

Current Opinion: February, 1922

WHAT CATHOLICS MEAN BY TRANSFORMATION OF BREAD

NO man of science will admit that the chemical properties of bread and wine are altered by the act of consecration, and no Roman Catholic who understands what is meant by transsubstantiation would maintain such an absurdity, so writes a chemist, Professor John Butler Burke, in the great Roman Catholic periodical, the *Dublin Review*. There is no transmutation of the chemical elements as such when at the sacrifice of the mass the bread and wine are transformed into the body and blood of Christ. Only the "substance," what in Greek is called the "noumenon" or in German the "thing-in-itself," the metaphysical essence underlying the phenomenon, is altered. No man of science and no Roman Catholic, unless he is blind, would doubt that the bread and wine retain the appearance and the material properties of bread and wine. If tested chemically they would be found to possess the chemical properties of bread and wine, and not those of flesh and blood. The percentage of carbon, oxygen, hydrogen and nitrogen in particular would be that of bread and wine. Starch is not converted into a nitrogenous proteid.

In this respect Huxley, who misunderstood the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist, entirely misconceived the distinction. The dematerialized substance is all that is changed. The appearance or matter remains the same, but the form or substance is altered. This distinction between material and spiritual facts is one that cannot be too strongly emphasized if men of science are expected to remain Roman Catholics. Some of the best scientists of the past, such as Copernicus, Descartes, Mendel, Pasteur, the three generations of Becquerels in the past and J. Becquerel and Branly of the present day, have openly professed the faith. The distinction, says Doctor Burke, cannot be too clearly made if we are to

avoid the entanglements of a truly irrelevant and perhaps irreverent nature with which unfortunately the history of science and of the church so manifestly teems.

Christ, then, is really and truly present in "substance," as distinct from "appearance," that is, from the physical and chemical properties of bread and wine. This distinction between "essence" and "accidents" is the basis of Roman Catholic philosophy:

"The Church deals with the spiritual, the immaterial, or perhaps dematerialized body; Science with the material phenomenon, its physical properties. Science with the world of experience or phenomena; Catholicism with the world beyond experience, or *noumena*, of which we know and can know nothing, except by revelation through the Church and its Founder.

"The miracles of Christianity, for instance, first and foremost the Incarnation, then the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection and the Ascension, and the Life Everlasting, to mention but the chief doctrines and miracles of the Christian faith, are entirely beyond the pale of the material world, and Science deals with the material. He who believes in any one of these might, with consistency, accept the whole, and he who refuses one should, with consistency, refuse the whole.

"If the scientific world to-day maintains that man was evolved from ancestors of the anthropoid apes—and the evidence for such is, as we say, admitted by the most competent judges to be overwhelming—and, accordingly, in the evolutionary series from reptiles, possibly from amphibia, and almost certainly from fishes, echinodermata, worms, back to the protista, to the most elementary forms of living matter, nay, back to the dust, to which he ultimately, as we know, in time returns, nay, even from the atoms and electrons, into which he ultimately becomes resolved—the cycle of his material history becomes complete, but it touches not, nor in the least affects, the dematerialized, spiritual essence of his being, of his beginning, any more than of his end as a human soul."