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The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Editor: DR. PAUL CARUS.

Associates: { E. C. HEGELER.
 { MARY CARUS.



THE MIRACLE OF BOLSENA.

A Fresco in the Cathedral at Orvieto. See pp. 515-522.

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The First Grammar of the Language Spoken by the Bontoc Igorot

A Mountain Tribe of North Luzon
(Philippine Islands)

By Dr. CARL WILHELM SEIDENADEL

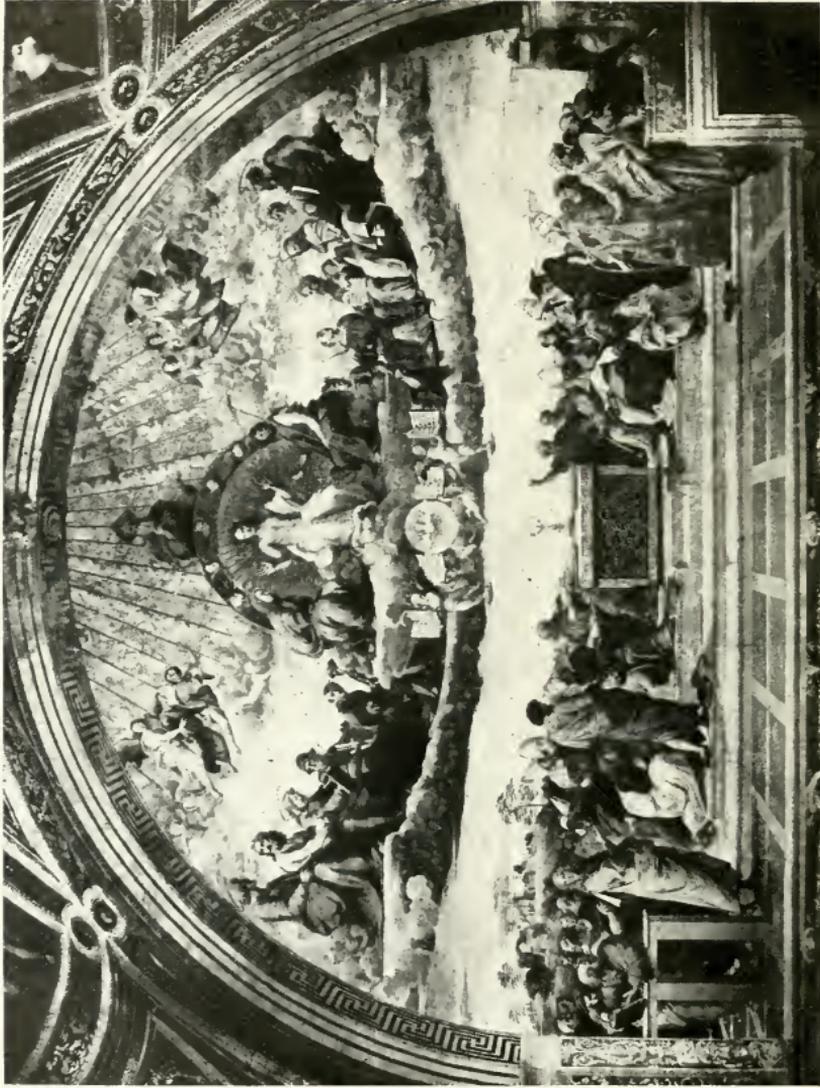
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THE EUCHARIST IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH.

BY THE EDITOR.

MONTREAL is to be the meeting place of a stately gathering of Roman Catholics, who will hold the Eucharist Congress there for the first time in the New World in celebration of the most sacred mystery of the Church.

In former articles we have shown that Christianity does not stand alone in rites of this kind. We find similar institutions in ancient Babylon, in Egypt, among the Greeks and also among the more distant nations of Inner Asia, the Tibetans, yea even among the American Indians. It is but natural that such a ceremony should develop, and there is no reason to doubt that similar institutions arose simultaneously and without any historical connection in different parts of the globe.¹ The very name Eucharist is not Hebrew but Greek and does not in this sense occur in the New Testament. St. Paul speaks of the Lord's Supper and of the Love Feast, *Agape*, but the term Eucharist seems to have suddenly sprung into common use in the beginning of the second century, when we find it in the Letters ascribed to Ignatius,² in Irenaeus,³ in Justin Martyr,⁴ and in Origen.⁵

In the days of savagery the sacrifice offered was the sacred emblem of the god,—the ram, the bull, the boar, or even a man, and

¹ See the illustrated editorial "Food of Life and the Sacrament," in *Monist*, X, 246-279, and 343-382.

² *Epist. ad Philad.*, 4, and *ad Smyrn.*, 6.

³ *Liber N.* 66.

⁴ *Apolog.*, I, 66.

⁵ *Contr. Celsum*, VIII, 57.

so it is not infrequent that religious cannibalism has been connected with the celebration of the Eucharist.⁶

The Jewish Passover is a similar ritual, and here the paschal lamb is slain and ceremonially eaten by the worshipers. It is noteworthy at the same time that the bread was baked in the more primitive fashion without the use of leaven, and the same conservative tendency is noticeable elsewhere, e. g., among the American Indians. It is natural for man in religious affairs to cling with persistence to the ancient customs, and this may have been the reason why even now the wafer is preferred in most churches to leavened bread. This wafer represents the victim offered on the altar, and so it was called *hostia*, "Host," or *oblata*, the offering made for an atonement.

Luther followed the practice of the Roman church in using the wafer for the Eucharist, while Calvin did not shrink from the innovation of introducing ordinary bread for the Lord's Supper.

Among the Jews unleavened bread is called *maḥza*, which is not Hebrew but presumably a Persian loan word *myazda* denoting the sacrificial cake, sacramentally eaten together with the sacred *homa* drink, for the nourishment of the resurrection body.

The celebration of the Eucharist in the Roman Catholic church is called *missa*, "mass," and the name is explained as being derived from the words *dismissa est ecclesia*, "the church is dismissed," which are sometimes spoken at the end of the service. A more plausible etymology would derive the word from the Persian *myazda* which is the more probable when we consider the similarity of the Lord's Supper to the Mithraist Eucharist. Justin Martyr even goes so far as to say that it was well known that the Mithraists celebrated the same ceremony.

Whatever parallels there may be in paganism to the Christian Eucharist, we must grant that as the Roman Catholic mass exists to-day it is unique and seems to have developed in perfect independence. Mithraistic reminiscences may still linger with it, yet one thing is sure that whatever solemnity may have attached to kindred rites, nothing can reach the grandeur and dignity of the Roman Catholic mass.

The underlying idea of the mass has been worked out with logical consistency during the development of the church. Whatever may be said in criticism of the paltry quibbles which accompa-

⁶ For a treatment of this subject from the standpoint of comparative ethnology see J. B. Smiley's article, "The Communion Ceremony," *Open Court*, XXIII, 513.

nied the progress of ecclesiastical history from one ecumenical council to another, we can see that a definite idea dominates the formulation of the faith point after point, and the final result is a logically consistent, though of course mystical, system of theology.

To be sure a modern scientist will not easily be reconciled to the dogmatic conception of these doctrines, but if we make allowances for poetry and bear in mind the significance (the spirit, not the letter) of the several dogmas, we shall have to grant that most of them are profound and full of meaning. And this is especially the case with the Eucharist. In its Roman Catholic interpretation more than in Protestantism Christianity is a summary of the religious spirit of the past. It echoes the most distant beliefs, and yet overcomes the prehistoric errors and superstitions by the spirit of a new dispensation. Here we have the eating of the God without the cannibalism of the Aztecs or other uncivilized peoples, and the ceremony is performed with a seriousness which boldly insists on the reality of the presence of the God who offers himself as a sacrifice.

In ecclesiastical history we always find the two contrasts, the mystic and the rationalist. The mystic insists on the reality of the performance, the rationalist is anxious to deprive it of the irrationality of mysticism. He therefore proposes to make the ceremony merely symbolical, which, however, appears offensive to the pious worshiper, and degrades the ceremony into a trivial and prosaic performance.

In defence of the mystical standpoint we must consider that symbol is the nature of spirit, and in symbols the spirit is really and truly present. But if the rationalist speaks of the symbolical nature of religious doctrines or rituals, he attempts to deny the real presence of the spirit. In this same way the nominalists regarded words as mere sounds (*flatus vocis*) while the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel declares that the words which he speaks are truth and life. No wonder that the rationalizing nominalist is opposed by the mysticist, and we must bear in mind that in mystic rites mysticism is on its own ground. Here if anywhere mysticism has a fair title to exist.

The Roman Catholic church celebrates the Eucharist in the mass, and the mass is the very keystone of the arch of theology. It is the ultimate consequence of the doctrine of the Trinity which teaches the triple mode of divine dispensation. There is God the Father, the eternal cosmic order, supernatural and absolute, who exists in and by himself aside from any consideration of the universe. But this absolute divinity is the Creator who manifests himself in the creation, in the actual world of material existence.

He actualizes himself and becomes incarnate in God the Son, in Christ, the God-man. The divine spirit, however, is not limited to one individual but dominates the whole history of mankind. First it prepares the appearance of the incarnate God and then it organizes the kingdom of heaven on earth which Christ has founded and this third manifestation is called The Holy Ghost.

The significance of the Trinity naturally touches man most in the God-incarnation, in Christ, and Christ's fate is closely linked in this mystical conception to the lives of all men. He is the Saviour, the high priest and the victim in one, who by his passion redeems mankind from the curse of sin.

In the history of Jesus the atonement has been made through his death on the cross. But we must bear in mind that the life of Jesus is typical for the fate of the divine presence immanent in the world, and the doctrine of Christ's passion refers to a general condition, not to a single historical fact. This sin-offering is a constant feature in the history of the world. True, it has found its most realistic expression in the tragedy on Golgotha, but the incarnation, the passion, the struggle for redemption is an omnipresent factor in religious experience, and this was felt instinctively by the church when it insisted on the doctrine that every Eucharist is really and truly a sin-offering for an atonement with all that is implied thereby. Accordingly the church insists that Christ is really present in the Host. In fact the very name implies that the wafer is the victim offered upon the altar for man's redemption. And this idea found its appropriate expression in the doctrine of transubstantiation.

In appreciating a religious ceremonial we cannot allow rationalism to have its way. We must accept the mystic interpretation and consider the entire performance as solemn poetry, where an appeal to reason would be as out of place as if we took a description of Dante's *Divina Commedia* in a literal sense, or as if we expected Mephistopheles in Goethe's *Faust* to be limited in his operations to actual possibilities.

The performance of the mass is a drama, and as such it belongs in the category of the arts and should not be measured by the gage of scientific thought. Accordingly the doctrine of transubstantiation simply expresses the consistent notions of the religious symbolism of the Christian God-conception, and the worshiper receives in the Host the real incarnate God in bodily form.

It goes without saying that in this connection we do not mean to advise the scientist or the man educated in the scientific world-conception to abandon his view and to kneel with the worshiper be-

fore the Host. We merely explain the significance of the rite and justify its logic from its own premises.

The doctrine of transubstantiation was not received at once in the Roman Catholic church. It was definitely sanctioned only under Pope Innocent III, in 1215 by the fourth Lateran Synod. The zeal with which this highest mystery of the church was accepted showed itself in many ways and kept the mass of the people in an unusual strain of awe and excitement. Miracles were expected and they happened.

A superstitious conception of the transformation of the wafer into the physical body of Christ as soon as the priest spoke over it the words, *hoc est corpus meum*, "This is my body," was greatly aided by a harmless natural phenomenon which consisted in the appearance of a red fungus that fastened itself with great preference upon the unleavened bread of which the Host was made. The fanaticism of those days led to many heinous persecutions of heretics and Jews which were committed in the ignorance of the Middle Ages. The history of the Inquisition tells us of the crimes of unbelievers who were assumed to have pierced the Host or cut it to pieces for the purpose of making Christ suffer, and the appearance of the red stains was accepted as satisfactory evidence in court.

The first case, so far as we can learn, happened in Paris in 1249, where a Jewish couple, living in the Rue des Billettes, were burned at the stake on the charge of having pierced the Host, and the evidence of this crime consisted in the clots of blood, or to speak more guardedly, of a red substance like blood, which persistently appeared on the Host that was assumed to have been mutilated. The incident caused an enormous excitement; ballads perpetuated the story and the miracle was commemorated in the stained glass windows of several churches. The notion that the Jews were bent on piercing the Host, together with the accusation that their ritual required the murder of Christian children, continued to haunt public imagination for several centuries, and for this alleged crime many Jews suffered a terrible martyr death on the fagots.

A special incident concentrated the attention of the Christian world on this doctrine of the real presence of Christ in the Host. A German priest on his way to Rome happened to read mass in the little church of St. Christina at Bolsena near Orvieto, in the year 1263, and when he blessed and lifted up the Host, he noticed spots like blood upon it, and the same red marks appeared in the *corporale*, the cloth which had covered the wafer.

The traveling priest had been a doubter all his life as to whether

the Host was to be considered as a mere symbol, or as harboring the real presence of Christ. Now he was convinced of the truth of the doctrine of transubstantiation, and the rumor of the miracle spread rapidly from mouth to mouth.

It reached the ears of Pope Urban IV who happened to be in Orvieto, and he came in procession to Bolsena, accompanied by all the dignitaries of the church and a crowd of people in order to receive personally the *corporale* thus miraculously stained by the very blood of Christ. A magnificent cathedral was built in Orvieto where Ugolino di Prete Ilario represented the miracle in a series of interesting frescoes. His pictures are painted with historical faithfulness, but two and a half centuries after him there arose a greater



POPE URBAN IV RECEIVING THE BOLSENA CORPORALE.
Fresco by Ugolino di Prete Ilario in the Cathedral of Orvieto.

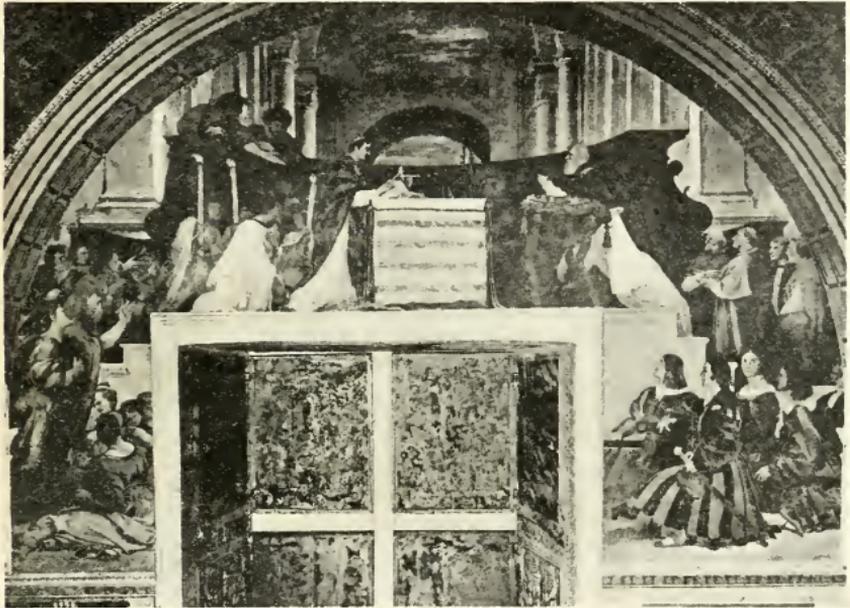
artist, who painted the same event idealized not only by religious enthusiasm but also by the immortal genius of an artistic conception. This was none other than Raphael, whose painting of the "Miracle of the Mass at Bolsena" is counted as one of his masterpieces.

Raphael is not an historical painter. His brush idealizes whatever it touches, and so he changes the small church of Bolsena into a great cathedral and imparts to the pope the strong features of his patron, Julian II.

Almost simultaneously with the miracle of Bolsena another event happened which added to the awe in which the Host was held. In consequence of the dream of Juliana, a nun of Louvain, the first procession with the Host, the *Corpus Christi* as it was called in

Latin, took place there in 1263, and this festival is still celebrated in the Roman Catholic church with great pomp the first Thursday after Trinity.

The doctrine of the transubstantiation as the center of Roman Catholic theology has found its noblest embodiment in the painting of the so-called *Disputa* by the same great artist. It represents the theology of the church which has raised the Host upon the altar as the central mystery of religion. We see in the highest heaven God the Father surrounded by archangels. Underneath is enthroned God the Son as the glorified and transfigured Christ, at his right



THE MIRACLE OF THE MASS AT BOLSENA.

Fresco in the Vatican by Raphael.

hand his mother, at his left hand John the Baptist. He is surrounded by prophets, apostles, and the evangelists. Further down the Holy Ghost in the shape of a dove hovers between four little cherubs bearing in their hands the opened volumes of the four Gospels.

Underneath this celestial scene an altar is erected on earth upon which stands the Host and around the altar are grouped the church fathers, and the most prominent theologians, who by their thought and faith have worked out the comprehension of this doctrine of transubstantiation.

We children of the twentieth century feel strangely touched by the spirit of medievalism when confronted with these mystical traditions. They have become weird to us and yet it would be a grave mistake to measure their significance by the dry rationalism of to-day, for they incorporate a philosophy which could be modernized if it were interpreted as the poetic conception of a philosophical truth.