

# Transubstantiation

by J.H. Newman

---

*J.H. Newman critiques the doctrine of Transubstantiation, emphasizing the spiritual nature of the Eucharist and its implications for faith and practice.*

**Scripture:** Luke 22:19, John 6:63, 1 Corinthians 2:14, 1 Corinthians 11:24, Colossians 1:27

**Topics:** "Eucharist Theology", "Sacramental Presence"

---

## Description

J.H. Newman preaches against the doctrine of Transubstantiation, emphasizing that the body of Christ is spiritually received in the Supper of the Lord, not carnally. He refutes the belief that the bread and wine physically change into the body and blood of Christ, highlighting the spiritual nature of the sacrament. Newman argues that the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist is a mystery beyond physical locality, suggesting a spiritual presence that transcends human understanding. He addresses objections to the doctrine, pointing out the philosophical complexities of defining presence and distance in spiritual matters, and offers a perspective on how Christ can be truly present without being physically localized.

---

## Transcript

Article xxviii. "Transubstantiation, or the change of the substance of bread and wine, in the Supper of the Lord, cannot be proved by Holy Writ; but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthroweth the nature of a sacraments, and hath given occasion to many superstitions."

What is here opposed as "Transubstantiation," is the shocking doctrine that "the body of CHRIST," as the article goes on to express it, is not "given, taken, and eaten, after an heavenly and spiritual manner, but is carnally pressed with the teeth;" that It is a body or substance of a certain extension and bulk in space, and a certain figure and due disposition of parts, whereas we hold that the only substance such, is the bread we see.

This is plain from Article xxix., which quotes St. Augustine as speaking of the wicked as "carnally and visible pressing with their teeth the sacrament of the body and blood of CHRIST," not the real substance, a statement which even the Breviary introduces into the service for Corpus Christi day.

This is plain also from the words of the Homily: "Saith Cyprian, 'when we do these things, we need not whet our teeth, but with sincere faith we break and divide that holy bread. It is well known that the meat we seek in this supper is spiritual food, the nourishment of the soul, a heavenly refection, and not earthly; an invisible meat, and not a bodily; a ghostly substance, and not carnal.'"

Some extracts may be quoted to the same effect from Bishop Taylor. Speaking of what has been believed in the Church of Rome, he says:--

"Sometimes CHRIST hath appeared in His own shape, and blood and flesh hath been pulled out of the mouths of the communicants: and Plegilus, the priest, saw an angel, showing CHRIST to him in form of a child upon the altar, whom first he took in his arms and kissed, but did eat him up presently in his other shape, in the shape of a wafer. *Speciosa certe pax nebulonis, ut qui oris praebuerat basium, dentius inferret exitium,*" said Berengarius: "It was but a Judas kiss to kiss with he lip, and bite with the teeth."--Bp. Taylor, vol. x. p. 12.

Again:--

"Yet if this and the other miracles pretended, had not been illusions or directly fabulous, it had made very much against the present doctrine of the Roman Church; for they represent the body in such measure, as by their explications it is not, and it cannot be: they represent it broken, a finger, or a piece of flesh, or bloody, or bleeding, or in the form of an infant; and then, when it is in the species of bread: for if, as they say, CHRIST'S body is present no longer than the form of bread remained, how can it be CHRIST'S body in the miracle, when the species being gone, it is no longer a sacrament? But the dull inventors of miracles in those ages considered nothing of this; the article itself was then gross and rude, and so were the instruments of probation. I noted this, not only to show at what door so incredible a persuasion entered, but that the zeal of prevailing in it hath so blinded the refiners of it in this age, that they still urge those miracles for proof, when, if they do any thing at all, they reprove the present doctrine."--Bp. Taylor's Works, vol. ix. p. cccxi.

Again: the change which is denied in the Article is accurately specified in another passage of the same author:--

"I will not insist upon the unworthy questions which this carnal doctrine introduces . . . neither will I make scrutiny concerning CHRIST'S bones, hair, and nails; nor suppose the Roman priests to be such [karcharodontes] and to have such *saws* in their mouths: these are appendages of their persuasion, but to be abominated by all Christian and modest persons, who use to eat not the bodies but the flesh of beasts, and not to devour, but to worship the body of Christ in the exaltation, and now in union with His divinity."--On the Real Presence, 11.

And again:--

"They that deny the spiritual sense, and affirm the natural, are to remember that CHRIST reproved all senses of these words that were not spiritual. And by the way let me observe, that the expressions of some chief men among the Romanists are so rude and crass, that it will be impossible to excuse them from the understanding the words in the sense of the men of Capernaum; for, as they understood CHRIST to mean His *true flesh natural and proper*, so do they: as they thought CHRIST intended they should tear Him with their teeth and such His blood, for which they were offended; so do these men not only think so, but say so, and are not offended. So said Alanus, *Apertissime laquimur, corpus Christi vere a nobis contrectari, manducari, circumgestari, dentibus teri* [ground by the teeth], *sensibiliter sacrificari* [sensibly sacrificed], *non minus quam ante consecrationem panis*, [not less than the bread before consecration] . . . I thought that the Romanists had been glad to separate their own opinion from the carnal conceit of the men of Capernaum and the offended disciples . . . but I find that Bellarmine owns it, even in them, in their ruse circumstances, for he affirms that *CHRIST corrected them not for supposing so, but reproved them*

for not believing it to be so. And indeed himself says as much: "The body of CHRIST is truly and properly manducated or chewed with the bread in the Eucharist; and to take off the foulness of the expression, by avoiding a worse, he is pleased to speak nonsense: "A thing may be manducated or chewed, though it be not attrite or broken. . . . But Bellarmine adds, that if you will not allow him to say so, then he grants it in plain terms, that CHRIST'S body is chewed, is attrite, or broken with the teeth, and that not tropically, but properly. . . . How? under the species of bread, and invisibly."--Ibid. 3.

Take again the statement of Ussher:--

"Paschasius Radbertus, who was one of the first setters forward of this doctrine in the West, spendeth a large chapter upon this point, wherein he telleth us, that CHRIST in the sacrament did show himself oftentimes in a visible shape, either in the form of a lamb, or in the colour of flesh and blood; so that while the host was a breaking or an offering, a lamb in the priest's hands, and blood in the chalice should be seen as it were flowing from the sacrifice, that what lay hid in a mystery might to them that yet doubted be made manifest in a miracle. . . . The first [tale] was . . . of a Roman matron, who found a piece of the sacramental bread turned into the fashion of a finger, all bloody; which afterwards, upon the prayers of St. Gregory, was converted to its former shape again. The other two were first coined by the Grecian liars. . . . The former of these is not only related there, but also in the legend of Simeon Metaphrastes (which is such another author among the Grecians as Jacobus de Voragine was among the Latins) in the life of Arsenius, .... how that a little child was seen upon the altar, and an angel cutting him into small, pieces with a knife, and receiving his blood into the chalice, as long as the priest was breaking the bread into little parts. The latter is of a certain Jew receiving the sacrament at St. Basil's hands, converted visibly into true flesh and blood." Ussher's Answer to a Jesuit, pp. 62--04.

Or the following:--

"When St. Odo was celebrating the mass in the presence of certain of the clergy of Canterbury, (who maintained that the bread and wine, after consecration, do remain in their former substance, and are not CHRIST'S true body and blood, but a figure of it:) when he was come to confection, presently the fragments of the body of CHRIST which he held in his hands, began to pour forth blood into the chalice. Whereupon he shed tears of joy; and beckoning to them that wavered in their faith, to come near and see the wonderful work of GOD; as soon as they beheld it they cried out, "O holy Prelate! to whom the SON of GOD has been pleased to reveal Himself visibly in the flesh, pray for us, that the blood we see here present to our eyes, may again be changed, lest for our unbelief the Divine vengeance fall upon us." He prayed accordingly; after which, looking in the chalice, he saw the species of bread and wine, where he had left blood....

"St. Wittekundus, in the administration of the Eucharist saw a child enter into every one's mouth, playing and smiling when some received him, and with an abhorring countenance when he went into the mouths of others; CHRIST thus showing this saint in His countenance, who were worthy and who unworthy receivers."--Johnson's Miracles of Saints, pp. 27, 28.

The same doctrine was imposed by Nicholas the Second which runs thus:--

"I, Berengarius .... anathematize every heresy, and more particularly that of which I have hitherto been accused .... I agree with the Roman Church .... that the bread and wine which are placed on the altar are, after consecration, not only a sacrament, but even the true body and blood of our LORD JESUS CHRIST; and that they are sensibly, and not merely sacramentally, but in truth, handled and broken, by the hands of

the priest, and ground by the teeth of the faithful."--Bowden's Life of Gregory VII., vol. ii. p. 243.

Another illustration of the sort of doctrine offered in the Article, may be given from Bellarmine, whose controversial statements have already been introduced in the course of the above extracts. He thus opposes the doctrine of intromission, which the spiritual view of the Real Presence naturally suggests:--

He observes, that there are "two particular opinions, false and erroneous, excogitated in the schools: that of Durandus, who thought it probable that the substance of the body of CHRIST in the Eucharist, was without magnitude; and that of certain ancients, which Occam seems afterwards to have followed, that though it has magnitude, (which they think not really separable from substance;) yet every part is so penetrated by every other, that the body of CHRIST is without figure, without distinction and order of parts." With this he contrasts the doctrine which, he maintains, is that of the Church of Rome as well as the general doctrine of the schools, that "in the Eucharist whole CHRIST exists with magnitude and all accidents, except that relation to a heavenly location which He has as He is in heaven, and those things which are concomitants on His existence in that location; and that the parts and members of CHRIST'S body do not penetrate each other, but are so distinct and arranged one with another, as to have a figure and order suitable to a human body."--De Euchar. iii. 5.

We see then, that, by transubstantiation, our Article does not confine itself to any abstract theory, nor aim at any definition of the word substance, nor in rejecting it, rejects a word, nor in denying a "mutatio panis et vini," is denying every kind of change, but opposes itself to a certain plain and unambiguous statement, not of this or that council, but one generally received or taught both in the schools and in the multitude, that the material elements are changed into an earthly, fleshly, and organized body, extended in size, distinct in its parts, which is there where the outward appearances of bread and wine are, and only does not meet the senses, nor even that always.

Objections against "substance, "nature," "change," "accidents," and the like, seem more or less questions of words, and inadequate expressions of the great offence which we find in the received Roman view of this sacred doctrine.

In this connexion it may be suitable to proceed to notice the Explanation appended to the Communion Service, of our kneeling at the LORD'S Supper, which requires explanation itself, more perhaps than any part of our formularies. It runs as follows:--

"Whereas it is ordained in this office for the Administration of the LORD'S Supper, that the communicants should receive the same kneeling: (which order is well meant, for a signification of our humble and grateful acknowledgement of the benefits of CHRIST therein given to all worthy receivers, and for the avoiding of such profanation and disorder in the holy communion, as might otherwise ensue ;) yet, lest the same kneeling should by any persons, either out of ignorance and infirmity, or out of malice and obstinacy, be misconstrued and depraved,--It is hereby declared, that thereby no adoration is intended, or ought to be done, either unto the sacramental bread or wine there bodily received, or unto any corporal presence of CHRIST'S natural flesh and blood. For the sacramental bread and wine remain still in their very natural substances, and therefore may not be adored, (for that were idolatry, to be abhorred of all faithful Christians ;) and the natural body and blood of our SAVIOUR CHRIST are in heaven, and not here, it being against the truth of CHRIST'S natural body to be at one time in more places than one."

Now it may be admitted without difficulty, 1. That "no adoration ought to be done unto the sacramental bread and wine there bodily received." 2. Nor "unto any corporal (i. e. carnal) presence of CHRIST'S natural flesh and blood."

3. That "the sacramental bread and wine remain still in their very natural substances." 4. That to adore them "were idolatry to be abhorred of all faithful Christians;" and 5. That "the natural body and blood of our SAVIOUR CHRIST are in heaven."

But "to heaven" is added, "and not here." Now, though it be allowed that there is no "corporal presence" [i. e. carnal] of "CHRIST'S natural flesh and blood" here, it is a further point to allow that "CHRIST'S natural body and blood" are "not here." And the question is, how can there be any presence at all of His body and blood, yet a presence such, as not to be here? How can there be any presence, yet not local?

Yet that this is the meaning of the paragraph in question is plain, from what it goes on to say in proof of its position: "It being against the truth of CHRIST'S natural body to be at one time in more places than one." It is here asserted then, 1. Generally, "no natural body can be in more places than one;" therefore, 2. CHRIST'S natural body cannot be in the bread and wine, or there where the bread and wine are seen. In other words, there is no local presence in the Sacrament. Yet, that there is a presence is asserted in the Homilies, as quoted above, and the question is, as just now stated, "How can there be a presence, yet not a local one?"

Now, first, let it be observed that the question to be solved is the truth of a certain philosophical deduction, not of a certain doctrine of Scripture. That there is a real presence, Scripture asserts, and the Homilies, Catechism, and Communion Service confess; but the explanation before us adds, that it is philosophically impossible that it should be a particular kind of presence, a presence of which one can say "it is here," or which is "local." It states then a philosophical deduction; but to such deduction none of us have subscribed. We have professed in the words of the Canon: "That the Book of Prayer, &c. containeth in it nothing contrary to the Word of God." Now, a position like this may not be, and is not, "contrary to the word of God," and yet need not be true; e. g. we may accept St. Clement's Epistle to the Corinthians, as containing nothing contrary to Scripture, nay, as altogether most scriptural, and yet this would not hinder us from rejecting the account of the Phoenix--as contrary, not to GOD'S word, but to matter of fact. Even the infallibility of the Roman see is not considered to extend to matters of fact or points of philosophy. Nay, we commonly do not consider that we need take the words of Scripture itself literally about the sun's standing still, or the earth being fixed, or the firmament being above. Those at least who distinguish between what is theological in Scripture and what is scientific, and yet admit that Scripture is true, have no ground for wondering at such persons as subscribe to a paragraph, of which at the same time they disallow the philosophy; especially considering they expressly subscribe it only as not "contrary to the word of GOD." This then is what must be said first of all.

Next, the philosophical position is itself capable of a very specious defence. The truth is, we do not at all know what is meant by distance or intervals absolutely, any more than we know what is meant by absolute time. Late discoveries in geology have tended to make it probable that time may under circumstances go indefinitely faster or slower than it does at present; or in other words, that indefinitely more may be accomplished in a given portion of it. What Moses calls a day, geologists wish to prove to be thousands of years, if we measure time by the operations at present effected in it. It is equally difficult to determine what we mean by distance, or why we should not be at this moment close to the throne of GOD, though we seem far from it. Our measure of distance is our hand or our foot; but as an object a foot off is not called

distant, though the interval is indefinitely divisible; neither need it be distant either, after it has been multiplied indefinitely. Why should any conventional measure of ours—why should the perceptions of our eyes or our ears, be the standard of presence or distance CHRIST may really be close to us, though in heaven, and His presence in the Sacrament may but be a manifestation to the worshipper of that nearness, not a change of place, which may be unnecessary. But on this subject some extracts may be suitably made from a pamphlet published several years since, and admitting of one or two verbal corrections, which, as in the case of other similar quotations above, shall here be made without scruple:—

"In the note at the end of the Communion Service, it is argued, that a body cannot be in two places at once; and that therefore the Body of CHRIST is not locally present, in the sense in which we speak of the bread as being locally present. On the other hand, in the Communion Service itself, Catechism, Articles, and Homilies, it is plainly declared, that the Body of CHRIST is in a mysterious way, if not locally, yet really present, so that we are able after some ineffable manner to receive It. Whereas, then, the objection stands, 'CHRIST is not really here, because He is not locally here,' our formularies answer, 'He is really here, yet not locally.'

"But it may be asked, What is the meaning of saying that CHRIST is really present, yet not locally? I will make a suggestion on the subject. What do we mean by being present? How do we define and measure it? To a blind and deaf man, that only is present which he touches: give him hearing, and the range of things present enlarges; every thing is present to him which he hears. Give him at length sight, and the sun may be said to be present to him in the day-time, and myriads of stars by night. The presence, then, of a thing is a relative word, depending, in a popular sense of it, upon the channels of communication between it and him to whom it is present; and thus it is a word of degree.

"Such is the meaning of presence, when used of material objects;—very different from this is the conception we form of the presence of spirit with spirit. The most intimate presence we can fancy is a spiritual presence in the soul; it is nearer to us than any material object can possibly be; for our body, which is the organ of conveying to us the presence of matter, sets bounds to its approach towards us. If, then, spiritual beings can be brought near to us, (and that they can, we know, from what is told us of the influences of Divine grace, and again of evil angels upon our souls,) their presence is something sui generis of a more perfect and simple character than any presence we commonly call local. And further, their presence has nothing to do with the degrees of nearness; they are either present or not present, or, in other words, their coming is not measured by space, nor their absence ascertained by distance. In the case of things material, a transit through space is the necessary condition of approach and presence; but in things spiritual, (whatever be the condition,) such a transit seems not to be a condition. The condition is unknown. Once more: while beings simply spiritual seem not to exist in place, the Incarnate SON does; according to our Church's statement already alluded to, that 'the natural body and blood of our SAVIOUR CHRIST are in heaven and not here, it being against the truth of CHRIST'S natural body to be at one time in more places than one.'

"Such seems to be the mystery attending our LORD and SAVIOUR; He has a body, and that spiritual. He is in place; and yet, as being a spirit, His mode of approach— the mode in which He makes Himself present here or there —may be, for what we know, as different from the mode in which material bodies approach and come, as a spiritual presence is more perfect. As material bodies approach by moving from place to place, so the approach and presence of a spiritual body may be in some other way,—probably is in some other way, since in some other way, (as it would appear) not gradual, progressive, approximating, that is, locomotive, but at once, spirits become present,—may be such as to be consistent with His

remaining on GOD'S right hand while He becomes present here,--that is, it may be real yet not local, or, in a word, is mysterious. The Body and Blood of CHRIST may be really, literally present in the holy Eucharist, yet not having become present by local passage, may still literally and really be on GOD'S right hand; so that, though they be present in deed and truth, it may be impossible, it may be untrue to say, that they are literally in the elements, or about them, or in the soul of the receiver. These may be useful modes of speech according to the occasion; but the true determination of all such questions may be this, that CHRIST'S Body and Blood are locally at GOD'S right hand, yet really present here,-- present here, but not here in place,--because they are spirit.

"To assist our conceptions on this subject, I would recur to what I said just now about the presence of material objects, by way of putting my meaning in a different point of view. The presence of a material object, in the popular sense of the word, is a matter of degree, and ascertained by the means of apprehending it which belong to him to whom it is present. It is in some sense a correlative of the senses. A fly may be as near an edifice as a man; yet we do not call it present to the fly, because it cannot see it; and we call it present to the man because he can. This, however, is but a popular view of the matter: when we consider it carefully, it certainly is difficult to say what is meant by the presence of a material object relatively to us. It is in some respects truer to say that a thing is present, which is so circumstanced as to act upon us and influence us, whether we are sensible of it or not. Now this is what the Catholic Church seems to hold concerning our LORD'S Presence in the Sacrament, that He then personally and bodily is with us in the way an object is which we call present; how He is so, we know not, but that He should be so, though He be millions of miles away, is not more inconceivable than the influence of eyesight upon us is to a blind man. The stars are millions of miles off, yet they impress ideas upon our souls through our sight. We know but of five senses: we know not whether or not human nature be capable of more; we know not whether or not the soul possesses any thing analogous to them. We know nothing to negative the notion that the soul may be capable of having CHRIST present to it by the stimulating of dormant, or the development of possible energies.

"As sight for certain purposes annihilates space, so other known capacities, bodily or spiritual, may annihilate it other purposes. Such a practical annihilation was involved in the appearance of CHRIST to St. Paul on his conversion. Such a practical annihilation is involved in the doctrine of CHRIST'S ascension; to speak according to the ideas of space and time commonly received, what must have been the rapidity of that motion by which, within ten days, placed our human nature at the right hand of God? Is more mysterious that He should 'open the heavens,' to use the Scripture phrase, in the sacramental rite; that He should then dispense with time and space, in the sense in which they are daily dispensed with, in the sun's warming at the distance of 100,000,000 of miles, than that He could have dispensed with them on occasion of His ascending on high? He who showed what the passage of an incorruptible body was ere it had reached GOD'S throne, thereby suggests to us what may be its coming back and presence with us now, when at length glorified and become a spirit.

"In answer, then, to the problem, how CHRIST comes to us while remaining on high, I answer just as much as this,--that He comes by the agency of the HOLY GHOST, and by the Sacrament. Locomotion is the means of a material Presence; the Sacrament is the means of His spiritual presence. As faith is the means of our receiving It, the HOLY GHOST is the Agent and the Sacrament the means of His imparting It; and therefore we call It a sacramental Presence. We kneel before His heavenly throne, and the distance is as nothing; it is as if that throne were the Altar close to us.

"Let it be carefully observed, that I am not proving or determining any thing. I am only showing how it is that certain proposition which at first sight seem contradictions in terms, are not so,--I am but pointing out one way of reconciling them. If there is but one way assignable, the force of all antecedent objection against the possibility of any at all is removed, and then of course there may be other ways supposable though not assignable. It seems at first sight a mere idle use of words to say that CHRIST is really and literally, yet not locally, present in the Sacrament; that He is there given to us, not in figure but in truth, and yet is still only on the right hand of GOD. I have wished to remove this seeming impossibility.

"If it be asked, why attempt to remove it, I answer that I have no wish to do so, if persons will not urge it against the Catholic doctrine. Men maintain it as an impossibility, a contradiction in terms, and force a believer in it to say why it should not be so accounted. And then when he gives a reason, they turn round and accuse him of subtleties, and refinements, and scholastic trifling. Let them but believe and act on the truth that the consecrated bread is CHRIST'S body, as He says, and no officious comment on His words will be attempted by any well judging mind. But when they say, 'this cannot be literally true, because it is impossible;' then they force those who think it is literally true, to explain how, according to their notions, it is not impossible. And those who ask hard questions must put up with hard answers."

There is nothing, then, in the Explanatory Paragraph which has given rise to these remarks, to interfere with the doctrine, elsewhere taught in our formularies, of a real super-local presence in the Holy Sacrament.

---

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jh-newman/transubstantiation/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**