

The Real Presence: Faith And Devotion

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Christ is not present “in bread and wine”

Although it is always encouraging to read an article that promotes adoration of the Eucharist I think that Pere Hennaux’s article, translated in the last issue of Faith, in spite of its good intention, misrepresents catholic belief about the Eucharist on a central point when he writes: “Christ is really present in bread and wine” (repeated several times). As adoration of the Blessed Sacrament arose as an expression of belief in the Real Presence, clearly the way we speak of the Real Presence will effect our devotion. I write with a copy of the original French before me. First, when Pere Hennaux tells us that when the Church speaks of the Real Presence she “affirms that Christ is really present in bread and wine” he ought to be able to show us where she affirms this. I do not think he can, because in fact the Church does not say this. She says that Christ is really present “in the Eucharist,” or “in the sacrament,” or “beneath the appearances of bread and wine,” but never “in the bread and wine”. There is a great difference between saying that Christ is really present beneath the appearances of bread and wine and is present in the bread and wine. For this latter expression leaves open the possibility that bread and wine still exist after the consecration, which is contrary to the faith of the Church that bread and wine are substantially changed into the true body and blood of Christ at the consecration, so that bread and wine as such cease to exist. The phrase “Christ is really present in bread and wine” suggests that bread and wine continue to exist and that Christ is present in them. This is similar to the Lutheran doctrine of consubstantiation, that Christ is present in the sacrament with bread and wine. This view was excluded at the Council of Trent (session XIII cannon 2):

If anyone says that the substance of bread and wine together with the Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ remain, and denies that wonderful and unique conversion of the whole substance of bread into the Body of Christ and of the whole substance of wine into his Blood, so that only the appearances (speciebus) of bread and wine remain, which conversion the catholic Church suitably calls transubstantiation, let him be anathema.

No “bread” or “wine” after the consecration

Pere Hennaux says, rightly, that transubstantiation is the “transformation of bread into the Body of Christ,” but the end of transubstantiation is not, as he thinks, “the real presence of Jesus in the bread,” for the bread and wine have been changed in their whole being (substantially), so that what was formally bread and wine is

now the Body and Blood of Christ. Indeed, the Real Presence entails that bread and wine are no longer present, because the sacrament cannot really be the Body and Blood of Christ and bread and wine at the same time. It can only really be one or the other: the Body and Blood of Christ or bread and wine. Thus we cannot properly say “Christ is really present in the bread and wine” but only “is present in bread and wine.” If it were true that Christ is present in bread and wine, then at communion I would receive bread and wine in which Christ also resides. But I do not eat bread or drink wine at all at communion, rather what I receive is the true Body and Blood of Christ, together with his soul and divinity. Also, if we can say that Christ is present in wine then when I look into the chalice at Mass after the consecration I am looking at wine. However, I do not think I am doing this at all. What I see in the chalice is the precious Blood of Christ, hidden from sight beneath the appearances of wine.

A complete transformation

St. Thomas Aquinas remarks that the words of consecration are not “This bread is my body” but rather Christ said “This is my Body” (Lk 22:19, quoted by Hennaux). Nor did Christ say at the Last Supper “This wine is my Blood” but “This is the cup of my blood,” where “cup” stands for its contents by metonymy.[i] Christ said “This” alone, not “This bread” or “This wine” because bread and wine become some totally new thing, his Body and Blood. “This” refers to what they have become or to what is contained in the sacrament. Contrary to what Pere Hennaux says, “This is my body” does not mean “his presence in bread” (see Section I, paragraph 2). The early Fathers of the Church are clear and unanimous that the Eucharist is the Body of Christ. To give just two examples: St. Ignatius of Antioch writes, “The Eucharist is the flesh of the Saviour,” and St. Cyril of Jerusalem, “What appears to be bread, even if it is sensed as such by taste, is the Body of Christ.”[ii] Commenting on these texts Fr. Sebastian Bullough O.P. expresses catholic faith with admirable simplicity:

But it is the same teaching: it is not bread, it is the Body of Christ: the doctrine later called “the Real Presence”: Christ is truly present in the Eucharist.[iii]

Change of substance not concomitance

We may trace the root of Hennaux’s view back to what he says in section I paragraph 4: “Jesus is able... to pass really into bread, and by bread, into his own,” that is into us. When St Thomas asks how Christ comes to be present when he was not previously one way he considers is that Christ moves into the sacrament. But he discounts this possibility, because it would mean that Christ’s body left heaven and could not be present on many altars simultaneously. Nor are bread and wine annihilated (they do not become nothing). So the only way left open is that Christ comes to be really present in the Eucharist because bread and wine are changed into his Body and Blood.[iv] Christ does not pass into bread and wine, but they are changed into him. Although Pere Hennaux mentions a “miracle of divine power,” he prefers to explain the Real Presence by Christ’s love than by the power of God’s word. As love goes out of the lover, for

love is of its nature ecstatic, so Christ goes out of himself and passes into the Eucharist. The Eucharist is of course the sacrament of love, because it is the sign of the way that Christ showed his great love by giving his life for us on the cross. But the change of the bread and wine is wrought by the creative power of the word of God, as Pope Paul VI reaffirmed in his encyclical on the Eucharist.[v] This explanation of the change already provides the very connection between the Eucharist and creation which Hennaux gives as a reason for adoration. Pere Hennaux does not account sufficiently for “the wonderful change” that occurs in the Eucharist; thus he can say that Christ is present “in bread and wine”. The Church has spoken of a change in the substance of bread and wine ever since she began, with Gregory VII in 1079, to pronounce on the presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

Symbolic language

I now come to answer various points which are in favour of allowing the expression. “Christ is really present in bread and wine”. Firstly, while it is true that we may refer to the Eucharist as bread I think this is understood as Christ calls himself “the Bread of Life” (Jn 6, 48). Interestingly, Jesus contrasts the bread from heaven which Moses gave with the true bread from heaven, which is himself (Jn 6, 32). The true bread from heaven is “my flesh for the life of the world” (Jn 6,51). Secondly, it says in the Fourth Eucharistic Prayer: “all who share in this one bread and one cup...” Here it is all important that although the text reads “in this bread” but does not use the parallel phrase “in this wine”. When “in this bread and wine” appeared in the first English edition of the new Missal there was a protest against the phrase which was then altered to “one bread and one cup” in a footnote. Significantly, this correction is now printed in the main text of the American Sacramentary. “One bread and one cup” has sound scriptural basis in St. Paul : “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” (1Cor 10,16). When St. Paul speaks of bread here he is thinking of the Eucharist as the sign of the unity of believers, but there is no foundation for using a parallel phrase about wine. There is also a difference between speaking of the bread of the Eucharist and saying that Christ is present in bread. Thirdly, one acclamation of faith in the New Rite of Mass says “When we eat this bread and drink this cup,” a quotation from 1Cor 11,26. But again St. Paul only says “bread” but not also “wine”. If it were at all right to say that Christ is present in bread and wine, why should we not also be able to say that his Body and Blood are present in bread and wine. If you would not say this second thing, it is inconsistent to uphold the first. One can and does say that Christ’s Body and Blood are really present in the sacrament or beneath the appearances of bread and wine. But, as I have already observed, one cannot anyway say, “Christ is really present in bread and wine” (only present in some other way).

Only appearances remain

Pere Hennaux also seems to me wrong when he says: “In the host we contemplate a piece of the material universe, the bread, become the body of

Christ” (Section IV, paragraph 2). He repeats this phrase in section III, paragraph 5. If what we adore is bread, this is idolatry. But if the bread has truly become the Body of Christ it is no longer bread. Pere Hennaux cannot have it both ways. He does not seem to see that if what was bread really is the Body of Christ, then we can no longer say that Christ is present in bread and wine. The Real Presence means precisely that he is not present in bread and wine. What we may say is that “a piece of the material universe” that we adore in the host is not, as Hennaux says, bread but the Body of Christ, born of the Virgin Mary. It might be argued that I give insufficient attention to the signs of this sacrament. But what are the signs of the Eucharist? They are not bread and wine after the consecration for these have been changed in their being, but the appearances of bread and wine. To want to be exact in speaking about the Eucharist does not mean that one is less sensitive to the mystery. Yehudi Menuhin was a very sensitive musician precisely because he was so exact in his playing. Being exact in detail enables us to notice more nuances. We know that St Thomas Aquinas, who gave us some of the greatest and most beautiful hymns of devotion to the Eucharist (*Adoro te, Pange lingua*, etc.), was extra careful when he came to write on the Eucharist. We can follow his example. If we care about truth, as most people think we should, surely there is nothing we should want to be more careful about than how we speak about the Eucharist, the sacrament of Truth. Otherwise, the words on our lips may not truly express the devotion in our hearts. For Cardinal Newman doctrine and devotion, mind and heart, went together.[vi] Devotion if it is not to be misplaced needs to be founded on doctrine rightly presented. The words which express our devotion are important because, as St Thomas says, “A person professes his faith by his words.”[vii] If it is true that Christ is present in bread and wine, then the Eucharist is not really “the mystery of faith.” I am, however, of one accord with Pere Hennaux about the main thesis of his article that receiving Communion leads to Adoration as the normal complement of participation in the sacrifice of Christ.

[i] St. Thomas , Summa, 3a 78,5.

[ii] St. Ignatius, Smyrn. 7,1; St Cyril, Cat. Myst. 4,9.

[iii] Sebastian Bullough, *Roman Catholicism* (London: Penguin, 1963), 96.

[iv] St. Thomas , Summa, 3a 75, 2.

[v] Pope Paul VI, *Mysterium Fidei*, 47.

[vi] John Henry Newman, *A Grammar of Assent* (London: Longmans, 1947), 91f.

[vii] St. Thomas , Summa, 2a2ae 11, 2 ad 2.