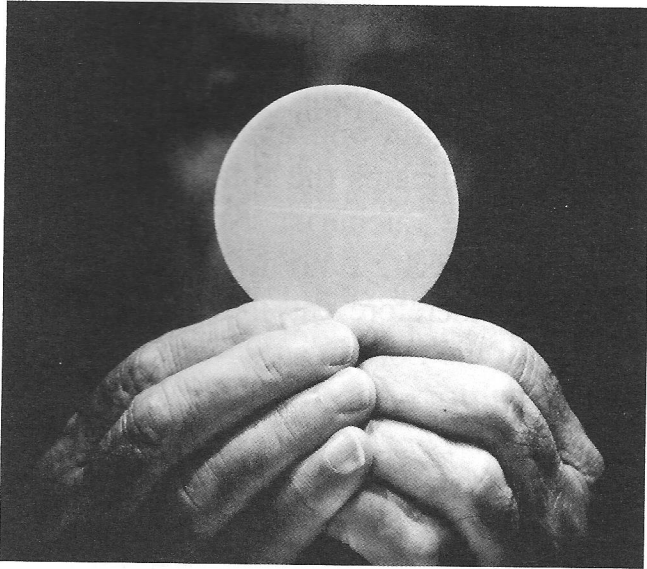


THE EUCHARIST



Catholics believe that the Eucharist is the *literal* body and blood of Christ. Nearly all of the more than 33,000 different Protestant denominations³ believe Christ is only present *symbolically* in the Eucharist.

Because the Eucharist is such an important doctrine, and because it divides us from nearly all Protestants, we must insist on discussing the Eucharist in any apologetic dialogue, and we must be prepared to discuss it *well*.

In order to defend the biblical basis for the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, know the following passages:

all of John 6	Lk 22:17–20	1 Cor 10:14–17
Mk 14:22–24	Lk 24:30–35	1 Cor 11:23–29
Mt 26:26–28		

³ The 2001 *World Christian Encyclopedia* published by Oxford University Press counts 33,830 denominations within Christianity.

Be able to “walk” a non-Catholic step by step through John 6. Begin by reading Jn 4:31–34 and Mt 16:5–12, which describe Jesus speaking about food in a *symbolic* or figurative way. The disciples interpret Him to mean real food. Note how Jesus shows them in plain, unmistakable language that He is only speaking *figuratively*.

Contrast this with Jn 6:51. Jesus says we must eat His flesh in order to have life. In Jn 6:52, the Jews *interpret Him literally*. Jesus then repeats again and again (verses 53–56)—in the clearest possible language—that we must eat His flesh and drink His blood in order to have eternal life. Take special note of verse 55: “For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed”—*this is not the language of symbolism*.

Protestants often cite John 6:35: “I am the bread of life; he who *comes* to me shall not hunger, and he who *believes* in me shall never thirst.” They claim that when Jesus calls Himself the “bread of life” He is simply saying that if we believe in Him, He will nourish us spiritually, just as bread nourishes us physically. Protestants claim that we “eat” and “drink” Jesus, our spiritual food, by *coming* to and *believing* in Him.

However, we must read the rest of this Eucharistic discourse, especially verses 48–58, where Jesus tells us exactly what He means by calling Himself “bread.” The bread Jesus is speaking of is not merely a symbol for spiritual nourishment. Jesus tells us plainly that the bread is *His own flesh* (verse 51), which we must eat in order to

have eternal life. When Jesus explains that the bread of life is literally His flesh, we must accept His clear words.

Many Protestants claim that in John 6:60–70, Jesus explains that He was only speaking symbolically in the previous verses. They focus on verse 63, “It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.” Be prepared to deal with this objection as follows:

(a) Jesus’ Eucharistic talk *ends* with verse 58 (see verse 59). The dialogue of verses 60–70 occurs *later* and deals with faith, not the Eucharist.

(b) The word “spirit” is nowhere used in the Bible to mean “symbolic.” The spiritual is just as real as the material.

(c) In verse 63, Jesus is contrasting the natural or carnal man (“the flesh”) with the spiritual or faith-filled man. Read 1 Cor 2:14–3:4 for a good explanation of what



Jesus means by “the flesh.” Note that Jesus says “*my* flesh” when discussing the Eucharist. He says “*the* flesh” when referring to the carnal man who will not believe anything beyond his

senses and reason. No Christian believes that *Jesus’* flesh is “of no avail,” for His flesh was the means of our redemption.

(d) Note that the unbelieving disciples leave Jesus *after* verse 63—they **would not have left at this point if Jesus had assured them that He was only speaking symbolically.** This is the only time recorded in the New Testament that any of Jesus’ disciples left

Him because they found a doctrine of His too hard to accept. Of the twelve Apostles, apparently only Judas rejected the Eucharist (Jn 6:70–71).

Now read the other Eucharistic Bible passages. Again and again the biblical language indicates the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Note the strong language of St. Paul in 1 Cor 11:27, “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be *guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord.*”

In the Aramaic language that Our Lord spoke, to symbolically “eat the flesh” or “drink the blood” of someone meant to persecute and assault him. See Ps 27:2; Isaiah 9:18–20; Isaiah 49:26; Micah 3:3; 2 Sam 23:15–17; and Rev 17:6, 16. Thus, if Jesus were only speaking *symbolically* about eating His flesh and drinking His blood, as Protestants say, then what He really meant was “whoever persecutes and assaults me will have eternal life.” This, of course, makes nonsense of the passage.

Consider Christ’s use of bread and wine at the Last Supper. Bread and wine are not normal or natural symbols of flesh and blood. Yet in all four Last Supper accounts (Mt 26:26–28; Mk 14:22–24; Lk 22:17–20; 1 Cor 11:23–25) Jesus tells us plainly that “this *is* my body” and “this *is* my blood.” Never is there a hint that He is speaking symbolically. Either the symbols would have been clearly explained if He were speaking symbolically (which is not the case) or Jesus spoke literally (which *is* the case).

Occasionally, a non-Catholic will insist that we Catholics, because of our belief

about the Eucharist, engage in cannibalism and violate the biblical prohibition on the drinking of blood. It was exactly this misunderstanding that led the unbelieving Jews and disciples in John 6 to reject Jesus when He spoke about the need to eat His body and drink His blood. The believing disciples were rewarded for their faith at the Last Supper. Jesus revealed to them that they would receive His body and blood in the *sacrament* of the Holy Eucharist, not in the bloody, cannibalistic way the unbelievers had imagined.

All the early Church Fathers believed in the Real Presence (see Appendix 1, page 9). Until the Reformation, all Christianity accepted the Real Presence of Christ in the



Eucharist. Even Martin Luther affirmed the doctrine, and confirmed that the early Church Fathers unanimously taught the Real Presence:

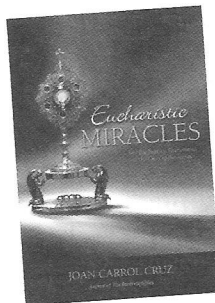
of all the fathers, as many as you can name, not one has ever spoken about the sacrament as these fanatics do. None of them uses such an expression as, "It is simply bread and wine," or "Christ's body and blood are not present." Yet this subject is so frequently discussed by them, it is impossible that they should not at some time have let slip such an expression as, "It is simply bread," or "Not that the body of Christ is physically present," or the like, since they are greatly concerned not to mislead the people; actually, they simply proceed to speak as if no one doubted that Christ's body and blood are present. Certainly among so many fathers and so many writings a negative argument should have turned up at least once, as happens in other articles; but actually they

⁴ *Luther's Works* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing, 1961), Volume 37, 54.

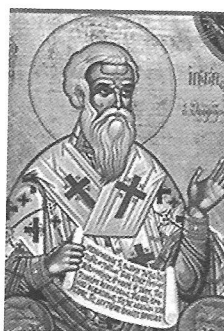
all stand uniformly and consistently on the affirmative side.⁴

Note that all the Churches that broke away hundreds of years *before* the Reformation (Orthodox, Coptic, Armenian) still believe in the Real Presence.

Finally, mention some of the great Eucharistic miracles that God has given us to confirm the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Joan Cruz's *Eucharistic Miracles*⁵ is an excellent resource for this purpose. Many of these miracles have been scientifically verified.



APPENDIX 1: EARLY CHURCH FATHERS ON THE EUCHARIST



St. Ignatius of Antioch, a disciple and contemporary of the Apostle John, wrote (around AD 110) concerning certain heretics:

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.⁶

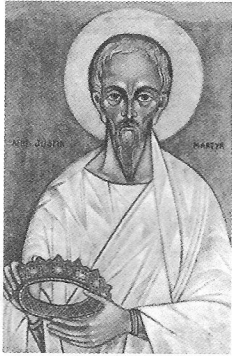
In another letter St. Ignatius wrote,

I desire the Bread of God, which is the *Flesh of Jesus Christ* ... and for drink I desire *His Blood*, which is love incorruptible.⁷

⁵ (Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 1988).

⁶ *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* 6, 2; William A. Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1970), Volume 1, #64.

⁷ *Letter to the Romans* 7, 3; Jurgens, #54a.



St. Justin Martyr wrote in his apology to the emperor at Rome (around AD 150):

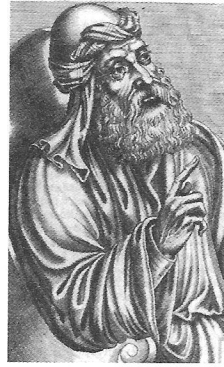
We call this food Eucharist; and no one else is permitted to partake of it, except one who believes our teaching to be true.... *For not as common bread nor common*

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 Eucharistic prayer set down by Him, and by the change of which our blood and flesh is nourished, *is both the Flesh and the Blood of that incarnated Jesus.*⁸



St. Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons and a pupil of St. Polycarp who had been taught by St. John the Apostle, wrote (around AD 195):

He [Jesus] 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.⁹



St. Cyril of Jerusalem, in a catechetical lecture given in the middle of the fourth century (AD 350), said:

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 the faith, not doubting that you have been deemed worthy of *the Body and Blood of Christ.*¹⁰



⁸ *First Apology*, 66, 20; Jurgens, #128.

⁹ *Against Heresies*, 5, 2, 2; Jurgens, #249.

¹⁰ *Catechetical Lectures: [Mystagogic 4]*, 22, 6; Jurgens, #846.