

## **TRANSUBSTANTIATION**

David C F Wright, DD

Transubstantiation is the Roman Catholic teaching that the bread and wine consecrated at the Communion service, or Mass, changes into the substance of Christ's body and blood. Having spoken to several Catholics recently, they have all confirmed that transubstantiation remains an essential Catholic belief and an act of faith.

Generally the bread is a wafer purchased from Catholic supplies and the wine is probably purchased at a local supermarket or wine merchant although what is called Communion wine can be obtained from Catholic outlets.

It must be accepted that symbolic language are often used in the Bible and the Lord Jesus used symbolism. In John 4 there is the story of the woman of Samaria who went daily to collect water from the local well. The Lord asked her for a drink of water which it was not customary to do as Samaritans had no dealings with the Jews.

The Lord said that he could give this woman living water and she replied that He nothing to draw water with and the well was deep. The Lord replied that whoever drank of the living water that He could give would never thirst again.

The Lord was talking about the water of life. Life is dependent on water. Water gives life. We cannot live without it. The Lord was referring the living water that springs up to eternal life.

Then to the woman's surprise, the Lord Jesus told her that she had had five husbands and the man she was now living with was not married to her. He also identifies Himself as the Christ, the Messiah. This is an important revelation for it shows that salvation was not only for the Jews but for the Samaritans, who, for centuries, were enemies of the Jews.

In John 6 from verse 48 onwards, the Lord Jesus said that He was the bread of life. This is also symbolic and as symbolic as the living water that springs up into everlasting life.

The Lord was not physically bread. He was the bread that came down from heaven, the living bread that whosoever eats this bread, which is described as His flesh, may have everlasting life.

The Lord says twice more that to eat His flesh and drink His Blood has communion with the Lord Himself and those who so eat and drink, the Lord will raise to eternal life

Now the Lord's flesh was not bread and His blood was blood not wine.

But the Jews, already against the Lord, ridiculed Him by saying, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" They were taking matters literally and deliberately being contrary.

The Lord spoke about the manna that came down from heaven which fed the Israelites in the wilderness. All those Israelites were now dead, of course, but whoever took of the bread Jesus offered would never die spiritually but live for ever. He was referring to eternal life.

At the Last Supper on the day of his trial the Lord Jesus took bread and broke it saying, "This is my Body which is given for you (Luke 22.19). Likewise He took the cup and said, "This cup is the new testament in my Blood which is shed for you." This is recalled by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 23 ff.

The language contrasting the flesh with bread and the blood with wine is vividly metaphorical. It must also be noted that 'flesh' is the word 'body'. The manna was only a type of the real bread of God. As Augustine

wrote, “Bread and flesh and wine and blood are only figures”. The Lord is the Bread of God and whoever partakes of Him will know what life from God really means.

Throughout John’s Gospel there are many references to the “I am’s” of Christ.

I am the Messiah John 4. 26

I am the Bread of Life John 6.35

I am from above John 8. 23

I am the Eternal One John 8.58

I am the Light of the World John 9. 5

I am the Door John 10. 7

I am the Good Shepherd John 10. 11

I am the Resurrection and the Life John 11. 25

I am the Lord and Master 9 John 13.13

I and the Way, the Truth and the Life John 14. 6

I am the true vine John 15. 1

To take two of these appellations, the Lord was physically not a door, a curtain or a partition. He was physically not a vine in a vineyard bearing grapes. He was a good shepherd of sheep, but not the woolly variety, since He called His followers sheep in the sense of His pastoral care and their willingness to be lead by Him. And, because the Lord Jesus was known as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, prophetically announced by Isaiah 53.7, seven hundred years before the nativity, and He was so heralded by John the Baptist (John 1. 29).

See [\*translation of Luke 22\*](#)

---

COPYRIGHT David C F Wright 1988. No part of this article, however small, may be reproduced or stored in any system whatsoever. It must not be copied, altered or downloaded. Failure to comply is illegal being theft and contrary to International Copyright law and will render any offender liable to action at law.