

NOT COMMON BREAD: THE EUCHARIST IN THE EARLY CHURCH

The Texts



TRUE BODY IN TRUE BREAD: THE PATRISTIC WITNESS

Assemble on the Lord's Day, and break bread and offer the Eucharist; but first make confession of your faults, so that your sacrifice may be a pure one. Anyone who has a difference with his fellow is not to take part with you until they have been reconciled, so as to avoid any profanation of your sacrifice.

-*The Didache* (1st/2nd c.), 14

I will certainly do this if the Lord reveals to me that you are all, man by man and name by name, attending your meetings in a state of grace united in faith and in Jesus Christ...and are ready now to obey your bishop and clergy with undivided minds and to share in the one common breaking of bread—the medicine of immortality, and the sovereign remedy by which we escape death and live in Jesus Christ for evermore.

-*Saint Ignatius of Antioch* (d.107), *Letter to the Ephesians* 20

And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons.

-*Saint Justin Martyr* (100-165), *First Apology* 67

They even absent themselves from the Eucharist and the public prayers, because they will not admit that the Eucharist is the self-same body of our Saviour Jesus Christ which suffered for our sins, and which the Father in His goodness afterwards raised up again. Consequently, since they

reject God's good gifts, they are doomed in their disputatiousness. They would have done better to learn charity, if they were ever to know resurrection.

-Saint Ignatius of Antioch (d.107), *Letter to the Smynaeans* 7

The Eucharist is not common bread or common drink...we have been taught that the food which receives the eucharistic blessing through his words of prayer, which by way of nourishment is changed into our blood and flesh, is the flesh and blood of the incarnate Jesus.

-Saint Justin Martyr (100-165), *First Apology* 66

LET FAITH STABLISH THEE...

For as the bread, which is produced from the earth, when it receives the invocation of God, is no longer common bread, but the Eucharist, consisting of two realities, earthly and heavenly; so also our bodies, when they receive the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, having the hope of the resurrection to eternity.

-Saint Irenaeus of Lyons (d.202), *Against Heresies* 4.18.5

Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself proclaims this is my Body. Before the sacred words of blessing another species is named, after consecration the Body is implied. He Himself speaks of His blood. Before consecration, it is spoken of as another thing. After consecration it is named blood. And you say Amen, that is, it is true. What your mouth expresses let your inner mind confess—feel what you say.

-Saint Ambrose (339-397), *On the Mysteries* 9.54

Therefore with fullest assurance let us partake as of the Body and Blood of Christ...For thus we come to bear Christ in us, because His Body and Blood are diffused through our members; thus it is that, according to blessed Peter, *we become partakers of the divine nature*...Contemplate therefore the Bread and the Wine not as bare elements, for they are, according to the Lord's declaration, the Body and Blood of Christ; for though sense suggests this to thee, let faith stablish thee. Judge not the matter from taste, but from faith be fully assured without misgiving, that thou hast been vouchsafed the Body and Blood of Christ.

-Saint Cyril of Jersulem (315-386), *Mystagogical Catechesis* 4.3,6

I am the food of the fully grown; grow and you will feed on me. And you will not change me into you like the food your flesh eats, but you will be changed into me.

-Saint Augustine (354-430), *Confessions* 7.10

So what you can see, then, is bread and a cup; that's what even your eyes tell you; but as for what your faith asks to be instructed about, the bread is the body of Christ, the cup the blood of Christ. It took no time to say that indeed, and that, perhaps, may be enough for faith; but faith desires instruction...How can bread be his body? And the cup, or what the cup contains, how can it be his blood?" The reason these things, brothers and sisters, are called sacraments is that in them one thing is seen, another is to be understood. What can be seen has a bodily appearance, what is to be understood provides spiritual fruit. So if you want to understand the body of Christ, listen to the apostle telling the faithful, You, though, are the body of Christ and its members (1 Corinthians

12:27). So if it's you that are the body of Christ and its members, it's the mystery meaning you that has been placed on the Lord's table; what you receive is the mystery that means you. It is to what you are that you reply Amen, and by so replying you express your assent. What you hear, you see, is the body of Christ, and you answer, Amen. So be a member of the body of Christ, in order to make that Amen true.

-Saint Augustine (354-430), *Sermon 272*

For both he that does not take it has no life, and he that does take it has life, and that indeed eternal life. And thus He would have this food and drink to be understood as meaning the fellowship of His own body and members, which is the holy Church in its saints who were predestined, and called, and justified, and glorified in its saints and believers. Of these, the first is already effected, namely, predestination; the second and third, that is, the vocation and justification, have taken place, are taking place, and will take place; but the fourth, namely, the glorifying, is at present in hope; but a thing future in realization. The sacrament of this thing, namely, of the unity of the body and blood of Christ, is prepared on the Lord's table in some places daily, in some places at certain intervals of days, and from the Lord's table it is taken, by some to life, by some to destruction: but the thing itself, of which it is the sacrament, is for every man to life, for no man to destruction, whosoever shall have been a sharer in it.

-Saint Augustine (354-430), *Tractates on the Gospel of John 26.6.42-59*

A CONTROVERSY!

But because it was fitting for him to penetrate the heavens according to the flesh, in order that those reborn in him might more confidently seek him there, he left to us this sacrament, the visible figure and character of flesh and blood, in order that through faith to grasp the invisible and spiritual. What is eternally perceived here is the figure or character, but it is the whole truth and not its shadow that is internally perceived; and through this is opened up the very truth and sacrament of [Christ's] very flesh. It is indeed the true flesh of Christ which was crucified and buried, it is truly the sacrament of that flesh which, through the priest on the altar, is divinely consecrated by the Holy Spirit in the words of Christ. Hence, it is the Lord who cries out *This is my body*.

-Paschasius Radbertus (d.851 or 860), *De Corpore et sanguine Domini 4*

We receive in the bread that which hung on the cross.

-Paschasius Radbertus (d.851 or 860), *Epistola ad Frudegardum*

Under the veil of the corporeal bread and the corporeal wine, the spiritual body and the spiritual blood exists. Not as though there are two things distinguished among themselves: body and spirit. Rather there is one and the same thing. According to one way, bread and wine; according to another way body and blood of Christ. For according to what they are corporeally, they are creatures; but according to what they have been made spiritually, they are mysteries of the body and blood of Christ.

-Ratramnus (d.868), *De Corpore et sanguine Domini 16*

The substance of bread does not change into the sacrament of the body of the Lord...[bread and wine] are not the true body, nor the true blood, but a figure or likeness...

-Berengar of Tours (d.1088), *Epistola ad Ascelinum*

I, Berengar,...anathematize all heresy, especially that...which attempts to restrict the bread and the wine which are placed on the altar, to be after consecration, only the sacrament and not the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ which are sensually touched or broken or torn apart by the teeth of the faithful.

-Berengar of Tours, Council of Rome of 1059

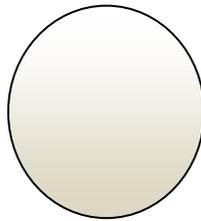
I, Berengar, believe in the heart and confess by mouth, that the bread and wine, which are placed on the altar, through the mystery of the holy prayer and the words of our Redeemer, are converted substantially into the true and proper and vivifying flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. After the consecration they are the true body of Christ [*esse verum Christi corpus*]. Which was born of the Virgin, and which hung on the cross...and the true blood of Christ [*verum sanguinem Christi*] which was poured forth from his side...

-Berengar of Tours, Council of Rome of 1079

CHANGES IN THINKING

PLATO'S THEORY OF IDEAS

1. Name
2. Definition
3. Image
4. Opinion
5. Idea (Form)



ARISTOTLE'S THEORY OF FORMS

“form resides in matter”

CHANGES IN LANGUAGE

...at the beginning they received the sacrament of the Body of Christ [*sacramentum corporis Christi*] in the true Body of Christ [*verum corpus Christi*]...

-Saint Augustine (354-430), *City of God* 21.25

Corpus Mysticum: meaning the consecrated bread and wine

Corpus Verum: meaning the Church



After the consecration they are the true body of Christ [*esse verum Christi corpus*]... and the true blood of Christ [*verum sanguinem Christi*] which was poured forth from his side...

-Berengar of Tours, Council of Rome of 1079

...the term *corpus verum* ceased, roughly after the mid twelfth century, to be applied to the Church, and was transferred to the body of Christ in the Eucharist. Inversely, the term *corpus mysticum* migrated from the Eucharist to the Church...Accompanying this transformation, was a change in the relation of both bodies to the historical body of Christ. Earlier, the sacramental and ecclesial bodies stood near each other, and both represented the historical body. But in the new scheme, the historical and sacramental bodies began to stand near each other as alien sources of authority over against the Church...

-John Milbank (1952-), *Being Reconciled*, p. 123

WRESTLING THE MYSTERY

Substantia

Essentia : prime matter and form
(invisible)
Substance

Proprietates: visible properties
Accidents

We believe...the earthly substances...are converted into the essences of the Lord's body. Their outward appearances and certain other qualities remain unchanged, so that those who receive them are not shocked by the naked flesh and blood, and so that believers may receive the greater rewards of faith.

-Lafranc of Bec (1010-1089), *Decorpore et sanguine Domini adversus Berengarium turonensem*
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SETTLING THE QUESTION...

His body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the forms of bread and wine, the bread and wine having been changed in substance, by God's power, into his body and blood, so that in order to achieve this mystery of unity we receive from God what he received from us.

-Fourth Lateran Council (1215), *Canon 1*

I answer that, The presence of Christ's true body and blood in this sacrament cannot be detected by sense, nor understanding, but by faith alone, which rests upon Divine authority. Hence, on Luke 22:19: "This is My body which shall be delivered up for you," Cyril says: "Doubt not whether this be true; but take rather the Saviour's words with faith; for since He is the Truth, He lieth not."

-Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), *Summa Theologiae* 3.75.1

BUT STILL DYNAMIC!

This sacrament has a threefold significance. one with regard to the past, inasmuch as it is commemorative of our Lord's Passion...With regard to the present it has another meaning...Ecclesiastical unity, in which men are aggregated through this Sacrament; and in this respect it is called "Communion"...With regard to the future it has a third meaning, inasmuch as this sacrament foreshadows the Divine fruition, which shall come to pass in heaven; and according to this it is called "Viaticum"...

-Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), *Summa Theologiae* 3.73.4

BUT ALSO SUPERSTITIOUS!

It may be understood...that if a man did not go to communion during epidemics or on feast-days there must be something wrong with him; or as a set of variations on the idea that while you were present at mass you did not grow older. Carried in procession at Corpus Christi or in the face of emergent dangers of riot and fire, received by the dying, seen at the elevation in the mass...the salutiferous effects of the Host seem mostly instances of the dogma of salvation by charity, healing by wholeness.

-John Bossy, *Christianity in the West: 1400-1700*, p. 74

It happed that a widow that was wont every Sunday to bring hosts to sing mass with, should on a time be houseled and communed, and when S. Gregory should give to her the holy sacrament in saying: Corpus domini nostri, etc., that is to say: The body of our Lord Jesu Christ keep thee into everlasting life, anon this woman began to smile tofore S. Gregory, and anon he withdrew his hand, and remised the sacrament upon the altar. And he demanded her, tofore the people, why she smiled, and she said: Because that the bread that I have made with my proper hands thou namest it the body of our Lord Jesu Christ. Anon S. Gregory put himself to prayer with the people, for to pray to God that hereupon he would show his grace for to confirm our belief, and when they were risen from prayer, S. Gregory saw the holy sacrament in figure of a piece of flesh as great as the little finger of an hand, and anon after, by the prayers of S. Gregory, the flesh of the sacrament turned into semblance of bread as it had been tofore, and therewith he communed and houseled the woman, which after was more religious, and the people more firm in the faith.

-*The Golden Legend* 3.27 (1260)