

The Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist



An Interactive Biblical Exploration

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This is a fictional dialogue between a Catholic and a non-denominational Christian, which explores the Catholic doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

The Scenario

A man in the square is giving out tracts, including one condemning the Catholic understanding of the Eucharist. He gives one to a Catholic who is walking past.

Catholic: [Looks at tract] Hey, why are you handing out this stuff?

Tract Guy: Just doing my bit for the Truth.

C: For the Truth, huh? Well, I think your motives are good, but this stuff that you're spreading is not truth.

TG: Oh really? Tell me, have you been born again?

C: Sure have. Been born again of water and the spirit, just like Jesus said in John chapter 3.

TG: Uh, glad to hear it. So why have you got a problem with what we're saying here?

C: Because I'm Catholic, and I believe the Lord Jesus with all my heart, and what you're saying here goes against what him and the apostles taught.

TG: You're a born-again Catholic? Isn't that a contradiction in terms?

C: No. What do you think you have to do to be born again?

TG: Well, I've got a tract on that right here. You have to understand that sin separates us from God, and that the only way to be put right with God is to turn from your sin and ask Jesus into your heart to be your personal Lord and Saviour.

C: Oh, that's OK then, I did that at Mass this morning. So anyway, why are you bagging the Catholic Church like this? Why are you blaspheming the Eucharist?

TG: Because what the Catholic Church teaches about the Eucharist is unbiblical, that's why. You don't really believe that you eat Jesus when you receive Communion, do you? It's obvious from Scripture that Jesus was speaking symbolically when He talked about eating His flesh and drinking His blood. He didn't mean that literally.

C: Well, what if I could show you from the Bible that Christ did teach that He is really present in the Eucharist?

John 6

TG: There is no way you can prove that from the Bible. And besides, you're a Catholic. Your doctrines don't come from the Bible, anyway. So go ahead and try. But first, you tell me this: in John 10:1, Jesus said He is a 'door.' Do you believe He has hinges and a doorknob on His body? In John 15:1, Jesus said He is a 'vine.' Do you take Him literally there? And if you don't, then why do

you take His words literally in John 6 where He talked about His flesh and blood being like food and drink? You Catholics are pretty inconsistent, don't you think?

C: Well, let's have a look at what he said in John 6, shall we? Exactly one year before the Last Supper, right before the Passover, Jesus said:

⁵³ "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; ⁵⁴ he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. ⁵⁶ He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him" (*John 6:53-56*)

TG: Yeah, and he's using a metaphor: eating his flesh and drinking his blood means putting our faith in him.

C: Well, if he was just using a metaphor, he wasn't a very good teacher. After all, everyone listening to Him understood that He meant things literally. They said, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" When Jesus said He is a "door" or a "vine," no one asked him "How can this man be a door made out of wood?" or, "How can this man claim to be a plant?" It was very clear from the context of what Jesus said in those passages that He was using metaphors. But in John 6 He was speaking literally. Here, look at John 6:41, and 6:52.

TG: "The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, 'I am the bread which came down from heaven.'"...and then... "The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?'"

C: Yeah, they understood him literally, they just couldn't handle it. He didn't tell them it was just a metaphor like he should have if they weren't getting it. Instead, he goes on to make the same point several more times in even stronger terms. After verse 53, Jesus stops using the normal Greek word for "eat"; he switches from using *phago* (which just means "eat", and can sometimes have a symbolic meaning). He starts using *trogo*, which is a very vivid word meaning "munch" or "gnaw", and which is never anything but literal in the Greek Bible and other Greek literature.

TG: Yeah, well in verse 63 Jesus says "the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life". It's a spiritual message he's getting across.

C: C'mon, there's nowhere in Scripture where "spirit" is used to mean "symbolic". I mean, John 4:24 says God is spirit - you don't think God is just a symbol do you?

TG: No!

C: And if you do a study on the word Jesus uses for "flesh" here, you'll find that there's nowhere in the Gospels where it is used symbolically either.

Besides, this is the only place in the Bible where followers of Jesus abandon Him for theological reasons. In verse 60 they say, "this is a hard teaching, who can listen to it". And then in John 6 verse 66 it says "After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him." I've always thought it was interesting that the only verse in the Bible that is 6:66 is where people reject Jesus because of his teaching about the Eucharist.

TG: Hey, that's just a coincidence.

C: Yeah, I know that. Funny though, isn't it? Anyway, here we have people leaving Jesus because of this hard teaching. Some people think this was the biggest crowd Jesus ever preached to, which would make this his single biggest public relations blunder. He could have cleared everything up and stopped everyone from leaving just by saying "No, no, listen guys, that was just a symbol, I don't really mean my literal body and blood". But he doesn't do that. Instead, he says to his disciples, "Do you also wish to go away?". And they don't because they know he has the words of eternal life. Here, read Mark 4:34.

TG: "he did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything."

C: Yeah, and if he had some mysterious symbolic meaning here, he didn't explain it to his disciples, which is another reason to think he was being literal. Besides, there's other places in the Gospels where Jesus just repeats a true but unpopular teaching like this, like in Matthew chapter 9 where he talks about his power to forgive sins, and people don't believe him, and he insists on it, and John chapter 8, where he talks about his eternal existence, people don't believe him, and he goes on to say "Before Abraham was born, I am!". This passage about the Eucharist is just like those ones. Plus there's heaps of places where he says something, the disciples get it wrong, and Jesus explains it to them. But he doesn't do that here, because they took him literally and they got it right.

TG: Well I still think that eating his flesh and drinking his blood means believing in him.

C: Well, "eating flesh" and "drinking blood" does actually have a metaphorical meaning in the Old Testament. What's your Bible version?

TG: NIV.

C: Cool. Well, read Psalm 27 verse 2.

TG: "When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall."

C: Yeah, and what does the footnote say for "devour my flesh"?

TG: "to slander me".

C: Right, so if Jesus was speaking symbolically, he would have been saying that people must slander Him in order to have eternal life. I don't think so. And then there's the teaching of St. Paul.

TG: Hey, Paul was the "apostle of grace" - he was no Catholic!

C: You think? St. Paul was a Catholic bishop. All those letters he wrote, he did between times when he was saying Mass! And in one of those letters, he had a lot to say about the Real Presence.

TG: Go on then.

1 Corinthians 10:16-17

C: 1 Corinthians 10:16-17:

¹⁶ "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? ¹⁷ Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."

See, communion is a participation in the body of Christ! And for you guys, where you say the bread remains bread, you haven't got one bread, you've got lots of different bits of bread.

TG: Actually, we use crackers and grape juice.

C: Yeah, well, because the bread and wine really becomes Jesus, we can honestly say we partake of the one bread, like St. Paul says.

And then you've got 1st Corinthians 11:27-29. Why don't you read that?

1 Corinthians 11:27-29

TG: ²⁷ "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. ²⁸ A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. ²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself."

C: Yeah, sounds a lot like Paul's talking about the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. You wouldn't be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord if it was just a symbol. And did you know that the Greek phrase for being "guilty of someone's body and blood" is a technical way of saying "guilty of murder". It's very serious. If you were just fooling around with a bit of grape juice it would be no big deal. But if Jesus is really present, then to receive communion unworthily would be a big deal. Which is why we take St. Paul very seriously, and why we take the Eucharist very seriously as well.

The Last Supper

C: Oh, and I forgot to mention, at the Last Supper, Jesus didn't say "This represents my body", did he? He said "This is my body". And we just take him at his word.

The Eucharist in the Early Church

TG: Well, this is all very interesting, but I've got a tract here that says your doctrine of transubstantiation was not adopted until 1215 A.D. So it doesn't matter what sort of tricky arguments you're gonna use, if you put your faith in something that wasn't believed until more than a thousand years after Christ, I'm not gonna follow it.

C: Let me get this right: you are accusing the Catholic Church of introducing something new?

TG: That's right.

C: What church do you go to anyway?

TG: Well, we're non-denominational...

C: But you must have a name - is this it on the bottom of the tract?

TG: Well, yeah, we're the Reformed Evangelical Congregational Elim fellowship of New Testament Independent Non-denominational Vineyards, affiliated to the Episcopal Newlife Truegospel International church Of the Nazarene. We have a long, proud history, in a couple of years we'll be celebrating our tenth anniversary as a fellowship.

C: Right. So that would make you... the uh, church of the RECENT INVENTION, wouldn't it? Anyway, the Catholic understanding of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist is nothing new. Transubstantiation is a technical term that describes what happens, and the only reason it wasn't widely used until the 11th century was because that was the first time on record that anyone significant denied the Real Presence. So the Church used transubstantiation (which just means "change of substance") to define things very clearly in a single word. The Eastern Church had been using the Greek word *metaousiosis*, which means the same thing for hundreds of years before that. I mean, you believe in the Trinity, don't you?

TG: Of course I do!

C: Well, the word "Trinity" wasn't "officially" used until the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD, but that doesn't mean that no-one believed in the Trinity until then. And as for the Real Presence in the early Church, listen to this, I happen to have a quote right here... this is from Ignatius of Antioch, who was martyred in AD 110 and was a disciple of both Peter and John; he wrote about some of the heretics that he had to deal with:

"They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer, because they confess not the Eucharist to be the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins, and which the Father, of His goodness, raised up again." (*Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to Smyrnaeans, 7, 1, c. 110A.D., in Coxe's Ante-Nicene Fathers I:89*)

TG: Oh. Well, that's just one guy.

C: No, it's not just him, I could give you tons of quotes that say the same thing. But look, here's a book - I was just taking it back to the library - it's by a very well-respected historian, who's not a Catholic, and this is how he summarises what the early Church believed about the Eucharist:

"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." (*J.N.D. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines, p. 440*)

TG: OK, that's very interesting and I'll have to think about it. Look, maybe I'll stop giving out this tract for time being while I look into things a bit more. But here, why don't you take this tract on Purgatory instead?

C: Oh man. I gotta go, but how about I give you a tract, and then you can call me if you want to talk about it some more. See ya!

Recommended Readings and Resources

Recommended Links

The Catholic Faith

www.thecatholicfaith.info

The home of The Catholic Faith booklets.

Biblia Clerus

clerus.org/bibliaclerus/index_eng.html

The Holy See offers Sacred Scripture in the light of Sacred Tradition and Magisterial teachings, cross-referenced to commentaries, catechisms, council pronouncements, etc. Available for online use and as a downloadable program.

Catechism of the Catholic Church; Compendium of the Catechism

www.scborromeo.org/ccc.htm and;

www.vatican.va/archive

The Catechism is *the* reference text for authentic Catholic teachings.

Catholic Education Resource Center

www.catholiceducation.org

Authentic Catholic education resource, invaluable for all Catholics, to engage the secular, relativist and at times anti-Catholic culture and media. It makes available the best in Catholic faith and culture – “the latest, the best, the brightest from outstanding writers, authors and journalists around the globe”

Catholic Answers

www.catholic.com

One of the most comprehensive and indispensable websites for Catholic apologetics (defence of Catholic doctrines). Have a browse, and try the “Quick Search” box on the top left of the page to look up any topic.

Radio Replies

www.icatholicism.net/apologetics/radio-replies.html

The famed anthology of questions and answers about virtually any topic on the faith.

New Advent

www.newadvent.org

A giant resource website which includes the Catholic Encyclopedia, Early Church Fathers’ writings, the Bible, and St. Thomas Aquinas’ theological masterpiece, Summa Theologica.

Catholic Culture Site Reviews

www.catholicculture.org/reviews

Find more links and check how any Catholic website is rated on fidelity, resources and useability.

Recommended Books¹

A Biblical Defence of Catholicism by Dave Armstrong

A “rigorous, Scripture-packed analysis” of the Catholic faith by a former Protestant campus missionary turned Catholic apologist.

Early Christian Writings translated by Maxwell Staniforth

Writings of the Fathers known to the Apostles, including Clement, Ignatius and Polycarp.

How the Catholic Church Built Western Civilization by Thomas E. Woods

An eye-opening book outlining how the Church had an indispensable role in every facet of Western civilization, including science, economics, morality, law, and fine arts.

Introduction to the Devout Life by St Francis de Sales

A guide to devout life while in the world. Written by the Saint at a dangerous time & place, where saying Mass was punishable by death, it has never gone out of print in 400 years.²

The Imitation of Christ by Thomas á Kempis

One of the greatest Catholic spiritual works, it has been cherished by all Christians. It is said to be second only to the bible in publication, and has been available in over fifty languages.²

True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin by St Louis Marie de Montfort

Praised by popes, theologians and mystics, this is perhaps the most celebrated book ever written about devotion to Mary.²



‘Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist’ Fictional Dialogue

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² Also available to read online at www.catholictreasury.info