

# **The Sacrament Of The Eucharist - Difficulties Answered**

## **From the writings of Saint Alphonsus Liguori.**

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From "THE HISTORY OF HERESIES, AND THEIR REFUTATION"; OR, "THE TRIUMPH OF THE CHURCH."

TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN OF Saint ALPHONSUS LIGUORI, BY THE REV. JOHN T. MULLOCK, OF THE ORDER OF Saint FRANCIS, in 1847.

OF TRANSUBSTANTIATION, THAT IS, THE CONVERSION OF THE SUBSTANCE OF THE BREAD AND OF THE WINE INTO THE SUBSTANCE OF THE BODY AND BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST.

The Council of Trent (Session 13, canon 1), teaches, "that Jesus Christ, God and man, is really, truly, and substantially contained under the appearance of those sensible things in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, after the consecration of the bread and wine."

The Council of Trent teaches further, that the whole substance of the bread and wine is changed into the body and blood of Christ. It issued a Decree to that effect (Chapter 4, Session 13), and says, that the Church most aptly calls this change Transubstantiation.

OF THE MANNER IN WHICH JESUS CHRIST IS IN THE EUCHARIST. THE PHILOSOPHICAL OBJECTIONS OF THE SACRAMENTARIANS ANSWERED.

Andrew Karlstadt was a disciple of Luther, but did not remain so, and thus he became chief of the Sacramentarians, teaching, in opposition to Luther, that Christ was not really present in the Eucharist, and, therefore, that the word 'this' ('this is my body') did not refer to the bread, but to Christ himself, who was about to sacrifice his body for us, as if he were to say: "This is my body which I am about to deliver up for you." The Sacramentarians hold that the Eucharist is only a figure of the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

1. Before we reply in detail to the philosophical objections of the Sacramentarians relative to the manner in which the body of Jesus Christ is in the Sacrament, we should reflect that the Holy Fathers in matters of faith do not depend on philosophical principles, but on the authority of the Scriptures and the Church, knowing well that God can do many things which our weak reason cannot comprehend. We never will be able to understand the secrets of nature in created things; how, then, can we comprehend how far the power of the Almighty, the Creator of nature, itself, extends?

We now come to their objections. First, they say that, although God is omnipotent, he cannot do anything which is repugnant in itself, but it is repugnant, they say, that Christ should be in heaven

and on earth, at the same time, really and truly, as he is according to our belief, and not alone in one, but in many places, at the same time.

But consult what the Council of Trent says on this subject (Session 13 canon 1). The Council, therefore, teaches, that the body of Jesus Christ is in heaven in a natural manner, but that it is on earth in a sacramental or supernatural manner, which our limited understanding cannot comprehend, no more than we can understand how the three Divine Persons in the Trinity are the same essence, or how, in the Incarnation of the Word in Jesus Christ there is but one Divine Person and two Natures, the Divine and human.

2. It is impossible, they say also, for a human body to be in several places at once.

We believe, however, that the body of Christ is not multiplied in the Eucharist, for our Lord is not there present definitively, or circumscribed to that place and to no other, but sacramentally, under the appearance of bread and wine, so that wherever the species of the consecrated bread and wine are, there Jesus Christ is present. The multiplicity of the presence of Christ, therefore, does not proceed from the multiplication of his body in many places, but from the multiplicity of the consecrations of the bread and wine, performed by the priests in different places.

But how is it possible, say they, that the body of Christ can be in several places at once, unless it is multiplied?

We answer, that before our adversaries can prove this to be impossible, they should have a perfect knowledge of place and of glorified bodies; they should know distinctly what place is, and what existence glorified bodies have. When such knowledge, however, surpasses our weak understandings, who shall have the hardihood to deny, that the body of our Lord can be in several places at once, since God has revealed in the Holy Scriptures that Jesus Christ really exists in every consecrated Host?

But, they reply, we cannot understand this.

We answer again, that the Eucharist is a mystery of Faith, since our understanding cannot comprehend it, and as we never can do so, it is rashness to say that it cannot be, when God has revealed it, and when we know we cannot decide by reason what is beyond the power of reason.

3. They assert, besides, that it is repugnant to reason to say that the body of Jesus Christ exists under the species, without extension or quantity, for both extension and quantity are essential qualities of bodies, and God himself cannot deprive things of their essences, therefore, say they, the body of Christ cannot exist without filling a space corresponding to its quantity, and, therefore, it cannot be in a small Host, and in every particle of the Host, as Catholics believe.

We reply to this, that although God cannot deprive things of their essence, still he can deprive them of the property of their essence; he cannot take away from fire the essence of fire, but he can deprive fire of the essential quality of burning, as he did in the case of the Book of Daniel, where Daniel's companions were unharmed in the furnace. Thus, in like manner, though God cannot make a body to exist without extension and quantity, still he can make it, so that it will not occupy space, and that it will be entire in every part of the sensible species which contain it as a substance; the body of Christ, therefore, into which the substance of the bread is changed, does not occupy place, and is whole and entire in every part of the species. Saint Thomas explains this in his Summa, Part 3, Question 76, Article 1.

4. That being the case, it is not the fact that the body of Christ in the Eucharist exists without quantity; the whole quantity is there, but in a supernatural, not a natural manner. It does not exist, then, 'circumscriptive', that is, according to the measure of the proper quantity corresponding to the quantity of space; but it exists 'sacramentaliter', sacramentally, after the manner of a substance. Hence it is, that Jesus Christ, in the Sacrament, does not exercise any action dependent on the senses; and although he exercises the acts of the intellect and of the will, he does not exercise the corporal acts of the sensitive life, which require a certain sensible and external extension in the organs of the body.

5. Neither is it true that Jesus Christ exists in the Sacrament without extension. His body is there, and it has extension; but this extension is not external, or sensible and local, but internal, 'in ordine ad se', so that although all the parts are in the same place, still one part is not confused with the other. Thus, Jesus Christ exists in the Sacrament with internal extension; but as to external and local extension, he is inextended, and indivisible, and whole, and entire, in each particle of the Host, as a substance, as has been already said, without occupying space. Hence it is, that as the body of our Lord does not occupy space, it cannot be moved from one place to another, but is moved only 'per accidens', ('accidentally' or 'incidentally') when the species are moved under which it is contained, just as happens to ourselves, that when our bodies are moved from one place to another, our souls are also moved, 'per accidens', though the soul is incapable of occupying any space. In fine, the Eucharist is a Sacrament of Faith, 'misterium Fidei', (mystery of Faith) and as we cannot comprehend all the matters of faith, so we should not pretend to understand all that faith, through the Church, teaches us concerning this Sacrament.

6. But how, say they, can the accidents of bread and wine exist without their substance, or subject, as it is called?

We answer, the question whether accidents are distinct from matter has been already mooted; the most general opinion is in the affirmative; the Councils of Lateran (1215), Florence (1445), and Trent, however, keeping clear of the controversy altogether, call the accidents species. In the ordinary course of things these accidents, or species, cannot exist without the subject, but they can in a supernatural and extraordinary manner. In the ordinary course of things, humanity cannot exist without its proper subsistence ('subsistentia. '); but, notwithstanding, faith teaches us that the humanity of Christ had not human, but Divine subsistence, that is, the Person of the Word. As the humanity of Christ, there fore, united to the Word hypostatically, subsists without the human person, so, in the Eucharist, the species can exist without the subject, that is, without the substance of bread, because their substance is changed into the body of Christ. These species, therefore, have nothing of reality, but by Divine power they represent their former subject, and appear still to retain the substance of bread and wine, and may even become corrupted, and worms may be 'generated in them', [as the Medieval scientists believed] but, then, it is from a new matter, created by the Almighty, that these worms spring, and Jesus Christ is no longer present, as Saint Thomas teaches in his Summa, Part 3, Question 76, Article 5, answer to objection 3.

As far as the sensations of our organs go, the body of Christ in the Eucharist is neither seen nor touched by us immediately in itself, but only through the medium of those species under which it is contained, and it is thus we should understand the words of Saint John Chrysostom in his Homily number 60.

7. It is, then, an article of faith, that Jesus Christ is permanently in the Eucharist, and not alone in the use of the communion, as the Lutherans say, and this is the doctrine of the Council of Trent, which also assigns the reason in Session 13 chapter 3.

And as Jesus Christ is present before the use of the Sacrament, so he is also present after it, as the Fourth Canon of that session expresses it.

8. This is proved, not alone by reason and authority, but by the ancient practice of the Church, likewise; for in the early ages, on account of the persecution, the Holy Communion was given in private houses and in caverns, as Tertullian testifies. Saint Cyprian tells us, that in his time the faithful used to bring home the Eucharist to their houses, to communicate at the proper time. Saint Basil, writing to the Patrician Cesaria (Letter 289), exhorts her, that as she could not, on account of the persecution, attend the public communion, she should carry it along with her, to communicate in case of danger. Saint Justin, Martyr, in the second part of his Apology, mentions that the Deacons used to carry the communion to the absent. Saint Iræneus laments to Pope Victor, that having omitted to celebrate the Pasch, he deprived several Priests of the communion on that account, who could not come to the public meetings, and he therefore sent the Eucharist in sign of peace to those who were prevented from attending. Saint Gregory of Nazianzan relates that his sister Orgonia, standing with great faith nigh to the Sacrament, which was concealed, was freed from a disease under which she was labouring; and Saint Ambrose tells us that Saint Satirus, his brother, having the Eucharist suspended round his neck, escaped shipwreck.

9. Father Agnus Cirillo, in his work entitled "Ragguagli Teologici" (page 353), adduces several other examples to the same effect, and proves that an anonymous author, who lately taught that it was not lawful to give communion with particles previously consecrated, and preserved in the tabernacle, is totally wrong. The learned Jean Mabillon (1632-1707) shows that the practice of giving communion when Mass was not celebrated had its origin in the Church of Jerusalem, and existed in the days of Saint Cyril, as it was not possible to say Mass each time that the numerous pilgrims frequenting the Holy City required communion. From the Eastern Church this custom was introduced into the Western Church, and Pope Gregory XIII., in 1584, laid down in his Ritual the mode to be observed by the Priest in the administration of the holy communion, when Mass was not said. This Ritual was confirmed, subsequently, by Paul V, in 1614, and in the chapter 'On the Sacred Eucharist'. Pope Benedict XIV., in his Encyclical Letter of the 12th November, 1742, approves of giving communion when Mass is not celebrated.

10. We may as well remark here, that a certain Decree of the Congregation of Rites, dated 2nd September, 1741, was circulated, by which it was prohibited to give communion to the people at the Masses for the dead, with pre-consecrated particles, and taking the pixis from the tabernacle, because the usual benediction cannot be given in black vestments to those who communicate. [A pix, or pyx, is one of the special containers used to hold the Blessed Eucharist.] But Father Cirillo (page 368) says that this Decree is not obligatory, as it was not sanctioned by the reigning Pope, Benedict XIV. There is, certainly, one very strong argument in his favour, and it is this, that Benedict, while Archbishop of Bologna, in his work on the Sacrifice of the Mass, approved of the opinion of the learned Merati, that communion might be given, at the Masses for the dead, with pre-consecrated particles, and when he was afterwards Pope, and re-composed the same Treatise on the Sacrifice of the Mass, he never thought of retracting his opinion, which he would have done had he considered the Decree we mentioned valid, and he would have given it his approbation, as published during his Pontificate. Father Cirillo adds, that one of the Consultors of the Congregation

told him that, although the Decree was drawn up, yet several of the Consultors refused to sign it, and thus it was held in abeyance, and never published.

11. To come back to the sectaries who deny the Real Presence of Jesus Christ, unless in the use alone, I know not how they can answer the First Council of Nicaea, which ordains (Canon 13), that communion should be administered to the dying at all times, and it would be impossible to do that if the Eucharist was not preserved. The Fourth Council of Lateran (1215) expressly ordains the same thing in Canon 20 and this was confirmed by the Council of Trent (Session 13, canon 6). From the earliest ages, the Greeks preserved the Eucharist in silver ciboria, made in the form of a dove, or of a little tower, and suspended over the altar, as is proved from the life of Saint Basil, and the Testament of Saint Perpetuus, Bishop of Tours.

12. Our adversaries object, that Nicephorus Callistus relates, that in the Greek Church, it was the custom to give the children the fragments that remained after communion; therefore, they say, the Eucharist was not preserved.

We answer, that this was not done every day, only on Wednesdays and Fridays, when the pixis were purified; and it was, therefore, preserved on the other days, and, besides, particles were always preserved for the sick.

They object, besides, that the words, "This is my body," were not pronounced by Christ before the eating, but after it, as appears from Saint Matthew (26:26): "Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke; and gave to his disciples, and said: Take ye, and eat: This is my body."

We answer, with [Saint Robert] Bellarmine, that in this text the order of the words is not to be regarded, for the order is different with each of the Evangelists. Saint Mark, speaking of the consecration of the chalice, says (14:23-24): "Having taken the chalice they all drank of it. And he said to them: This is my blood." Now, it would appear from this, also, that the words, "This is my blood," were said after the consumption of the chalice; but the context of all the Evangelists show that both "This is my body," and "This is my blood," was said by our Lord before he gave them the species of bread and wine.

#### THE MATTER AND FORM OF THE SACRAMENT OF THE EUCHARIST.

13. As to the matter of the Eucharist, there is no doubt but that we should use that alone which was used by Jesus Christ that is, bread of wheat, and wine of the vine, as we learn from Saint Matthew (26:26), Saint Mark (14:12), Saint Luke (22:19), and Saint Paul (1 Corinth 11:27). This is what the Catholic Church has always done, and condemned those who dared to make use of any other matter, as is proved in the Third Council of Carthage (canon 27), which was held in the year 397. Estius (William van Est, 1542-1613) says that consecration can be performed with any sort of bread wheaten, barley, oaten, or millet; but Saint Thomas in his Summa, Part 3, Question 74, Article 3, answer to objection 2, writes, that it is with bread of wheat alone it can be done, but still that bread made of a sort of rye, which grows from wheat sown in poor soil, is also matter for the consecration. He, therefore, rejected all other bread, and this is the only opinion we can follow in practice.

Doctors have disputed, as we may see in the works of Mabillon (Died 1707), Sirmond (1559-1661), Cardinal Bona (1609-1664), and others, whether unleavened bread, such as the Latins use, or leavened bread, as used by the Greeks, is the proper matter for the Sacrament. There is not the least doubt but that the consecration is valid in either one or the other; but, at present, the Latins are

prohibited from consecrating in leavened, and the Greeks in unleavened, bread, according to a Decree of the Council of Florence, in 1429. The matter of the consecration of the blood should be common wine, pressed from ripe grapes; and, therefore, the liquor expressed from unripe grapes, boiled wine, or that which has become vinegar, cannot be used. 'Must', however, or the unfermented juice of the grape, will answer; but it should not be used without necessity.

14. As to the quantity of bread and wine to be consecrated, it is quite sufficient that it be apparent to the senses, be it ever so little; it must, however, be certain, and of a known quantity, and morally present.

According to the intention of the Church, and as Saint Thomas teaches in his Summa, Part 3, Question 73, Article 2, a greater number of particles should not be consecrated than is sufficient to give communion to that number of people who are expected to receive within the time that the species would keep without corrupting. From this Peter (Pierre) de Marca (1594-1662) concludes, that it is not in the power of a Priest to consecrate all the bread in a shop, for example; the consecration in this case, he says, would be invalid, though others assert it would only be illicit. Theologians also dispute of the validity of consecration, when performed for the purposes of witchcraft, or to expose the Host to the insult of unbelievers.

15. We now have to treat of the form of the Eucharist. Luther says, that the words of Christ alone, "This is my body," are not sufficient to consecrate, but that the whole liturgy must be recited. Calvin said, that the words were not necessary at all for consecration, but only to excite faith. Some Greek schismatics, Arcudius (died in 1640) informs us, said that the words, "This is," and so on, being once expressed by Christ, were sufficient in themselves to consecrate all the Hosts offered up ever after.

16. Some Catholics taught that Christ consecrated the Eucharist by his occult benediction, without any words at all, by the excellence of his power; but ordained the form, at the same time, for man to use in consecration.

This opinion was held by Durandus (died 1297), Innocent III. (died 1216), and especially by Catharinus (Llancelotto Politi 1483-1553), but as Cardinal Gotti (1664-1742) informs us, it is now not held by any one, and some even say it was branded as rashness to hold it. The true and general doctrine is, as Saint Thomas teaches in his Summa, Part 3, Question 78, Article 1, that Jesus Christ consecrated, when he expressed the words, "This is my body, this is my blood," and that the priest, at the present day, consecrates in the same manner, expressing the same words, in the person of Christ, and this not historically, as narrative, but significantly, as significative, that is, by applying this meaning to the matter before him, as the generality of Doctors teach with Saint Thomas (in his Summa, Part 3, Question 78, Article 5).

17. Catharinus says, also, that besides the words of our Lord, it is necessary, in order to consecrate, to add the prayers which, in the Latin Church, precede, and in the Greek, follow, the act; and the learned Oratorian, Father Pierre Le Brun (1661-1729), follows this opinion, likewise. The general opinion of theologians agreeing with Saint Thomas (in his Summa, Part 3, Question 78, Article 5), is, that Christ consecrated with the very same words as Priests do at present, and that the prayers of the Canon of the Mass are obligatory, but not necessary for consecration, so that it would be valid without them. The Council of Trent (Session 13, canon 1) declares that our Saviour's words are the essence of the issue in question. Were not the words, "Take and eat; this is my body," as the Evangelists inform us, clearly demonstrative that Christ gave his disciples his body to eat? It was by

these words, then, and no other, that he converted the bread into his body, as Saint Ambrose also declared in his *On the Sacraments*, tome 4, chapter 4.

Saint John Chrysostom spoke of the same words in his first Homily on the Betrayal of Judas.

18. The same Council - Trent (Chapter 3) – raises another point about the instantaneous change which occurs as a result of the words of Christ. Therefore, by the power of the words, that is, the words mentioned by the Evangelists, instantly after the consecration, the bread is converted into the body, and the wine into the blood, of Jesus Christ. There is a great difference between the two sentences, "This is my body," and "We beseech you that the body of Jesus Christ may be made for us," or, as the Greeks say, "Make this bread the body of Christ;" for the first shows that the body of Christ is present at the very moment in which the sentence is expressed, but the second is only a simple prayer, beseeching that the oblation may be made the body, not in a determinative, but in a suspended and expectative sense. The Council says that the conversion of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ takes place 'vi verborum', not 'vi orationum', by the power of the words, and not by the power of the prayers. Saint Justin, Martyr, in the second part of his *Apology*, says this, and he afterwards explains that any prayers are in fact: "This is my body". Now, the prayer in the Canon was not pronounced by the Word of God himself, but the words of Institution were. Saint Iræneus agrees in this. We do not find that Christ, in consecrating, used any other words but those: "This is my body, and this is my blood." Taking all this into consideration, we must again decide that the opinion of Le Brun, mentioned in paragraph 17, has not a sound foundation of probability.

19. Several Fathers (say the supporters of this opinion) teach that the Eucharist is consecrated both by prayer and by the words of Christ.

We answer, that by the word prayer they mean the very expression "This is my body," used by Christ, as Saint Justin, Martyr, in the second part of his *Apology*, expressly states, that the prayer by which the Eucharist is consecrated is the words, "This is my body," and so on. Saint Iræneus had previously said the same, that the Divine invocation by which the Eucharist is made is the Divine word. Saint Augustine (in Sermon number 28) says that the mystic prayer (as he calls it in Chapter 4 of his *On the Trinity*), by which the Eucharist is made, consists in the words of Christ, "This is my body," and so on, as the forms of the other Sacraments are called prayers, because they are holy words which have the power of obtaining from God the effect of the Sacraments.

They object to us, also, some Liturgies, as those of Saint James, Saint Mark, Saint Clement, Saint Basil, and Saint John Chrysostom, which would make it appear that besides the words of Christ other prayers are requisite for consecration, as we have in the Roman Canon: "Be pleased, O God, we pray, to bless, acknowledge, and approve this offering in every respect; make it spiritual and acceptable, so that it may become for us the Body and Blood of your most beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ." The same prayer is also used in the Greek Mass, but, as [Saint Robert] Bellarmine writes, when the Greeks were asked by Pope Eugenius IV what was the reason that they used the prayer "that this may become the body," (and so on), after having already expressed the words of consecration, "This is my body," (and so on), they answered that they added this prayer, not to confirm the consecration, but that the Sacrament might assist the salvation of the souls of those who received it.

20. Theologians (such as Salmeron [1515-1585] and Tournely [1658-1729], for instance) say, notwithstanding, that it is not an article of Faith that Christ did consecrate with these words, and

ordained that with these words alone priests should consecrate, for although this is the general opinion, and most consonant with the sentiments of the Council of Trent, still it is not anywhere declared to be an article of faith by the Canon of the Church; and although the Holy Fathers have given it the weight of their authority, they have never laid it down as a matter of faith. Salmeron mentions that the Council of Trent being entreated to explain the form with which Christ consecrated this Sacrament, the Fathers judged it better not to define anything on the subject.

Tournely replies to all the objections made by those who wish to make it a matter of faith. If it is not a matter of faith, however, still, as Saint Thomas teaches, (in his Summa, Part 3, Question 78, Article 1, answer to objection 4,) it is morally certain, and we cannot even say that the contrary opinion is probable. The priest, then, would commit a most grievous sin, if he omitted the preceding prayers, but still his consecration would be valid. It is debated among authors, whether any other words unless these, "This is the Chalice of my blood," though the remainder is laid down in the Missal, are essentially necessary for the consecration of the blood. In our Moral Theology, the reader will find the point discussed. Several hold the affirmative opinion, and quote Saint Thomas in their favour, the opposite opinion, however, is more generally followed, and those who hold it deny that it is opposed to the doctrine of Saint Thomas, for he says that the subsequent words appertain to the substance but not to the essence of the form, and hence they conclude that these words do not belong to the essence, but only to the integrity of the form, so that the priest who would omit them would commit a grievous sin undoubtedly, but still would validly consecrate.

21. We should remark here that the Council of Trent (Session 22), condemned in nine Canons nine errors of the Protestant Reformers concerning the Sacrifice of the Mass, as follows:

First: that the Mass is not a true Sacrifice, and that it is only offered up to administer the Eucharist to the Faithful. Second: That by these words, "Do this in commemoration of me," Christ did not institute the Apostles Priests, or ordain that the Priests should offer up his body and blood. Third: That the Mass is only a thanksgiving or remembrance of the Sacrifice of the Cross, but not a propitiatory Sacrifice, or that it is useful only to those who communicate at it. Fourth: That this Sacrifice is derogatory to the Sacrifice of the Cross. Fifth: That it is an imposture to celebrate Mass in honour of the Saints, and to obtain their intercession. Sixth: That there are errors in the Canon. Seventh: That the ceremonies, vestments, and signs used in the Catholic Church are incentives to impiety. Eighth: That private Masses, in which the Priest alone communicates, are unlawful. Ninth: That the practice of saying part of the Canon in a low voice should be condemned; that it all ought to be said in the vulgar tongue, and that the mixture of water with the wine in the Chalice should also be condemned.

All these errors I have refuted in my work against the Reformers.

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{We have omitted the abundant footnotes which Saint Alphonsus supplied when quoting the Fathers of the Church, and the other Ecclesiastical, controversial and historical writers, in order to allow Alphonsus' argument to flow smoothly. Those readers who would like to consult them, are urged to read the original work in an English translation, such as at:

<http://www.freewebs.com/wallmell/LiguoriHistoryHeresies.pdf>

This extract is from pages 279 to 284.}

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