Pius: "We do not receive those things as common bread and drink; but as Jesus Christ our Saviour was made flesh by the word of God, so we are taught that the Eucharist is both the flesh and blood of the same Jesus Incarnate." Would any man in his senses write thus to a pagan if he believed only in a figurative presence of our Lord in the Holy Eucharist?

Origen (third century) says: "If you will go up with Christ to celebrate the Passion, He will give to you that bread of benediction, His own body, and will vouchsafe to you His own blood."

Saint Cyril of Jerusalem (fourth century), instructing his people, says: "He Himself having declared, "This is My body," who shall dare to doubt henceforward? He having said, "This is My blood," who shall ever doubt, saying, "This is not My blood." He once at Cana turned water into wine, which is like blood; and is He undeserving of belief when He tells us that He has turned wine into blood?" Saint Cyril might be imagined to be contending against modern unbelief.

Saint Augustine (fifth century), addressing the newly baptised, says: "I promised you a discourse, wherein I would explain the Sacrament of the Lord's Table. The bread, which you see on the altar, after being sanctified by the word of God, is the body of Christ. That chalice, after being sanctified by the word of God, is the blood of Christ."

Numberless other authorities might be adduced, but they are not required. Those culled from the first five centuries show the doctrine believed and taught in those centuries to be precisely the same as that taught and believed by the Catholics of the nineteenth and twentieth [and twenty-first] century.

Before concluding this subject, it will not be amiss to state the belief of our own dear Irish Church on this important dogma. The Episcopal Protestants — one-eighth of the population — have the courage (?) to dub themselves "The Church of Ireland," and would fain have themselves regarded as descended from the ancient Irish Church. They formerly disclaimed Saint Patrick; but now they claim him as the founder of their sect.

Deluded people! Who should know, if they do not, that their religion was commenced by Henry VIII, whose character for profligacy was simply infamous. Henry cast aside his allegiance to the Church because the Pope (Clement VII.) would not permit him to divorce his lawful wife, Catherine, with whom he had lived seventeen years, in order that he might marry Anne Boleyn. Henry effected his purpose, however, through the services of the infamous Cranmer, who pronounced the marriage with Catherine to be null and void! This occurred in the year 1534. At the close of the year, when the Parliament met, Henry had himself proclaimed the only supreme head on earth of the Church of England. His next move was to have the newly assumed title recognised in Ireland. George Brown, a rank Lutheran, was consecrated by Cranmer in England, and sent to Dublin to fill the Archiepiscopal See, which then happened to be vacant. Brown and his companions preached up the doctrine of lay supremacy of Henry VIII., who died as he lived, in 1547. Henry had six wives, two of whom he repudiated, two he beheaded, one died in childbirth, and the sixth probably would have ended her days on the scaffold, if Providence had permitted the monster to continue much longer on earth.

In the succeeding reigns of Edward and Elizabeth, the system of the Church of England was completed, as it now exists; and penal laws, which should have been written in characters of fire and of blood, were enacted for the suppression of Catholicity in Ireland, and for the introduction of Anglicanism. A storm of persecution swept over the country from sea to sea. Bishops and priests

were exiled or put to death; education proscribed; and the churches were either appropriated or razed to the ground. The caves of the earth, or the lowly, quiet valleys, under the broad canopy of heaven, were the only temples left to the poor Irish, who had been robbed, by the predecessors of those who now designate themselves "The Church of Ireland," of all the glorious monuments, which had been erected by the faith and charity of their ancestors.

The Irish Church, in communion with Rome, ought to be dearer than life itself to the Catholics of Ireland. For it, our forefathers lost their properties, and often shed their blood. It is, therefore, of great importance, as has been stated already, to know what was the faith of the Irish after Saint Patrick's time in regard to the Holy Eucharist.

We have the Stowe Missal, which, according to the best Irish scholars, cannot be later than the sixth century. In this Missal, we find Masses for the Dead; for the Living; of the Apostles and Virgins; and the greater part of the Canon is word for word the same as the Latin in the Roman Missal used at the present time. The Irish priest today at God's altar uses the same prayers as the sainted Irish priests of thirteen or so centuries ago.

We have a second Missal, called The Bobbio Missal, given by Saint Columbanus, our great Irish Saint, in the sixth century, to his Irish disciples in Italy. In this Missal, the Canon of the Mass is substantially the same as in the Roman Missal of Saint Pius V used today. The prayers in this book clearly prove the doctrine of the real presence. Of our Divine Lord, it states: "By participating of whose flesh we are strengthened, and by drinking whose blood we are cleansed." Could the Catholic doctrine be more clearly expressed?

In the lives of our great national Saints, we find also clear proofs of the same doctrine. The two virgin daughters of King Leoghaire (or Lóegaire mac Néill) say to Saint Patrick: "Give to us the sacrifice of the body and blood of Christ, that we may be freed from the corruption of the flesh, and may see our spouse in heaven." Then Saint Patrick "celebrated Mass, and both daughters of the King approached the Communion with great hope and perfect faith; and when they had communicated they immediately rested in peace."

When the Saint himself took ill, like all his spiritual children to the present day, he fortified his soul with the Holy Communion, or Viaticum. "When the hour of his death approached he received the Sacrament from the Bishop, Tassach (or Tassac); it was at the admonition of the angel Victor he received the Viaticum." — *Vita Tripartita Sancti Patricii*.

Saint Benignus of Armagh, the beloved disciple of Saint Patrick, prepared for death thus: "The man of God, seeing that his dissolution was at hand, sent for Saint Jarlath, and received most devoutly from his hand the earnest and pledge of eternal happiness, the body of the Lord; and thus prepared himself for death, and for his entrance to his heavenly country." In the "Life of Saint Brigid," "the Mary of Erin," who is and ought to be dear to every Irish woman's heart, we read, immediately before her death "she received the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, from the most pure-hand of [Saint] Ninnidh, as she herself had predicted." — *Acta Triadis Thaumaturgae*.

These passages — more might be cited — prove the faith of our forefathers in the adorable mystery of the Eucharist. The faith of Saint Patrick was the same as that of Saint Ignatius, Saint Justin, Origen, Saint Cyril, and Saint Augustine.

The prescription and tradition of every age are in accordance with the teaching of Saint Paul; and Saint Paul confirms the doctrine contained in the words of institution narrated by the three Evangelists; and the words of institution fulfil the promise made by our Divine Lord in the Gospel of Saint John. All taken together, conclusively, irresistibly force on the candid mind the conviction of the truth of the holy dogma, defined so clearly by the Council of Trent, "that in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist are contained truly, really, and substantially the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

Transubstantiation follows directly from the doctrine of the real presence. No one thing in nature can become really and substantially another thing of a different class unless the former be changed into the latter. If, taking water into his hands at Cana, our dear Lord had said, "This is wine," the assertion would be untrue unless he changed the water into wine. In like manner, had Moses said of the rod in his hand, on flinging it on the ground, "This is a serpent," the assertion would not be true unless it were changed into a serpent. Hence, when Our Lord said of what He held in His hands — bread and wine — that they were His body and blood, they required to be changed into His body and blood in order that His assertion should be true.

This wonderful and singular conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the body, and of the whole substance of the wine into the blood of Christ, by the consecration of the bread and wine, is, as the Council of Trent teaches (Canon 1 and Session 13), "properly called by the Catholic Church transubstantiation." If the term is objected to — as it is by Protestants — as not found in the sacred Scriptures, they may also object — which they do not — to the terms Trinity and Incarnation as not found in the Bible. These terms are not found in the Sacred Scriptures; but they express in the clearest manner the doctrine found therein. When Protestants object to the Catholic doctrine, because they cannot comprehend it, or because they cannot understand how Christ's body can be in different places at the same time, they clearly forget or do not know that the Eucharist is a mystery.

It is a doctrine, which we are bound to believe, but which cannot be comprehended by weak human reason. Protestants ask Catholics to account naturally for what is supernatural. Surely, in this they are unreasonable; and their unreasonableness will appear more clearly if they themselves cannot even explain mysteries of nature; for there are mysteries in nature. Can they explain, for example, how a man's soul can be wholly in every part of his body? If the body grows, it comes to the new parts without leaving the old ones; and if a limb be cut off, the soul loses nothing of its immortal self. And why may not a spiritual body, about which we can know nothing, be in different places, by divine power, at the same time? We cannot explain naturally how Our Lord can be in Heaven and in various places on earth at the same time; but we believe that, being in many places at once, our dear Lord is fulfilling the express intention He had in leaving Himself sacramentally on earth. He has left Himself, not for one or two persons, nor for one country, but for all His children, and wishes to be accessible to all.

This very presence was foretold by the prophet Malachy (1:11) where he tells us of "the clean oblation," the Mass, which is being offered constantly "from the rising of the sun even to the going down."

In concluding this subject, which is eminently practical, considering the following words of Our Lord: — "Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you." (Saint John, chapter 6) — I will make this case. Suppose a Catholic and a Protestant came, after death, before the divine tribunal. On the sentence about to be pronounced shall depend their

state for eternity.

Let us suppose that Jesus Christ the Judge will say to the Protestant: "You did not believe in the real presence?" The Protestant will answer. "No." The Judge will rejoin: "Why? Were not my words, 'This is My body: this is My blood,' plain?" "Oh, yes," the Protestant will say; "but I did not think that You really meant what You said: I gave to your words a figurative interpretation." Then, turning to the Catholic, the Judge will say: "You believed in the real presence?" "Yes," the Catholic will reply. "Why?" "Simply, my God, because You said so; and 'You have the words of eternal life'." It is not difficult to see which of the two would be in the safer position at that dread moment on which depends eternity.

Catholics cannot be sufficiently grateful for their faith in the adorable mystery of the Eucharist, and they should pray daily for those who have it not; that "we being many may become one bread, one body, all that partake of one bread." – 1 Corinth 10:17.

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