**Transubstantiation**

*Transubstantiation is a doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church. The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines this doctrine in section 1376:*

***"The Council of Trent summarizes the Catholic faith by declaring: ‘Because Christ our Redeemer said that it was truly his body that he was offering under the species of bread, it has always been the conviction of the Church of God, and this holy Council now declares again, that by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation.’"***

In other words, the Roman Catholic Church teaches that once an ordained priest blesses the bread of the Lord’s Supper, it is transformed into the actual flesh of Christ (though it retains the appearance, odor, and taste of bread). When he blesses the wine, it is transformed into the actual blood of Christ (though it retains the appearance, odor, and taste of wine). Is such a concept biblical? There are some Scriptures that, if interpreted strictly literally, would lead to the “real presence” of Christ in the bread and wine. Examples are John 6:32-58; Matthew 26:26; Luke 22:17-23; and 1 Corinthians 11:24-25. The passage most frequently is John 6:32-58 and especially verses 53-57, “Jesus said to them, ‘I tell you the truth unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life … For my flesh is real food, and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him … so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.’”

Roman Catholics interpret this passage literally and apply its message to the Lord’s Supper, which they title the “Eucharist” or “Mass.” Those who reject the idea of transubstantiation interpret Jesus’ words in John 6:53-57 figuratively or symbolically. How can we know which interpretation is correct? Thankfully, Jesus made it exceedingly obvious what He meant. John 6:63 declares, “The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.” Jesus specifically stated that His words are “spirit.” Jesus was using physical concepts, eating and drinking, to teach spiritual truth.

The Scriptures declare that the Lord’s Supper is a memorial to the body and blood of Christ (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24-25), not the actual consumption of His physical body and blood. When Jesus was speaking in John chapter 6, Jesus had not yet had the Last Supper with His disciples, in which He instituted the Lord’s Supper. To read the Lord’s Supper / Christian Communion back into John chapter 6 is unwarranted. For a more complete discussion of these issues, please read our article on the Holy Eucharist.

The most serious reason transubstantiation should be rejected is that it is viewed by the Roman Catholic Church as a "re-sacrifice" of Jesus Christ for our sins, or as a “re-offering / re-presentation” of His sacrifice. This is directly in contradiction to what Scripture says, that Jesus died "once for all" and does not need to be sacrificed again (Hebrews 10:10; 1 Peter 3:18). Hebrews 7:27 declares, "Unlike the other high priests, He (Jesus) does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins ONCE for all when He offered Himself."

**Consubstantiation**

Consubstantiation is the view that the bread and wine of Communion / the Lord’s Supper are spiritually the flesh and blood of Jesus, yet the bread and wine are still actually only bread and wine. In this way, it is different from transubstantiation, in which the bread and the wine are believed to actually become the body and blood of Jesus. Transubstantiation is a Roman Catholic dogma that stretches back to the earliest years of that church, while consubstantiation is relatively new, arising out of the Protestant Reformation. Consubstantiation essentially teaches that Jesus is "with, in, and under" the bread and wine, but is not literally the bread and wine.

Martin Luther, the founder of the Protestant Reformation learned all about the doctrine of transubstantiation in his theological training, and it made up part of his belief system because, as a priest, he celebrated the Mass many times, and the dogma of transubstantiation is central to the Roman Catholic Mass.

when the Reformation started as a backlash to the Roman Catholic abuses (such as the sale of indulgences), and the reform movement was summarily denounced by the church, the leaders of the Reformation were largely Roman Catholic believers who were now without a church since they had been excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church. Thus, was born the climate in which the elements of the Mass, the bread and the wine, could be examined in a scriptural light. So, instead of transubstantiation, a doctrine that must be taken on faith alone since no apparent change is present in the bread and wine, the doctrine of consubstantiation was formulated to explain what happened to the bread and wine and why there was no real physical change to these basic elements.

The change from *trans-* to *con-* is the key to seeing the bread and wine as the body and blood of Jesus. The prefix *trans-* means “change” and says that a change takes place; the bread actually becomes the body of Jesus, and the wine actually becomes the blood of Jesus. The prefix *con-* means “with” and says that the bread does not become the body of Jesus but co-exists with the body of Christ so that the bread is both a bread and the body of Jesus. The same thing is true of the wine. It does not become the blood of Jesus but co-exists with the blood of Jesus so that the wine is both wine and the blood of Jesus.

Consubstantiation is held by some Eastern Orthodox churches, and some other liturgical Christian denominations (Episcopal and Lutheran, as examples). Even among these groups, consubstantiation is not universally accepted.