

Real Presence



May 12, 1995

Dear John,

My purpose for writing this letter is to share with you, my loving brother in Christ, why we Roman Catholics cherish the sacred Eucharist, partake of it daily when possible, and believe Our Lord and Savior is present in the form of bread and wine, after which special prayers are said to consecrate the bread and wine into His Body and Blood.

It is not my intent in this paper and nor shall it ever be my intent, to attempt conversion of you, or any other of my fellow Protestant Christian brothers and sisters, to Roman Catholicism. Most Roman Catholics are usually too respectful of other Christians to try all of that. It is my objective, however, to persuade you that the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist is real; for this is the essence of my faith. To us Roman Catholics the Eucharist is precious and sacred; it is the consecrated Eucharist that nourishes our faith and our souls. The Holy Eucharist is the embodiment and epitome of our prayerful ways.

There are three areas of the Bible referred to in this paper; namely, John 6 between and inclusive of verses 26-66, 1 Corinthians 11:26-30, and Acts 2: 42-47. I mention these now should you want to read ahead and prepare yourself just in case you think this is an exercise in Catholic indoctrination.

Permit me to begin sharing this way. Roman Catholics believe that Jesus more than adequately expressed His dogma about the Real Presence during a brief dialogue with His followers, not at the Last Supper as one might presume, but rather on the western shores of Galilee in or near Capharnaum. Notwithstanding, the Holy Eucharist was instituted by our Lord and affirmed as the Real Presence when He recited those special prayers during the Last Supper.

This important account on the "bread of life" opens with the Miracle of the Loaves and Fish for the 5,000 on a mountain near the city of Tiberius. With the miracle complete, Jesus withdrew to the hills to get away from the crowd (who wanted to herald Him as a king) and to pray. No one knew where he went. As dusk approached, His disciples went down to the Sea of Galilee without Jesus, got into the only available boat, and began rowing toward Capharnaum located several miles to the north and east away from Tiberius. Meanwhile, when the lake became very rough because of a strong wind, the disciples suddenly saw Jesus walking toward them on the water. They were afraid, but Jesus calmed them, and soon after, the boat came to rest on the shore. At dawn the next day, the crowd, who had eaten bread and fish multiplied and blessed by Jesus, realized that He was not around. Somehow they also found out that the disciples had disembarked the evening before in the only available boat and that Jesus had not departed with them. So, some part of the crowd found boats at or near Tiberius and they too sailed to Capharnaum in search of Jesus. There they found Him and they continued their excitement by the miracle feeding the 5,000 on the previous day. Then they asked Him when, but not how, he had made His way to Capharnaum. It was seemingly their perception that Jesus had walked the long distance overland starting out before dawn. Jesus did not respond

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directly. Rather, He rebuked them for having interest only in physical concerns and not in spiritual truth:

I assure you, you are not looking for me because you have seen signs but because you have eaten your fill of the loaves. You should not be working for perishable food but for food that remains unto life eternal, food which the Son of Man will give you; it is on him that God the Father sets his seal. (John 6:26-27) [\[1\]](#)

I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you are the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval. (John 6:26-27) [\[2\]](#)

On the previous day, Jesus had given them their fill of natural bread, but on this day at Capharnaum He began to speak to them about supernatural bread.

The Jews challenged Jesus asking what miracle He could perform for them. Taunting Jesus they noted, "**our ancestors had manna to eat in the desert**". (John 6:31). Could Jesus do something better than that? Jesus replied,

I solemnly assure you, it was not Moses who gave you bread from the heavens; it is my Father who gives you the real heavenly bread. God's bread comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. (John 6:32-33) [\[3\]](#)

I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. (John 6:32-33) [\[4\]](#)

The Jews were insistent and demanded of Jesus, "**give us this bread**" (John 6:34). In return Jesus responded to them pointedly,

I myself am the bread of life. No one who comes to me shall ever be hungry, no one who believes in me shall ever thirst. (John 6:35) [\[5\]](#)

I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. (John 6:35) [\[6\]](#)

As Jesus got more emphatic with them, they began to gripe. They still understood Jesus to be speaking to them in metaphors. So once again Jesus repeated what He said,

I myself am the living bread come down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread he shall live forever; the bread I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world. (John 6:51) [\[7\]](#)

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live

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forever. This bread is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world. (John 6:51) [\[8\]](#)

After Jesus said this, the Jews argued among themselves, when finally they understood Him verbatim, asking incredulously, "**How can he give us his flesh to eat?**" (John 6:52) Once again Jesus emphatically repeated what He said before:

Let me solemnly assure you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his Blood, you have no life in you. He who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has life eternal, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood real drink. The man who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him just as the Father who has life sent me, and I have life because of the Father, so the man who feeds on me will have life because of me. (John 6:53-57) [\[9\]](#)

I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live forever. (John 6:53-57) [\[10\]](#)

By this time the message was clear and they knew unequivocally that He was not speaking in metaphors. If they did understand, why would Jesus not seize the opportunity to make corrections? Jesus made no attempt to abate, nor did He moderate His words, and nor did He attempt anywhere in the dialogue to correct misunderstandings. While on other occasions, when His followers appeared confused, Jesus explained what He meant. This time the Jews understood Him very well and Jesus made absolutely no effort to correct. After hearing His words, many of the disciples remarked, "**This sort of talk is hard to endure! How can anyone take it seriously?**" (John 6:60) He warned them again, as He did in verse 26, not to have interest in only physical concerns, but rather in spiritual truth, replying:

It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words I spoke to you are spirit and life. (John 6:63) [\[11\]](#)

The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken are spirit and they are life. (John 6:63) [\[12\]](#)

Jesus knew many of them, including Judas Iscariot, would not believe, forsake the Eucharist, and abandon Him.

From this time on, many of his disciples broke away and would not remain in his company any longer. (John 6:66) [\[13\]](#)

From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. (John 6:66) [\[14\]](#)

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This is the only record of Jesus' disciples rejecting Him for doctrinal reasons. The Jews, who were suspicious of Him, and His disciples, who accepted everything until this time, would have remained with Him had He told them that His words meant no more than symbolic gestures. Jesus did not correct these first protesters, or proto-protestants. Between verses 26 and 66 in chapter 6 of John's Gospel, I count 8 times He said He was the bread that came down from heaven and 4 times He said they would have to "eat my flesh and drink my blood". All of this He said repeatedly, without correction, in the course of a single brief dialogue. Chapter 6 of St. John's gospel is an extension of what Jesus would institute at the Last Supper and is expressed explicitly.

The *truth* of the Real Presence in the Eucharist is exemplified further in the apostle Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. [\[15\]](#) As we examine this Scripture, let us keep in mind the global Protestant posture about the Eucharist, that is, there is no real presence and that the bread and wine are only symbols of the Lord's body and blood occasionally administered "in the remembrance of Christ".

Every time, then, you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes! This means that whoever eats the bread and drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily sins against the body and blood of the Lord. A man should examine himself first; only then should he eat of the bread and drink of the cup. He who eats and drinks without recognizing the body eats and drinks a judgment on himself. (1 Corinthians 11:26-30) [\[16\]](#)

For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats the bread and drinks the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. (1 Corinthians 11:26-30) [\[17\]](#)

Was Jesus telling us that we "unworthily sin" against Him, or is He telling us that people "unworthily sin" against a symbol that represents Him. The following analogy focuses on what Jesus said and meant. If I showed you a photo of my son, the image of him portrayed in the photo is a symbol indicating something of what he might look like, but the photo is not my son. My son is a real person. Furthermore, the photo I show may be an old one and by now my son's physique may have perhaps changed and maybe the resemblance of him in the photo you see does not reflect anything at all about his current features. In fact, you might not be able to recognize my son in person while, at the same time, you glance at his photo. If while showing you his photo, I remark "he is a good boy and I am very proud of him", I will be making a statement about my son the real person. I would not be making a statement about the image of my son in the photo. If I showed you the photo and say to you "I live with guilt because I have not done for my son everything that I should have done for him as a father", I would be implicating myself and admitting that I have committed wrongfully by him. But I would be committing the wrong I have done against my son the person, certainly not against the image of

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my son, the symbol of him in the photo. Therefore, if we re-examine the words in the Scripture, "whoever eats the bread and drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily sins against the body and blood of the Lord", how then can it be that one could "unworthily sin against" a symbol of the "body and blood of the Lord"? A person can only "unworthily sin against" the real "body and blood of the Lord" when one "eats the bread and drinks the cup of the (real presence) Lord unworthily". Nothing appears vague here. Is this not succinct?

You have told me that a major objective of Fundamentalist Protestant Christians is to practice Christianity in a manner similar to those of our first century Christian predecessors; that is, "untainted" by the dogmas of other organized Christian religions that evolved over the ages. If this is so, then let us examine the written records given to us by those early Christians regarding the Eucharist. What is it that the early Christians passed on to us about the Eucharist? Let us see what the early Church thought ?[\[18\]](#)

The earliest known writing found to date, other than the New Testament, is available to us from Ignatius of Antioch, who wrote to the Smyrneans 80 years after the Resurrection in 110 AD. Ignatius wrote about "those who hold heterodox opinions":

"They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, flesh which suffered for our sins and which the Father, in His goodness, raised up again." [\[19\]](#)

Forty years later, in 150 AD, Justin Martyr wrote:

"We call this food Eucharist, and no one else is permitted to partake of it except one who believes our teaching to be true and who has been washed in the washing which is for the remission of sins and for regeneration and is thereby living as Christ has enjoined. For not as common bread nor common drink do we receive these; but since Jesus Christ our Savior was made incarnate by the word of God and had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so too, as we have been taught, the food which has been made into the Eucharist by the Eucharist prayer set down by him, and by the change which our blood and flesh is nourished, is both the flesh and the blood of the incarnated Jesus." [\[20\]](#)

Toward the end of the 2nd century, Irenaeus of Lyons said that Christ

"has declared the cup, a part of creation, to be his own Blood, from which he causes our blood to flow; and the bread, a part of creation, he established as his own Body, from which he gives increase to our bodies". [\[21\]](#)

Irenaeus then asks

"If the Lord were from other than the Father, how could he rightly take bread, which is the same creation as our own, and confess it to be his Body and affirm that the mixture in the cup is his Blood?"

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In 373 Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria preached the following,

"You shall see the Levites bringing loaves and a cup of wine and placing them on a table. So long as the prayers of supplication and entreaties have not been made, there is only bread and wine. But after the great and wonderful prayers have been completed, then the bread becomes the Body and the wine the Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ." [\[22\]](#)

In 390 Ambrose wrote

"You may perhaps say: 'My bread is ordinary.' But that bread is bread before the words of the sacraments; where the consecration is entered in, the bread becomes the flesh of Christ. And let us add this: How can what is bread be the Body of Christ? By the consecration, the consecration takes place by certain words, but whose words? Those of the Lord Jesus ... Therefore it is the word of Christ that consecrates the sacrament." [\[23\]](#)

Around 450 Cyril of Jerusalem preached

"Do not therefore, regard the Bread and Wine as simply that; for they are according to the Master's declaration, the Body and Blood of Christ. Even though the senses suggest to you the other, let faith make you firm. Do not judge in this matter by taste, but be fully assured by faith, not doubting that you have been deemed worthy of the Body and Blood of Christ." [\[24\]](#)

While there are a dozen or more additional writings by early Christians, similar in narrative to the seven provided above, there are absolutely no records of any Christians doubting the Catholic interpretation in the early centuries. Ironically, it is *their* interpretation, that of the early first century Christians, that fomented, *and is*, the Catholic interpretation that was *never* been altered. Other than a brief misunderstanding over a period of less than 30 years (from 831 to 860), due to the poor writing skills by two cloistered monks, Radbertus and Ratramus, the earliest recording of any denial of the Real Presence occurred 1,000 years after the Resurrection. In 1088 the first Christian to deny the Real Presence was Berengarius of Tours and yet, in spite of his denial, he died reconciled on this point. The Eucharist was canonized as dogma by the Catholic Church in 1215 and was not, to my knowledge, threatened until the Protestant Reformation, representing the first overt challenge since the early proto-protestants rejected Jesus's dogma in Capernaum.

In recent years, since the Ecumenical Council II culminated 25 years ago, Roman Catholics have begun to read Scripture daily and study the Word in far greater numbers than previously. I, as one Catholic, admit my short sightedness and am grateful to several of my Protestant Christian brothers for encouraging me to read Scripture more frequently. Roman Catholics have, however, always concentrated on deep and meaningful prayer. We have always practiced early Christian tradition, in the same communal manner taught us by our early Christian apostolic predecessors from the first century. Our traditions, the important ones unaltered, have been passed down to us through the ages. Similarly, I pray that my Protestant

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Christian brothers choose to learn from us Roman Catholics by adopting our prayerful practices which are deep-rooted in the Real Presence of the Eucharist. This is a gift to us directly from Jesus, His dogma maintained *en totus*, and a tradition passed unaltered from the earliest Christian community to each successive one through the ages to the present day.

In this regard, permit me to point out a couple of examples from Scripture. The full text of Acts 2:42-47 explains clearly the behavior and tradition conducted, even to this day, by nearly all Roman Catholic religious orders (prayer filled communal living, sharing everything, vows of poverty and ownership of nothing) while Acts 2:46 specifically explains the derivation of the Roman Catholic tradition of "eating" the Eucharist daily, in "communion", with fellow Christians who believe:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' instruction and the communal life, to the breaking of bread and prayers. A reverent fear overtook them all, for many wonders and signs were performed by the apostles. Those who believed shared all things in common; they would sell their property and goods dividing everything on the basis of each one's need. They went to the temple area together every day, while in their homes they broke bread. With exulting and sincere hearts they took their meals in common, praising God and winning the approval of all the people. Day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. (Acts 2: 42-47) [\[25\]](#)

They devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2: 42-47) [\[26\]](#)

May the Prince of Peace always reign in your heart and mine, may we forever be united in His glorious Kingdom as we invite the Holy Spirit to fulfill us daily showering us with promised gifts and fruits.

Your companion in Christ,

Reggie Bollich

[\[1\]](#) *The New American Bible for Catholics*, World Bible Publishers, Iowa Falls, Iowa, (1976), p. 1255

[\[2\]](#) *The Student Bible: New International Version*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI. (1991), p.951

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- [3] [The New American Bible for Catholics](#), p. 1255
- [4] [The Student Bible: New International Version](#), p. 951
- [5] [The New American Bible for Catholics](#), p. 1255
- [6] [The Student Bible: New International Version](#), p. 951
- [7] [The New American Bible for Catholics](#), p. 1255
- [8] [The Student Bible: New International Version](#), p. 952
- [9] [The New American Bible for Catholics](#), p. 1256
- [10] [The Student Bible: New International Version](#), p. 952
- [11] [The New American Bible for Catholics](#), p. 1256
- [12] [The Student Bible: New International Version](#), p. 952
- [13] [The New American Bible for Catholics](#), p. 1256
- [14] [The Student Bible: New International Version](#), p. 952
- [15] Schreck, Alan, *Catholic and Christian: An Explanation of Commonly Misunderstood Catholic Beliefs*, Servant Books, Ann Arbor, MI., (1984), p. 130.
- [16] [The New American Bible for Catholics](#), p. 1352
- [17] [The Student Bible: New International Version](#), p. 1028-1029
- [18] Keating, Karl, *Catholicism and Fundamentalism: The Attack on "Romanism" by "Bible Christians"*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, CA., (1988), p. 237.
- [19] Ignatius, *Letter to the Smyrneans, Chapter 7, Verse 1*
- [20] Justin Martyr, *First Apology, Chapter 6*
- [21] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies, Book V, Chapter 2*
- [22] Athanasius, *Sermon to the Newly Baptized*
- [23] Ambrose, *The Sacraments*
- [24] Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures, "Fourth Address: On the Body and Blood of Christ"*
- [25] [The New American Bible for Catholics](#), p. 1286
- [26] [The Student Bible: New International Version](#), p. 973