

The Early Church On The Real Presence

Transubstantiation, a term coined during medieval scholasticism, refers to the belief that the substance of the bread and wine in the Eucharist changes into the substance of the body and blood of Christ, while the tangible aspects remain unchanged. This concept, also known as the doctrine of the real presence, was present in the Church from the beginning, as seen in the teachings of Jesus in John chapter 6 and the earliest Church Fathers. Although the term "transubstantiation" is not used in the Eastern Orthodox Church, they share the same belief, expressing it in their own terms. The doctrine is not a development in the Church; rather, the term itself took time to develop to explain the concept.

Real Presence

- **Real Presence** – Christ is truly present body, blood, soul, and divinity under the appearance of bread and wine
 - * The term "real presence" is not meant to deny the many other forms of Christ's presence but to highlight that He is preeminently present in the Eucharist
 - * Since Christ is truly present Catholics truly adore and worship the Eucharist (latria)
- **Philosophical Distinction**
 - Substance:* What it really is
 - Accidents:* What it looks like or appears to be (characteristics)
- **Transubstantiation**
 - Transubstantiation means the change of the whole substance of bread and wine into the substance of the Body and Blood of Christ
 - While the *substance* of bread and wine change the *accidents* remain



The Catholic Church uses Aristotle's philosophy in its doctrine of transubstantiation, the belief that during the Eucharist, the substance (the concrete entity) of the bread and wine change into the Body and Blood of Christ, while the accidents or appearances (akin to Aristotle's "essence") remain as bread and wine. This means that what is fundamentally the bread and wine (substance) transforms into the Body and Blood, despite retaining their original physical characteristics or essence (like taste, texture, and color). This application of Aristotle's ideas allowed for a philosophical explanation of a key theological mystery within the Catholic faith.

CHURCH FATHERS ON THE REAL PRESENCE

St. Ignatius of Antioch

I have no taste for corruptible food nor for the pleasures of this life. I desire the bread of God, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, who was of the seed of David; and for drink I desire his blood, which is love incorruptible [Letter to the Romans 7 (c. a.d. 110)].

Take note of those who hold heterodox opinions on the grace of Jesus Christ, which have come to us, and see how contrary their opinions are to the mind of God.... 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 that suffered for our sins and that the Father, in his goodness, raised up again. They who deny the gift of God are perishing in their disputes [Letter to the Smyrnaeans 6–7 (c. a.d. 110)].

St. Justin Martyr

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 that is for the remission of sins and for regeneration [i.e., has received baptism] and is thereby living as Christ 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 that has been made into the Eucharist by the eucharistic prayer set down by him, and by the change of which our blood and flesh is nurtured, is both the flesh and the blood of that incarnated Jesus [First Apology 66 (c. a.d. 151)].

St. Irenaeus of Lyons

If the Lord were from other than the Father, how could he rightly take bread, which is of the same creation as our own, and confess it to be his body and affirm that the mixture in the cup is his blood? [Against Heresies 4:33:2 (c. a.d. 189)].

He 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 has established as his own body, from which he gives increase to our bodies. When the mixed cup [wine and water] and the baked bread receive the Word of God and become the Eucharist, the body of Christ, and from these the substance of our flesh is increased and supported, how can they say that the flesh is not capable of receiving the gift of God, which is eternal life—flesh that is nourished by the body and blood of the Lord, and is in fact a member of him? [ibid., 5:2:2–3].

St. Clement of Alexandria

“Eat my flesh,” [Jesus] says, “and drink my blood.” The Lord supplies us with these intimate nutrients, he delivers over his flesh and pours out his blood, and nothing is lacking for the growth of his children [Instructor of Children 1:6 (c. a.d. 197)].

Tertullian of Carthage

There is not a soul that can at all procure salvation, except it believe while it is in the flesh, so true is it that the flesh is the very condition on which salvation hinges. And since the soul is, in consequence of its salvation, chosen to the service of God, it is the flesh that actually renders it capable of such service. The flesh, indeed, is washed [in baptism], that the soul may be cleansed.... The flesh is shadowed with the imposition of hands [in confirmation], that the soul may be illuminated by the Spirit; the flesh feeds [in the Eucharist] on the body and blood of Christ, that the soul may fatten on its God [Resurrection of the Flesh 8 (c. a.d. 210)].

St. Hippolytus of Rome

“And she has furnished her table”: That denotes the promised knowledge of the Holy Trinity; it also refers to his honored and undefiled body and blood, which day by day are administered and offered sacrificially at the spiritual divine table, as a memorial of that first and ever-memorable table of the spiritual divine supper” [fragment from On Proverbs (c. a.d. 217)].

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

[A]s the bread and wine of the Eucharist before the invocation of the Trinity, which is holy and worthy of adoration, were simple bread and wine, after the invocation the bread becomes the body of Christ, and the wine the blood of Christ [Catechetical Lectures 19:7 (c. a.d. 350)].

Consider 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 even though sense suggests this to you, let faith establish you. Judge not the matter from the taste, but from faith be fully assured without misgiving, that the body and blood of Christ have been vouchsafed to you.... Having learned these things, and been fully assured that the seeming bread is not bread, though sensible to taste, but the body of Christ; and that the seeming wine is not wine, though the taste

will have it so, but the blood of Christ; and that of this David sung of old, saying, “And bread strengthens man’s heart, to make his face to shine with oil, strengthen your heart,” by partaking of it as spiritual, and “make the face of your soul to shine”[*ibid.*, 22:6, 9].

St. Ambrose of Milan

Perhaps you may be saying, “I see something else; how can you assure me that I am receiving the body of Christ?” It only remains for us to prove it. And how many are the examples we might use!... Christ is in that sacrament, because it is the body of Christ [The Mysteries 9:50, 58 (c. a.d. 390)].

St. Augustine of Hippo

Christ was carried in his own hands when, referring to his own body, he said, “This is my body” [Mt 26:26]. For he carried that body in his hands [Explanations of the Psalms 33:1 (c. a.d. 405)].

I promised you [new Christians], who have now been baptized, a sermon in which I would explain the sacrament of the Lord’s table.... The bread you see on the altar, having been sanctified by the word of God, is the body of Christ. The chalice, or rather, what is in the chalice, having been sanctified by the word of God, is the blood of Christ [Sermons 227 (c. a.d. 411)].

What you see is the bread and the chalice; that is what your own eyes report to you. But your faith obliges you to accept that the bread is the body of Christ and the chalice is the blood of Christ. This has been said very briefly, which may perhaps be sufficient for faith; yet faith does not desire instruction [*ibid.*, 272].

Council of Ephesus

We will necessarily add this also. Proclaiming the death, according to the flesh, of the only-begotten Son of God, that is Jesus Christ, confessing his Resurrection from the dead, and his Ascension into heaven, we offer the unbloody sacrifice in the churches, and so go on to the mystical thanksgivings, and are sanctified, having received his holy flesh and the precious blood of Christ the Savior of us all. And not as common flesh do we receive it; God forbid: nor as of a man sanctified and associated with the Word according to the unity of worth, or as having a divine indwelling, but as truly the life-giving and very flesh of the Word himself. For he is the life according to his nature as God, and when he became united to his flesh, he made it also to be life-giving [Session 1, Letter of Cyril to Nestorius (a.d. 431)].

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The doctrine of the Real Presence asserts that in the Holy Eucharist, Jesus is present—body and blood, soul and divinity—under the appearances of bread and wine. This teaching is based on a variety of Scriptural passages (see 1 Cor 10:16–17; 11:23–29; and, especially, Jn 6:32–71).

The early Church Fathers interpreted these passages literally. In summarizing their teaching on Christ’s Real Presence, Protestant historian of the early Church J.N.D. Kelly writes: “Eucharistic teaching, it should be understood at the outset, was in general unquestioningly realist, i.e., the consecrated bread and wine were taken to be, and were treated and designated as, the Savior’s body and blood” (Early Christian Doctrines, 440).

Akin, J. (2010). [*The Fathers Know Best: Your Essential Guide to the Teachings of the Early Church*](#) (p. 292). Catholic Answers.

FURTHER STUDY OF THE EUCHARIST

Sacred Scripture OT Mal 1:11, Ps 116:13, 17, Ex 24:8, Pr 9:5, Ge 14:18, Ex 13:3, Dt 8:3, Ps 104:13–15

NT Jn 6, 1 Co 11:17–34, Mt 26:17–36, Lk 22:7–29, Mk 14:12–34, 1 Co 10:16–17, Heb 13:15, 1 Pe 2:5, Ac 2:42–46, Jn 13:1–17, 1 Co 10:1–6, Heb 7:24–27, Mt 14:13–21, 15:32–39, 16:6, Jn 4:32, Ac 20:7, Lk 24:13–49, Jn 2:11, 20:28, 1 Co 5:7, Re 19:9, Mt 5:23–24, 8:8, Mk 8:6, 19, Ac 20:11, Heb 9:14

Church Teaching Catechism CCC 1322–1419, 2176–2178, 1211–1212, 1436, 2181–2183, 610–611, 1169, 1178, 1180–1181, 1183, 1846, 2691, 2837, 790, 805, 838, 864, 950, 1000, 1003, 1074, 1088, 1094, 1097, 1105, 1244, 1275, 1533, 1570, 1621, 1644, 1650, 2042, 2120, 2637, 2643, 2718, 2845, 2861; Glossary “Eucharist”, “Blessed Sacrament”; Index “Eucharist”, “Sacrament(s): the Blessed sacrament”

Denzinger (Sources of Catholic Dogma) DS 1636–1642, 1651–1657, 1320–1322, 1730–1731, 802, 1198–1200, 1740, 1726–1727, 1743, 3445*, 1151–1152*, 1646–1648, 1661, 784, 812–813, 860, 1303, 1601, 1659, 1734, 1748, 1752, 1759, 2629*, 3232*, 3530, 3556, 700, 718, 761, 793–794, 1771, 2322*, 3379, 3382, 1764

Roman Catechism (Catechism of the Council of Trent) RC 2.4.43

Papal Encyclicals *Mysterium Fidei*, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*

Papal Documents *Sacramentum Caritatis*, *Familiaris Consortio* 57, *Vita Consecrata* 95, *Catechesi Tradendae* 23

Canons of the Ecumenical Councils First Council of Nicaea Canon 18, Quinisext Council Canon 52

Vatican II *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 47–58, 7, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 5, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 122–128, *Lumen Gentium* 3, *Unitatis Redintegratio* 22, *Lumen Gentium* 11, *Unitatis Redintegratio* 15, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* 15, *Dei Verbum* 21, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* 3–4, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 2, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 10, *Lumen Gentium* 15, 29, 41, *Perfectae Caritatis* 7

Canon Law Code of Canon Law CIC 919–920, 844, §3–§4, CIC 916–917, 1247–1248, 1367

Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches CCEO 881, 708

Ecclesiastical Writers

Apostolic Fathers *IEph* 20.2, *Did* 9.4–5, *IPhld* 4, *ISmyr* 8.1, *Did* 14.1

Apostolic Constitutions *Const.* Ap. 8.12–13

St. Justin Martyr 1 *Apol.* 65–67

St. Irenaeus Adv. Haer. 4.18.4–5, 5.2.2–3

Tertullian *Adv. Marc.* 4.40, *Ad ux.* 2.5, *De res.* 8, *Tert.*, *De orat.* 19

Origen *Cont. Cels.* 8.33

St. Cyprian *De laps.* 25–26, 16, *De orat. dom.* 18, 23, *Cyprian, Ep. (O)* 63.13–15, *Cyprian, Ep. (O)* 58.1, *Cyprian, Ep. (O)* 76.3

St. Hilary *De Trin.* 8.14

St. Cyril of Jerusalem *Cyr. Hier., Cat. Lect.* 22.2–3, 23.7, 9–10, 32.7, 23.22

St. Gregory of Nyssa *Cat or.* 37

St. Athanasius *Ath., Ep. fest.* 1

St. Ambrose *De myst.* 9.52, 50, 8, 9.58, *De Spir. Sanct.* 3.11.79

St. John Chrysostom *Hom. Matt.* 82.5, *Hom. Jo.* 46.3, *Hom. 1 Cor.* 27.4

St. Augustine *Tract. in ev. Joan.* 26.13, *Enarr. in Ps.* 98, *De pecc. merit. et remiss.* 1.20.27, 24.34, 3.4.8, *Enarr. in Ps.* 33, *Conf.* 9.11.27, *De civ. Dei* 10.6, *Tract. in ev. Joan.* 26.11, *Augustine, Serm. (Ben.)* 57.7.7

Theodoret *Theodoret, Eranistes* 2

St. Cyril of Alexandria *Cyr. Alex., In Jo.* 10.2, *Cyr. Alex., Adv. Nest.* 4.5, *Cyr. Alex., Ep.* 17

St. John Damascene *De Fide Orth.* 4.13

St. Thomas Aquinas *SCG* 4.63, *STh.*, III q.73–q.83, q.65 a.3, q.64 a.3, II-II q.122 a.4