

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DOCTRINE OF THE EUCHARISTIC SACRIFICE

Paper 3 (b)

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After the patristic age, the doctrine of the eucharist encountered two periods of controversy; that of Berengarius and that of the Reformation. Berengarius (c. 1050 - 1079) was accused of maintaining that "the bread and wine placed on the altar, after the consecration are only the sacrament, not the true body and blood of our Lord" and was required to agree that this body and blood were "truly handled and broken by the hands of the priest and touched by the teeth of the faithful" (D-S 690). Later he was required to swear that the bread and wine "are substantially y changed into the true...body and blood of Christ"; and that after the consecration there is the body of Christ "not only by signs and virtus of the sacrament, but in the property of its nature and the truth of its substance." (ibid 700). We are not here presented with infallible definitions of faith, but we see the attitude of Rome at about the time of the schism between East and West. As is well known, the term transubstantiation came to be applied to the change at consecration, and the official Roman Catholic doctrine is found in a canon of Trent: "If anyone says that in the holy sacrament of the Eucharist there remains the substance of bread and wine together with the body and blood of our Lord...and denies that wonderful and unique conversion of the whole substance of the bread into (his) body, and of the whole substance of wine into (his) blood, which conversion the Catholic Church most fitly calls transubstantiation, anathema sit" (D-S 1652)

This doctrine of the Real Presence is not irrelevant to the question of the eucharistic sacrifice, since Roman Catholics believe that the latter "occurs" simultaneously with the "conversion" of the bread and wine. For the doctrine of the Eucharistic sacrifice, cf. the canons of Trent D-S: In the Mass, a true and proper sacrifice is offered to God, and this offering is not simply the fact that Christ is given to us as our food (1752); the sacrifice of the Mass is not only a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, nor a mere commemoration of the sacrifice accomplished on the Cross; it is propitiatory; does not only benefit the communicant; and may be offered for the living and the dead, for sins and punishments satisfactions and other needs (1752). As Trent teaches, (though without anathema): (In the Eucharist is offered) one and the same victim (as on the Cross), and it is the same One who offers It by the ministry of priests who then offered himself on the Cross; only the ratio offerendi is different (D-S 1743)

(Thus the defined doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church on the Eucharistic sacrifice seems to be rather exiguous. I have not found it defined, for instance, that the Mass-sacrifice is actuated precisely in the consecration, though I think everyone among us hold this to be so - anyhow I don't see how we could associate the sacrifice merely with the reception of Holy Communion, whether by the officiating priest or members of the congregation). - For theological elaboration, cf. the article by Leo Scheffczyk, Eucharistic Sacrifice in Sacramentum Mundi 2.