



# SERMONS ON the EUCHARIST

st. FRANCIS DE SALES

# SERMONS ON the eucharist

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# INTRODUCTION



his publication issues from the convergence of two events in the Fall of 2004: the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Francis de Sales' magisterial letter *On the Preacher and Preaching* (dated October 5, 1604) and the "Year of the Eucharist," which the Church celebrates from October 2004 to October 2005.

Born in the Savoy region (today's southeastern France and northern Italy), FRANCIS DE SALES (1567-1622) was educated at the universities of Paris and Padua. Ordained to the priesthood at age twenty-six, he volunteered for a "missionary" assignment to the region of the Chablais (Switzerland), which by that time had become thoroughly Calvinist, in religious belief and political orientation. The force of Protestant policy, which prohibited public interaction with the papist preacher, would prove to be no match for the rhetorical skills of this saint. Through dialogues with local leaders, including dinner-time discussions that almost converted Calvin's successor (Theodore de Beze), through public liturgical celebrations, and through an ingenious means of pamphleteering (for which he was later named Patron of the Press), Francis de Sales re-converted the entire region, reportedly 72,000 in all.

Central to the success of this ecumenical endeavor was not only his priestly passion, but also his oratorical abilities. Later deemed a "master of sacred eloquence," Francis considered preaching to be one of, if not *the*, principal duties of the clergy. In his letter to the new archbishop of Bourges, he defined preaching as "the publication and declaration of God's will, made to men by one lawfully commissioned to that task, to the end of instructing and moving them to serve his divine Majesty in this world so as to be saved in the next."<sup>1</sup> So successful was de Sales at this sacred work, in his day, that St. Vincent de Paul would say of him: "His words inspired me with such admiration that, upon considering them, it seemed to me that no one better than he represented the Son of God conversing among men."

In our day, the sermons of St. Francis de Sales are becoming more widely

known through recent translations.<sup>2</sup> Appropriately, we offer three newly translated sermons of his that speak in a particular way to the Church's celebration of a Year of the Eucharist.<sup>3</sup> For Francis de Sales, all the sacraments are "channels through which God comes down to us."<sup>4</sup> And the celebration of the Eucharist, as he describes it in his famous *Introduction to the Devout Life*, is "the sun of all spiritual exercises . . . center of the Christian religion, heart of devotion, and soul of piety, the ineffable mystery that comprises within itself the deepest depths of divine charity, the mystery in which God really gives himself and gloriously communicates his graces and favors to us."<sup>5</sup>

The variety of writings on the Eucharist that Francis de Sales has left us suggests that this sacrament held a special place in his thought and in his work. Among these many works are eleven sermons, in whole or in part, including the three "dogmatic sermons" on the Eucharist delivered in July of 1597.<sup>6</sup> We provide them here, for the first time in English translation, thanks to the diligent efforts of Fr. Sandy Pocetto, O.S.F.S., the Senior Salesian Scholar at DeSales University.

These sermons form a short series dating from July of 1597. According to the editors of the *Oeuvres*,<sup>7</sup> the dating of these texts is suggested by the allusion that Francis makes to a debate with a local minister about the virginity of Mary. This controversy was occasioned by Viret's publication of the *Simple consideration sur le Symble* (Simple Consideration of the Creed), which first appeared in 1597. Moreover, the three sermons being preached in the course of one week, one could suppose that the occasion was the octave of the Blessed Sacrament (June 5-12 that year). But Francis had been called back to Annecy (the residential see of the Catholic bishop of Geneva, in nearby France) on May 30, due to the serious illness of his bishop, and it is known that he stayed there the entire month of June. Most likely, then, he preached these sermons soon after his return to the Chablais, sometime in July.

The content of these sermons suggests the tenor of the ongoing debates. In these texts, the reader will discover the saint's homiletic defense of "the truth of the Eucharist." Both the explicit thought and the underlying tone of his words bespeak the controversies with the Reformers that typified Francis' missionary work in the Chablais region. In fact, the sermons do not necessarily "read" well; one can only surmise that the spoken version filled in much of what seems to be left out. And, no doubt, the preaching disclosed

a passion that could only be experienced fully in the actual delivery of these sermons. To focus on the words preached, we have retained the Scriptural references (as provided by the editors of the *Oeuvres*), but have decided to omit the numerous citations to Patristic works.

To facilitate our appreciation of the depth of these sermons, Fr. Jim Cryan, O.S.F.S., a Visiting Salesian Scholar at DeSales University, has penned a "mystagogical commentary." In it he offers the reader a window onto the catechetical method of St. Francis de Sales, and illumines for us the saint's persuasive method in preaching, as he guides the listener/reader to an understanding of the divine will.

The Salesian Center for Faith & Culture at DeSales University offers this small publication in tribute to our patron saint and as a way of marking the anniversary of his short treatise on preaching. We hope that in this "Year of the Eucharist" the teaching of this Doctor of the Church will lead others, once again, to a renewed appreciation of this Blessed Sacrament. To paraphrase what St. Francis de Sales wrote in his letter *On the Preacher and Preaching*, our hope is that, whether this book's audience be great or small, "provided that someone be edified, that is sufficient."

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*January 24, 2005*

*Feast of St. Francis de Sales*

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Francis de Sales, *On the Preaching and Preaching*, translated with an introduction and notes by John K. Ryan (New York: Regnery & Sons, 1963).

<sup>2</sup> A series on *The Sermons of St. Francis de Sales*, translated by the Nuns of the Visitation and edited by Fr. Lewis Fiorelli, O.S.F.S., has recently been published by Tan Books (Rockford, IL). The four volumes include sermons *On Prayer* (1985), *On Our*

*Lady* (1985), *For Lent given in 1622* (1987), and *For Advent and Christmas* (1987). In 2000 Peregrina Publishing (Toronto) brought forth the *Sermon Texts on Saint Joseph by Francis de Sales*, translated and edited, with an introductory essay and commentary, by Joseph F. Chorprenning, O.S.F.S. In addition to these translations, two studies on St. Francis de Sales include material from his sermons: Vincent Kerns, M.S.F.S., *Pulpit and Pew: A Study in Salesian Preaching* (Bangalore, India: SFS Publishing, 1976) and Dom B. Mackey, *St. Francis de Sales as Preacher: A Study*, translated by Thomas Dailey, O.S.F.S. (Bangalore, India: Indian Institute of Spirituality, n.d.).

<sup>3</sup> From the *Oeuvres de Saint François de Sales, Évêque et prince de Genève et Docteur de l'Église*, édition complète (Annecy: Monastère de la Visitation, 1894), tome 7, pages 320-347.

<sup>4</sup> *Oeuvres* 6:337.

<sup>5</sup> *Oeuvres* 3:100.

<sup>6</sup> A list of these works is given in William C. Marceau, *The Eucharist in Théodore de Bèze and St. Francis de Sales*, Toronto Studies in Theology, vol. 59 (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1993), 37-39. The list includes eleven sermons, three chapters in the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, three other short treatises, a personal note, and even a poem in honor of the Blessed Sacrament.

<sup>7</sup> *Oeuvres*, 7:320, note 1.

# DOGOMATIC SERMON ON THE HOLY EUCHARIST

(THE TRUTH OF THE EUCHARIST)

JULY 1597

*My flesh is true nourishment* (JOHN 6:56)



Truth is so beautiful and so excellent in itself that, once it is clearly and sincerely exposed to our understanding, it is impossible for us not to embrace it with love and extreme pleasure. The Aristotelians say that truth is the mind's object; the Platonists say it is the mind's food. All of them, along with our holy theologians, say that it is the perfection of the mind. "All the earth invokes and desires the truth; heaven blesses it. All things are shaken by its strength," says the wise Zerubbabel (see Haggai 2:6-7), who, because of this saying, was reputed as the wisest of all the Persians and Medianites. If this can be said for all kinds of truth, how much more, I ask you, my dear Brothers, can this be said of the truth which is the first and most excellent of all other truths, I mean, the Christian truth, in the light of which all other truths are hardly truths but mere frivolities. St. Augustine says, "This truth is more beautiful than that of the famous Helen," for whose beauty so many Greeks and Trojans died (*Epis.* xl, chap. iv)], since infinitely more honorable people and holy martyrs gave their lives for the beauty of Christian truth. It is more desirable *than gold or topaz* (Psalm 118:127), *sweeter than sugar and honey* (Psalm 18:11; 118:103); it *rejuvenates* the mind and *enlightens the eyes* (Psalm 18:9), as David sings.

It is for this reason that, desiring in the following sermons to demonstrate the truth of this most Holy Sacrament of the altar, I thought I could not better begin, my very dear brothers, than by making you see clearly and distinctly the authentic teaching of the Church, a teaching so clear and pleasing that your minds, at the first sight of this beauty, will receive it, I am sure, with an

unbelievable love and pleasure and will sufficiently recognize it by its own bearing and grace to be the daughter of God, *coming from his mouth* and conceived in the bosom of his infinite wisdom (see Sirach 24:5). At the same time, I will make you see, in comparison to it, the face of the falsehood opposed to her. I have no doubt that the incredible ugliness of the latter will make you admire and cherish all the more the beauty of the former. In short, this is what I plan to do in this first sermon: to set forth very clearly the truth and, in order to make it more apparent, juxtapose the lies that are opposed to it. Open your eyes, O Christians! See this beautiful truth desired more than any other in the Church, but so great and elevated that neither you nor I would be able to withstand its brilliance had He who revealed it not been so gracious to us. Let us then first implore his help through the intercession of His most holy Mother, whom we customarily greet, saying *Ave*.

A body cannot be eaten if it is not in some way present to the one who eats it, and it cannot be eaten unless the one who eats it is present to it. This truth is self-evident since eating is an application and union of the food to the one who eats it and becomes extremely intimate and conjoined to the one who eats it, to the extent that the food is changed into the one who eats it or the one who eats it is changed into the food he eats. Speaking in a general manner, I find that a body can be present to or applied or conjoined to another in only three ways: really and not spiritually, spiritually and not really, really and spiritually at the same time. The first way is real but crude, natural and carnal; the second is spiritual, metaphorical and not a real eating; the third is as real as the first, as spiritual as the second, and hence it is more admirable than the first or second way. With this precisely in mind, let us see which of the three ways is most suitable to the presence and the eating of the body of our Lord in the Most Holy Sacrament.

In the first place, I said that a body can be present to another and, consequently, can be eaten, really and not spiritually, but naturally and in an earthly fashion. This idea does not present any problem. For example, my body is present to this pulpit and your bodies to your seats. My brothers, this is reality, for it is the proper essence and substance of our bodies who are here, but in a fleshly manner. They have all of the natural qualities of our flesh -- weight, heaviness, mortality, opaqueness, and similar marks of our wretchedness and proper nature. This is the ordinary and natural way of the

presence of our bodies and of all the bodies in this world according to which they can also be eaten. It was thus with the body of Jezebel eaten by the dogs (4 Kings 9:35-37), for they ate it really and truly, and in the flesh also. They tore it apart since it was corruptible; they dragged it here and there since it had weight; they bit into it since it had thickness like that of a horse or a steer. This is the way the lions ate the people whom the king of Assyria had brought in to populate Samaria (4 Kings 18:25), and the children who insulted Elisha were eaten by bears (4 Kings 2:23,24). This is the way the cannibals of the Indies eat each other really and truly, and in a fleshly manner as if they were eating the flesh of sheep or calves. In the same manner, the two Samaritan women (4 Kings 6:26-29), forced by famine brought on by the siege, really and in a fleshly manner ate one of their children, tearing their flesh apart with their teeth and filling their stomach and their belly with the flesh. This should be sufficient to make the point. I think that you have understood me since I have been talking to you only about a kind of presence and of ordinary, natural eating of flesh.

Now, my Brothers, I have to tell you that the people of Capernaum, having heard that our Redeemer had so often inculcated and repeated in a sermon he gave them about the necessity of eating his *flesh* and drinking his *blood* and that his *flesh* was *true food* and *the bread* he would give was his *flesh for the life of the world* (John 6:52-56), they thought he wanted to give his flesh in the first manner, that is, really (for his words were so insistent that they could not doubt what they heard) but in a fleshly manner. They thought he wanted to give them dead meat, by bits and pieces, raw, dark, thick, corruptible, heavy, palpable, visible so that they would necessarily have to tear it apart and chew it like cannibals or savages eat each other as one eats mouton or sheep. Hence, being completely astonished at this promise, they said among themselves (v. 53): *How can he give us his flesh to eat?* And seeing that he persisted in asserting this promise and in the strongest terms, they said, *This saying is hard and who can accept it?* (vv. 54, 61).

They called his words *hard*, that is, harsh, severe, strange, repulsive because they understood that our Lord wanted to make them eat his flesh and drink his blood in a fleshly manner and in the natural and ordinary state of flesh and blood, so naturally this seemed to them to be very crude, barbaric and excessive. And whose hair would not stand on end with horror and one's flesh

crawl, if one had to eat a human body and drink the blood of a human being? This thought would appear all the more repulsive to our Lord's listeners since both he and they were of the Jewish nation and religion. Among the Jews, human flesh as food was so unthinkable that on even touching a dead body, one was socially unclean and contaminated. With regard to blood, it was so forbidden that it was not even permitted, according to the Law, to eat the blood of animals (Deuteronomy 12:23). Why should we be surprised, then, that these poor people, hearing that our Lord wanted to give his flesh and blood as *food* and *drink*, were so shocked, believing that he wanted to give it as dead meat and in its proper form and natural and fleshly condition? Certainly this was a very crude understanding which sprung from a great denseness.

The first Christians were accused of this same kind of gross and fleshly eating by the atheistic pagans. I ask you to note this, my dear brothers. The primitive Church, spread throughout the face of the earth, made such an open profession among its children of really eating the body of the Son of God and of drinking his blood that the words they used in stating this truth, on hearing them, the pagans and other enemies of the Savior used them as an occasion of calumniating the Christians and accusing them of cannibalism, that is, of eating their little children, of slitting their throats and tearing them apart with their teeth. They said that in their Sacrament and mystery the Christians feasted on human flesh the way Cyclops did. Tertullian states in his *Apology* (chap. 7), "They call us the worst kind of criminals of the sacrament of infanticide and of the meal that we make of them." In fact, Pliny the Second, in his letter to Trajan, cited by Tertullian, clearly shows that the Christians had been accused of this crime, for he exonerates them of it when it is given due consideration.

This calumny lasted until the time of Minutius Felix, repeating the words of a certain Cecilius, who still accused the Christians of it, an accusation so far from the truth but whose falsehood is in no way excusable in these ancient enemies of the Church. For our forefathers openly confessed that they ate the body of our Lord, and Sacred Scripture states it so clearly that the pagans, either hearing the Christians speak or seeing it in Sacred Scripture, could not be unaware that the Church held this belief. However, it was not in their power to attain to the knowledge of this real eating since it is only faith that

teaches it. Moreover, Christians kept so close and secretly to themselves in the celebration of this mystery that they did not even allow the catechumens to watch it. This is the reason why the pagans, on hearing about it said that the Christians ate the flesh of the Son of God and not knowing nor guessing that this was not in a fleshly fashion, they accused the Christians of the crime of cannibalism.

Now who can find excusable this accusation today, to revive this same calumny with an impudence that knows no bounds in order to discredit Catholics? "And who are these impudent people?" you will say to me. They are those who have been baptized, nourished and instructed by the Church of God, who have heard a thousand times and seen the celebration of the Holy Eucharist and hundreds of times perhaps participated in it. And after all of this, having been separated from the company of the faithful to create divisive sects, they continue to argue using this calumny as if they were totally ignorant of this belief. How many times do they object that, if we really eat the body of our Lord, then we have to tear it apart, chew it and gnaw on it. From there, they go to arguments that are so insolent and outlandish as to be beyond belief. Has their ever been in heresy a more arrogant effrontery than this?

In a word, all of this is nothing more than calumny, as you know very well, my dear Brothers. No, this was not what our Lord said or thought, that one eat his flesh in a crude, fleshly manner as one eats dead and perishable meat. The townsfolk of Capernaum, who understood it in this way, were poor people who never sufficiently considered the words of our Lord, which can never be taken to mean this. Listen to what our Lord says (in John 6). He says, *My flesh is true food* (v. 56), but *whoever eats my flesh has eternal life* (v. 55). Had he not said this, the interpretation of the people of Capernaum might have had some validity since he only spoke simply of flesh. But does he not sufficiently make known his meaning when he says in this same discourse: *I am the living bread that came down from heaven* (v. 51)? Do you not see that he is not speaking of dead meat but living food? Now it would not be living if it were torn apart and broken into pieces. *Whoever eats me*, he says, *will live out of love for me* (v. 58). He does not want to give his dead flesh nor give it alone, but gives himself completely. Now he would not be giving himself completely if he only gave his dead flesh.

But our Lord had rejected outright this crude and fleshly meaning by the words: *It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life* (v. 64). Holy words, divine words, words infinitely excellent and suitable for countering this awkward and crude understanding of the fleshly eating of our Lord's body, words from which our ancient Fathers in two attractive ways have wisely concluded. "How is it then," St. Chrysostom says, "that *the flesh is of no benefit* if he is talking about his own flesh? May it never occur, but he is speaking of people who understand him in a fleshly way." "In these expressions," says St. Cyprian, "*flesh and blood are of no benefit*; the fleshly meaning is not able to penetrate the meaning of such great profundity unless one has recourse to faith."<sup>1</sup>

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Concerning the double allusion made in the following sermon, one is obliged to conclude either that here it has not been written in its entirety or that a part of the manuscript has been lost.

## SECOND SERMON ON THE HOLY EUCHARIST

JULY 1597



On Sunday, I told you, my dear listeners, that all of the difficulties that our enemies have with the belief in the reality of the body and blood of our Lord in the Most Holy Sacrament can be reduced to two doubts which the Jews and his disciples had about our Lord Jesus when he taught the truth of this article of faith (in John, 6). The first (v. 53) was: *How can he give us his flesh to eat?* The other one (v. 61) was: *This saying is hard and who can accept it?* For all of the opposition brought against it boils down to these objections, namely, that either this Sacrament was never instituted or that it is unseemly, and all of the places that they search in Sacred Scripture only serve to confirm these two doubts. Now, I will begin by showing that God can do it as much by the common rule of his omnipotence as by the specific proofs touching on the multi-presence of the same body. Then I will begin to show you that the manner in which our Lord is present in this Sacrament is in no way either hard or ghastly, but very gentle and gracious.

Now in pursuing my line of thought, I will show: (1) that it is not impossible in this Holy Sacrament for a body to be in one place without occupying space and keeping this exterior dimension which we see to be natural to other bodies; (2) that transubstantiation is not impossible but genuine in this Sacrament; (3) all that I have said I will deduce from the adoration of this Holy Sacrament.

Oh Lord! I will praise with all my heart your omnipotence, providing you *open my lips to praise you* (Psalm 50:17). I will adore your majesty in the Holy Sacrament, providing you always keep your words in my heart. For your words will teach me that in this Sacrament you are God made Man, really and

truly, and that your presence is no more impossible for your will, although incomprehensible to our weak minds, than the rest of your admirable works. So that this prayer be acceptable to his divine Goodness, let us join it to the intercession of our Lady. *Ave.*

We remain convinced that a body can be in several places by the obedience it gives to the commandment of the omnipotent God, for whom nothing is impossible. Now I say that a body can be in a place without occupying space, without being seen, touched or perceived. Perhaps you need to understand, for the most part, the basis of this difficulty. Listen carefully, and I will explain myself more clearly.

When a thing is in a place, we are used to perceiving it as having two things, two traits, two characteristics. One is its presence, that the thing being in one place is present to it, and this quality is nothing more than being in a place in such a way that to be present in a place is nothing other than to be there; to be absent, is not to be there. The other quality that we perceive to be in the thing that is in a place is that it occupies space there; this is to say that it is there in such a fashion that the place where it is no other thing can be there with it. It so fills the space where it is that another thing is not able to be there.

These two conditions, in our clumsy way of thinking, seem to us to be so linked to each other than they can in no way be separated. We are well aware that when a thing is in a place, it occupies space and hence that another thing cannot occupy the same space. Nevertheless, this is not necessarily so. There is a big difference between being present and occupying space in such a fashion that there can be one without the other. I mean that a thing can be perfectly present in a place without occupying space. The more perfectly things are present in some place, the less they occupy space. Some examples will help you accept this.

God's majesty is so present everywhere that St. Paul says: *He is not far from anyone of us. For in him we live, move and have our being* (Acts 17: 27,28). This is what he told the Athenians about the *Unknown God* (v. 23). And as I told you recently of what David said: *If I climb to the heavens, you are there; if I descend to the netherworld, you are there* (Psalm 138:8). Although he is present to all things, it is in such a way that he does not occupy any place or

space. Likewise angels do not occupy any space in themselves so much so that entire legions of devils are found in one body (see Mark 5:9). Presence then can be without occupying space, as is ordinarily the case with spirits. But with corporal things, ordinarily the presence of a thing involves occupying space.

Now here is the obvious difficulty between us and our adversaries. For we say that presence is ordinarily separated from occupying space with spiritual things and also can occur with corporal things through the omnipotence of God. They deny this, and we will prove it. Our first proof is taken from what we said on Sunday. What we proved on Sunday can be proven by what we will now say since it is the nature of truths to be mutually supportive.

On Sunday we said and sufficiently demonstrated that a single body can be in two places. Now if two bodies can be in one place, then there is no more difficulty in saying that two bodies can be in only one place than there is in saying that two places can have the same body. *It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. On hearing this, the disciples were greatly astonished. Who then can be saved?* And looking at them, *Jesus said* to them, *With men this is impossible but with God all things are possible* (Matthew 19: 24-26). How can it be possible for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle unless it does not occupy any space? For such a large animal to be constricted to such a small space, is this not a good example for our discussion at hand? I know that there are those who have understood the word for camel to mean a string of hemp, which is called a cable. But all the Fathers understand it to mean this animal. Do you not see that Jesus says *this is impossible for men*, but that neither this nor other things are impossible *for God*? Now if it is not impossible to put such a large body into so small a place, why will it be impossible to put a human glorified body in the host and in the smallest part of it?

Our Lord, on the day of his Resurrection (John 20:19-26), appeared in the midst of his apostles with the *doors being locked*, and *when there in the midst of them he said to them: 'Peace be to you!* Oecolampade says that he entered by the windows or that he destroyed the doors and immediately restored them. Calvin [says] that he opened and closed again, or that he annihilated the doors and all at once recreated them. Peter Martyr says that he entered by some opening or made the doors transparent or that they gave way to him. I protest, my dear Brothers, that these glosses and interpretations

are not in the Scriptures. Oh my God, how the human mind hates and deeply hates what does not exonerate it. Consider how the disciples are astonished at this sudden appearance, and seeing *the doors firmly locked, they think they see a ghost* (Luke 24:36,37). Like our adversaries, who when they are told that our Lord does not occupy space, they think that this is not his body. No, no! This is his body. It is not a spiritual appearance; it is his real body, but spiritualized.

If our forefathers had thought that these evasive interpretations were solidly based, they could have been used against the Marcionites, who objected to the passage of St. John's gospel to prove that the body of our Lord was a phantom, as St. Cyril attests in this regard. However, no attacks ever made them back down from their position. They wanted to maintain the unadorned and simple meaning of Scripture.

Oh my God! Oh my Savior! Oh my Master! Permit me to speak about the first entrance that you made in this world at which time not you but the angels on your behalf, seeing you among men as a little infant, poor, naked and crying, sang: *Glory to God in the Highest and peace on earth to men of good will* (Luke 2:14). In coming to earth, Lord, how did you appear in the midst of men? No doubt you entered through the virginal and *tightly closed door* (Ezekiel 44:2) of our Lady, for she was a Virgin during birth and afterward. There was never any corruption neither in her very holy soul nor in her body. Now, my Brothers, our Lord with his true body came out of the womb of his Mother without the breaking or rupturing of her virginity. Did this not have to occur, then, without occupying space and with his passing through this virginal body? God forbid that I should repeat what our adversaries reply in this matter. It would be irreverent. At whatever cost, they wish that what they say once be true. They prefer to wound the virginity of the Mother of God than admit their fault. Certainly, Jovinian was considered a heretic, among other things, because he said that our Lady had lost her virginity in giving birth to her Son. Isaiah, in chapter 7, states and protests that the Mother of God would be a virgin, not only in conceiving, but also in giving birth. "Behold a Virgin shall conceive and give birth" (7:14). In our Creed, we say, "He was born of the Virgin Mary."

Now did our Lord not come out of the sealed tomb? Certainly: "The angel removed the stone after our Lord had risen" (Matthew 28:2; Mark

16:4). Then he must have gone out through the stone without occupying any space.

Would you like me, Sirs, to utilize the testimony of St. Augustine in book 22, chapter 8 of his *City of God*? He says there that Petronia had a ring from a certain Jew, which had a stone for healing a certain illness she had. The ring was firmly attached and tied to her girdle. She went to the tomb of St. Stephen. So that the healing would not be attributed to the Jew, immediately the ring fell at the feet of this woman without breaking and without the knot being untied or cut. In this way, says St. Augustine, must one believe that our Lord came out of the virginal womb without any rupture. You see then how a body can be in a place without occupying space.

Our enemies do not know what to say. They see our reasons solidly based on Scripture which they search to find anything that might serve to refute them, and we see that there are none there. They fell back on philosophy and desired to show that this Eucharistic presence is impossible. If I had wanted to bring in the arguments that Peter Martyr and Calvin make, I would have never done so, although it would be very easy for me to answer them with philosophical arguments in the manner of the Scholastics, but I do not want to make use of philosophy when I have the word of God supporting me. Our Lord sufficiently answers all of these arguments when he says, *With men this is impossible; with God all things are possible* (Matthew 19:26). Do you not understand? So we should not stop believing because of that.

But since you want to abandon Scripture for philosophy, I beg you, tell me how can you see, for it is either through emitting or receiving. If it is the first, how can your eye contain so many things since it is so small? How can it have so many rays that are necessary to cover an entire mountain which it sees all of a sudden? The most unraveled string in the world, in such a large space, would make a large ball. If it is the second, how can your eye, which is so small, receive a representation of such large and diverse objects? Let them tell me how the corporal light penetrates in this way in an instant the sky, the air and water, even though it does not have substance if it is something corporeal.

Here, my Brothers, is the truth of the matter. Our Lord is in the Eucharist without occupying space. He is in it with the parts well apportioned together,

but without any apportionment of space because the parts do not occupy any. You will say to me: “How can it be that he is invisible and not palpable there?” That is easy. When they wanted to throw our Lord off *the top of the mountain*, he passed *through their midst* without being seen or perceived (Luke 4:29,30). When, after the Resurrection, he left his disciples in Emmaus, *he disappeared* before them, and they no longer saw him, even though they previously saw him and *their eyes were open* (Luke 24:31).

There is, then, no more difficulty with all of those aspects. A body can be in two places as is evident from the story of the conversion of St. Paul (Acts 9:3-7; 22:6-9). A body can be in one place without occupying space, as is evident by the entrance of our Lord with *the doors locked* and by his birth. A body can be in one place without being seen or without knowing that it is there, as is evident from the examples that I have just given.

But there still remains one difficulty; for our adversaries, not willing to cede the *how* of it (see John 6:42,53), ask: “How can it be that bread becomes the flesh of our Lord?” This can occur by a complete change of one substance into another substance, which is appropriately called transubstantiation. Those who follow the position of Luther to fight against the Church are of the opinion that in this Sacrament there is no change in the bread, but the bread remains. Nevertheless, they believe that it is the true body of our Lord that is in it. Those who follow Calvin deny any change in the bread and also the reality of the body. Now the Church, believing the reality, says the body of our Lord is really present without the substance of bread, which has been changed into flesh, etc. Peter Martyr, in his book against Gardinerus, strongly and firmly argues against this transubstantiation as something impossible.

But I do not see why he considers this to be impossible, for was not the substance of water *changed into wine* at the marriage feast of Cana in Galilee (John 2:9), and *the wife of Lot into a pillar of salt* (Genesis 19:26)? Even the devil himself admits that transubstantiation is possible: *If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread* (Matthew 4:3). But what difficulty is there when David says God *turned rock into pools of water and stone into flowing springs* (Psalm 111:8) and in Exodus (7:10,11), is not the rod of Aaron *turned into a snake*? For Scripture says that what the others *did* was accomplished *by sorcery*, but what Aaron did was genuine. Did our Lord not make everything out of nothing (Genesis 1)? Did he not change our

corruption into a beautiful body in the Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:42-44)? Did he not change dust into flesh (Genesis 3:19,23)? Now there is no doubt that transubstantiation is possible.

Our Lord *took bread and said, This is my body* (Matthew 26:26). So it is no longer bread if it is the body of our Lord. For if what he took in his blessed hands was not changed, then we do not have to say that it is another thing than what it was before. Before it was bread, now it is body. So it was changed from bread to body. We must not say that his body is there and so is the bread. One who would sell a sack filled half with wheat and half with oats and say buy this for it is wheat would certainly deceive people and would be considered to have lied. Likewise, whoever would say that a barrel full of water and oil is oil would be considered a liar. So must we not say that, our Lord saying *This is my body*, the bread is still there. When he says, *This is my body*, he clearly shows that the bread was changed.

Secondly, our Lord says: *The bread I shall give you, is my flesh for the life of the world* (John 6:52). If what he says is not due to a change in the substance, it would have been false, for if bread remains bread it cannot be flesh. We must, then, understand it to be bread changed as he describes it: *I am the living bread which comes down from heaven* (v. 51).

But, Sirs, would you prefer in this Sacrament that one nourish his belly as well as his spirit at the same time. No, that would not be fitting. I am well aware that there is a problem here, but otherwise there would still be more. With regard to Scripture, everything that we know is opposed to it. First of all, the word transubstantiation does not appear in Scripture. I would respond that neither do the words “Trinity”, *homousios* nor *Theotokos*. It is sufficient that the idea be in Scripture even though the word itself is not there.

Secondly, they say that this sacrament is called bread. My response is not because it is bread but because it has the appearance of bread, or because it was confected of bread, or because it has the effects and properties of bread, or because, in keeping with the custom of the Hebrews, all kinds of food were called bread (as we see with the manna that was called *bread* [Exodus 16:15,32], of which Our Lord did not say: *My flesh is true bread*, but *it is true food* [John 5:56], which is the same as when he says *I am the living bread* [John 6:51]). Scripture customarily calls things by the name of things of which they

are made, which can easily be seen in Exodus 7:12 where Aaron's rod being changed into a snake was still called a *rod*. In Genesis 3:19, when man is made and drawn from dust, he is still referred to as *dust*.

Thirdly, they say that this term of transubstantiation is new, but they are seriously mistaken. For truly it has been in the Church all the time. It would be easy to gather together what the Ancients say about it. Let us listen to some of them. Saint Cyprian, who lived more than 1300 hundred years ago, in a sermon *On the Lord's Supper*: "This bread which the Lord presented to the disciples has been changed not in appearance but in substance by the all powerful Word, which became flesh." Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, in Catechesis 4: "He once changed water into wine, and he would not deserve to be believed when he changed wine into blood!" Saint Gregory of Nyssa in his *Great Catechism* (chap. 37): "We must reasonably believe that the bread sanctified by the word of God has been changed into the body of the Word." Saint Augustine, cited by Bede in chapter 10 of the First Epistle to the Corinthians: "Not every kind of bread becomes the body of Christ but only that which has received the blessing of Christ." Finally, five hundred years ago in a General Council presided over by Pope Nicholas II, who was from a noble Savoyard family,<sup>1</sup> Berengarius was forced to abjure this error. Do we want to abandon all of antiquity so well founded on Scripture in order to avoid a little difficulty and gratify the conclusions of our own understanding? Let us conclude then that after the consecration, the true body of our Lord is present, and there is no other substance whatsoever present. He is present, I say, really and truly.

There follows from this the third proposition which I have advanced, namely, that this Sacrament, in as much as it contains our Lord, is worthy of adoration and that we must adore him. For truly, since it is Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ is God, who will not adore him, I beg you, as well there as in heaven, since it is written *I will worship the Lord God and only him will I serve* (Matthew 4:10). For our Lord wants to be adored wherever he is. Thus he was adored on the cross by the thief (Luke 23:42), walking in Jerusalem among the people who cried out, *Hosanna* (Matthew 21:9)" and in the crib by the three kings (Matthew 2:11). He is hidden in the Eucharist, but that does not prevent him from being adored, for thus the kings adored him, hidden and wrapped in swaddling clothes.

Having just proven that our Lord is really present in the flesh in the

Sacrament, and that we must adore him there, the one can not exist without the other, either that he not be adored if he is not there, or if he is there without being adored by the Church, which is jealous in giving to its Spouse all honor. Please look at how fitting this all is, since this adoration was foreseen by David, who in Psalm 21:30 is greatly consoled over it and sings: *All the rich of the earth have eaten and adored*. The rich of the *earth have eaten*, says Saint Augustine, the body of their Lord in his humility. It is true they were not like the poor sufficiently filled to the point of imitation, but nevertheless *they adored*. Arnobius,<sup>2</sup> Basil, Théodore. This is the way that Saint Augustine explains the passage of Ps. 98:5: "Adore the footstool for his feet since he is holy." But what does St. Paul say in 1 Corinthians, 11:29: "Whoever eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks judgment on himself for not recognizing the body of the Lord."

We have to make the appropriate distinction and revere the body of the Lord, so that this will not appear to be something new, but that the adoration of the Eucharist has always been known to exist in the Church and consequently that it was always firmly believed that in it is the true body of our Lord. Listen to some testimonies from several great Fathers.

Let me first cite Saint Chrysostom who lived more than 1200 years ago and was praised for his excellence as a preacher and called the "Golden Tongue Orator." In his homily (no. 61) *To the People of Antioch*, he says, "Consider, I ask you, what a royal table is. The angels serve there; the King himself is present and you participate in a lackadaisical fashion. Adore and participate in this banquet. When you see the veil lifted, think about heaven which is opening above your head and about angels that are coming down from there." Likewise in Book 6 of his work *On the Priesthood*, he tells of an old man who had a vision, which he calls "admirable, in which at Mass he saw all of a sudden a troupe of resplendent angels surrounding the altar and bowed down like soldiers before their king." Note this comparison, note the word altar. Then he tells of another who had learned through a vision that those who devoutly receive this Sacrament at the end of their life will have angels around their body who will accompany them to heaven. It is a beautiful thing to see what he says in homilies 3 and 4 *Against Anomaeos*.

Saint Ambrose in his *Preparatory Prayer*, invokes this Holy Sacrament and calls it "holy, living, pure, beautiful and very sweet bread," and asks God

for the grace to be able to go to his Kingdom.

Saint Gregory Nazianzen, in his *Prayer in Praise of His Sister Gorgonie*, tells how his sister, when she was gravely ill, came before the altar and prostrated herself and prayed to the One who is adored in this Sacrament, invoking him under all names and reminding him of all his works. Listen to what she did: “Placing her head against the altar, with tears and supplications, she protested that she would not leave until her health was restored.” And so she was healed.

Going back even father, Origen, in homily 5 *On Diverse Matters*, says that in this Sacrament we receive as in our own house the body of our Lord. “Say then,” he says, *Lord I am not worthy*, etc.

Cyprian, in his sermon *On Those Who Have Renounced the Faith*, says “A certain woman who tried to open with unworthy hands the container in which she had placed the holy body of the Lord, was repulsed by a flame that shot out of it.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Gérard or Gérold de Chevron, born in the environs of Chambéry, was first the Bishop of Florence, then Pope under the name of Nicholas II (1058-1061). It was a half-century later that the lords of Chevron added Villette to their name. (See the article on “Chevron” by Grillet in the *Dictionnaire historique de Savoie*.) The maternal grandmother of St. Francis de Sales belonged to this family.

<sup>2</sup> *Commentary on the Psalms of David*, on Psalm 21:30. St. Francis de Sales, as seen in his *Defense of the Standard of the Cross* (OEA II), book 2, chapter 12, follows the opinion of those who attribute this work to the Arnobius the grand. Today, it is recognized that Arnobius the younger is its author.

# THIRD SERMON ON THE HOLY EUCHARIST

JULY 1597

*The bread we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ*  
(1 CORINTHIANS 10:16)



he enemies of the Catholic Church respond in the negative to this examination because Jesus Christ said to them, *The flesh is of no avail* (John 6:64). Catholics respond in the affirmative because, they say, we have learned from the Lord that the *Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and after he had given thanks, broke it and said: ‘Take and eat this is my body’* (1 Corinthians 11:23,24). It is to this article of faith, listeners, that I want you to be attentive, more than ever, so as to understand our reasons, begging you to leave all emotion aside in order to judge well in such an important matter. I am certain, after considering it in a mature fashion, you will judge in favor of the Catholics, since their reasons will win out in firmness, holiness, solidity and goodness over those of the enemies.

I pray, if I have ever prayed humbly and affectionately, that He who gave *ready speech to infants* (Psalm 8:3; Wisdom 10) may deign by his goodness to give me the *understanding* to be able *to study your law well* (Psalm 118:125) and *to keep it with all my heart* (Psalm 118:34). As for you, my dear listeners, may he incline your hearts *in testimony* of his word (Psalm 118:36), for in this difficulty I see the enemies who lie in wait for me with a whole host of human doubts and questions. *Sinners lie in wait to destroy me* (Psalm 118:95), but the understanding of your commandments delivers me. As one wants to pull me by way of figures of speech, another by ubiquity, and another by effects, grant, Lord, that I have as my guide only your word and that it be a beacon in this navigation: *May your word be a lamp unto my feet and light unto my path* (Psalm 118:105). For this purpose, let us invoke the help of the Holy Spirit, saying “*Ave*.”

For fear that through prejudice or a false presupposition your understanding not be affected by some ill feeling against us, dear listeners, and while one would delude you in believing that the disagreement between us and our adversaries consists in nothing more than the fact they only want to believe in what is in the Scriptures and that we wish to base our teaching on something other than Scripture, I beg you to believe that in this specific disagreement (as in any other as well) we do not want to yield to them in the respect that we have sworn to Sacred Scripture, but on the contrary we solemnly declare that we only want to untangle this disagreement with the pure and express word of God. I beg you to disabuse yourself of this accusation and to believe that Scripture has always been in our hands and that only the Church has kept this rich treasure and that our adversaries only have it from us. We do not want anything here but Scripture.

We are then already in agreement on this point, namely, that this disagreement can only be settled by Scripture. But our dispute and controversy hinge on the interpretation of Scripture, for we bring forth good and beautiful passages, and they present those which they think are such. Everything is from Scripture. Then what is the problem? They want to interpret our passages and theirs against us, while we, being on the defensive, without interpreting ours, for they are clear, only want to reject their interpretations so that they do not offend us. Let us, I beg you, get to the heart of the matter and you will clearly see the truth of what I am saying.

When Berengarius appeared, the Church maintained that the body and blood of our Lord was really, truly and substantially in the Holy Sacrament of Eucharist. Since then, it has maintained this truth peacefully up until the time of John Hus and Wycliff. Then came Oecolampadius, Carolostade, Zwingli and Calvin, who said that it was mistaken and spoke without any foundation. But, on the contrary, here are the Church's responses.

In the first place, the sixth chapter of Saint John, about which I have already spoken. Secondly, the Church presents the words of institution in Matthew 26:26, Mark 14:22, Luke 22:19, and 1 Corinthians 11:24. These places in which our Lord speaks of the food that he gave while eating the Last Supper relate that he said it was his body, in words so clearly expressed that they can not be more so. From these words, then, we draw this clear conclusion: God spoke them; God cannot lie, then he is present in the

Eucharist. The enemy answers that God did not say that; we show his own words. The enemy says that we should not understand them the way we do; we disagree. There is our disagreement. Who understands Scripture better? If I can clearly show that our position is well founded, it follows that the position of our adversaries is all the less so and that they have joined battle with the possessor of good faith.

## THE REASONS OF CATHOLICS

The first reason. Here our Lord institutes a sacrament. Now, the sacraments must be instituted in clear words. The minor [premise] is proven by reason because recourse to the sacraments should be easy and available to all. So everyone has to understand what it is. See Matthew 26:19 and in John 3:3-5 how our Lord makes known his intention when instituting Baptism.

Second reason. It is the testimony of Matthew 26:28 (*This is the blood of the new testament*) and Luke 22:20 (*This cup is the new testament of my blood which will be shed for you*). Now these testaments have to be in clear terms. Hebrew 9:19-20: *When every commandment had been declared by Moses to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, together with water and crimson wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, this is 'the blood of the testament which God enjoined upon you.'* In Galatians 3:15-16: *In human terms I say that no one can annul or amend even a human testament once ratified. Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his descendant (Genesis 22:18). It does not say, 'And to his descendants.'* Why do you, Sirs, want to attach your interpretations to the testament of our Lord? If Saint Paul makes a distinction between the singular and plural, wishing to rigorously adhere to the appropriateness of the words, why would we want to take the license to ignore the appropriate words of the Son of God in this his testament?

Moreover, the intention of our Lord in this Holy Supper, on making his testament, was to leave a pledge to his Spouse of the love which he had for her, a love so great that he was willing to die for her. Would you have it, dear listeners, that a piece of bread, so small a legacy, be the pledge of such a great love? No, it was himself in another form, impassible, that he gave as an appropriate and incontestable testimony of the excess of his love. Besides, our

Lord had only his body and blood, for the *Son of Man had nowhere to lay his head* (Matthew 8:20; Luke 10:58). In making his testament and leaving his legacy to his friends, he could only leave his body and blood. Finally, does it appear seemly to you that a piece of bread be a gift worthy of such a Lord, and do you want us to always be servants (Galatians 4:1-7) having as inheritance only a representation like mosaics?

Third reason. It is law and dogma, but laws must never be expressed in an obscure manner, as Saint Augustine says in book 2, chapters 6 and 9 of his *Christian Doctrine*: “Nothing is to be spoken or written in an obscure fashion with regard to faith and morals, which is not explained very clearly elsewhere.”

Fourth reason. There is no other indication of a symbol as in other places where he speaks figuratively.

Fifth reason. All the writers agree.

Sixth reason. All the ancient interpreters agree.

Seventh reason. We are never to abandon the literal meaning; otherwise everything would be open to arbitrary interpretations.

These are the general reasons by which it is evident that we are on solid ground by interpreting them in their express and formal sense, not figuratively or metaphorically.

Now we are going to demonstrate it in a little more detail against the arguments of our adversaries.

The first interpretation of André Carlostade: *This*, that is, “here” and says that the Heavenly Father revealed this to him. In view of this, Luther wrote a book entitled *Against Heavenly Prophets*. I saw a Bible printed in French since I have been in this region where it has: *My body is here*. But the Greek repudiates quite obviously everything in it and its meaning. For what reason? *Eat, for my body is here*.

Another interpretation is that of Zwingli who claims that in a vision of I do not know who, white or black, says that the verb *is* means *signifies*. Oecolampade says, “*Corpus*” (body), that is, a sign of the body. Calvin is of the same opinion except that he adds the apprehension by faith. But Luther,

to show that he is as clever as the rest in mocking the sacraments, in his book *Quod verba Domini firmiter stent* (That the Words of the Lord Remain Unshakeable), says, “*Meum*” (my) because all things belong to me.”

It is evident that in the institution of this great mystery consisting of four words, there are none that have been attacked with such great audacity and sacrilege by the arrogant enemies of the faith, too attached to their own meaning and reasoning.

# FRANCIS DE SALES, MYSTAGOGUE

A COMMENTARY ON THE DOGMATIC SERMONS  
ON THE EUCHARIST (JULY, 1597)

ystagogy is how we lead those who have been baptized to experience the sacred. It is not primarily about doctrine (*fides quae*), and certainly not about the punctilious observation of sacred rubrics. It has to do with experiencing grace (*fides qua*) and the community's role in this.

Catholicism's most sacred experience is the Eucharist: the power of death, no matter how identified in human existence, lost its power over us in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and that death, freely accepted on our behalf at the Last Supper, pervades every aspect of our life. Christ is the food that gives life; He is the priest sacrificed for our redemption. The Sacrificed One remains with us as the Gift who unites us with the gracious Mystery who is God, the love that heals and absolves, empowers us to virtue, enables us to live in the expectation of glory, distinguishes us from the children of darkness, gives us reason to live in thanksgiving, and unites us to one another. Christ gave the Church his real body and blood in ritual form so that all who partake of the one bread would be joined to Him in a more profound incorporation which unites us more deeply into the unity of his body the Church.

Can we find a mystagogic value in the dogmatic sermons of 1597 that will speak to us today, in this Year of the Eucharist?

Francis de Sales' sermons on the Real Presence have little to do with philosophy or philology. His reference to transubstantiation is a pastoral exposition of Sacred Scripture, not an excursion into metaphysics.<sup>1</sup> And his reference to the hermeneutical debacle that bitterly splintered the Protestant Confessions of Marburg, Geneva, Zurich and Augsburg moves benignly and

swiftly to a Catholic confession he calls "most suave and gracious."<sup>2</sup>

For Francis, the central question of theology is not philosophy, but God and God's love. The doctrine of the Real Presence, as any doctrinal articulation, is not confined to a single datum, but must be found within the context of a global understanding of the common faith of the people as expressed in the creeds and protected by the Church in its articulation. That global understanding is what Francis called *the analogy of faith*. In early spring, 1597, he demonstrated the analogy in a tract that related the articles of the apostolic creed to the doctrine of the Eucharist:

When I see, O my Savior, that your Father so loved the world that he gave you as Pastor and Healer, how marvelous is it that the Son, equal in goodness, has given himself as food and medicine!...

How he has loved you, O my soul. He could have saved you with one drop of his blood. And yet he has offered his whole body to pain and suffering, even unto a bitter death to give you life. Such are loving mothers, not content with giving life to their children from their own sustenance, they also nourish them on it.<sup>3</sup>

While Francis de Sales has a real concern for what we believe (*fides quae*), he was as much concerned about how we are enabled to believe (*fides qua*). Like Justin Martyr, the apologist he much admired, the faith of the past could only be preserved in its purity by someone who accepts responsibility for the future, not by creating new doctrines, but by delving more deeply into the articulation in light of current situations. Like Augustine who wrote *The City of God* while Rome and western civilization tumbled down about his ears, Francis de Sales witnessed the collapse of feudal loyalties and the birth of nationhood, the demise of seigneuries and the rise of democracies, the end of Christendom and the emergence of pluralism. It must have been confusing and painful. Francis de Sales kept his feet planted in this world, but like Augustine his vision was always on another kingdom. That vision must be kept in mind when we read his sermons.

The readers of these sermons may be disappointed that their heavily cognitive content seems polemical and devoid of the warmth one expects from Francis de Sales' other sermons, as in this reference to the Eucharist in a Lenten sermon (1618):

To what extent did the greatness of God lower itself for each one of us, and to what extent does He wish to exalt us? To unite us so perfectly with Himself as to make us one with Him. Our Lord did this to teach us that we are all loved with the same love by which He embraces us all in this Most Holy Sacrament, so He wishes us all to love one another with that same love, a love which tends towards union, but a union greater and more perfect than can be conceived. We are all nourished with the same bread, this heavenly Bread, the divine Eucharist. The eating of it, called Communion, represents to us the common union that we ought to have together; without this union we would not be worthy of bearing the name of "children of God," since we would not be obedient to Him.<sup>4</sup>

The 1597 sermons are erudite and clearly directed to a specific audience who had some acquaintance with the *Meditation* mentioned above and who were aware of Minister Viret's public polemic against it.

Who heard the sermons? A handful of Catholics, for the most part, who wanted the restoration of Catholic cult and were certain to carry the message forward. Some Calvinists also attended, but they stood outside. Geneva's Venerable Company of Pastors had forbidden them to enter a Catholic church, so the curious and the intimidated stationed themselves at the windows, along with an adversarial contingent who reported events to the Venerable Company.

The sermons follow the argument Francis made in the two letters he sent to Viret a month earlier in response to the minister's attack on the *Meditation*.<sup>5</sup> They are sermons of a man who knew his select audience well, and that in itself is worthy of our attention. On closer reading, however, one can find a mystagogic value in these sermons if they are read as a gloss on what the community of the Church in the Chablais was experiencing, much as a marginal gloss of a manuscript brings to light what is initially an oral and experiential transmission committed to writing.

## THE SERMONS AS TEXTUAL GLOSS ON UNITY IN DIVERSITY

In many ways, Francis de Sales stood in the twilight of the late middle ages and retained many sensibilities of that culture. His exegesis follows that of the

schoolmen, who found meaning occurring on many levels simultaneously: literal, figurative, tropological and anagogic. If the schoolmen of the high middle ages make it difficult for us to distinguish their exegesis from systematic doctrinal teaching, it is because they were at home with "unity in diversity," unity in multi-layered realities. For the schoolmen, the literal text, like the world of physical phenomena, was a window that opened onto other realities.

Images swiftly pile upon one another in such a world. Like drama, manuscript illumination, architecture and iconography, sermons of this time play on ambiguities and ironies that bind life together in a continuous and always complicated dialogue. Ryan Streber notes that such dialogue among images is expressively articulated in ways that are almost completely foreign to us.<sup>6</sup> If we read Francis de Sales' "proofs" for the Real Presence as if we were reading a Cartesian theorem, we miss the point. The meshwork of the layered images provides a complexity that approximates post-modern thought.

"The world is charged with the grandeur of God," Hopkins famously wrote. The physical world for Francis de Sales contained within it deeper realities that could shine through physical realities. The juxtaposition of these realities was perfectly logical for the late medieval mind; they belonged together.

Such anachronisms and flagrant parataxis are not a result of medieval naïveté, but a balance of a dissonant, but constructive, double vision. The value of this kind of double structure is that it resists comfortable synthesis and resonates with the memory, symbolic content, and spiritual import that lie just beneath and behind the material images. The point is to affirm the sacredness within the secular.

The sermons of Francis de Sales abound with such double vision. The Virgin Mary in his delightful, almost playful, *Annunciation* and *Visitation* sermons is a young, devout Savoyard. She goes *in haste* to Elizabeth because young girls should not saunter on city streets. She does not greet Zachary because virgins cannot be too careful around old men. It is charming!

The layering of scriptural image upon scriptural image in his dogmatic sermons is serious, but it functions in the same way. He creates multi-tiered layers of images that *point* to mystery; that is, they *articulate* that we are in the

presence of the mysterious, the wonderful and the awesome, just as *an article of faith* indicates that we are in the presence of what is substantive. In neither have we encompassed it.

Like the *Sic et Non* of Abelard, the *Sententia* of Peter Lombard, and the *Quaestiones* of Aquinas, the sermons of Francis de Sales were launching pads of exploration, uniting the listener with Francis in what he heard, experienced or remembered. But it was also what the listener had heard, experienced and remembered, and Francis appeals to this. This partly accounts for his appeal to patristic authors. Francis put the Calvinist audience in touch with the memories of their ancestors. *Sola scriptura* had not yet hardened into text alone.

In addition, physical phenomena opened to deeper truths yet were real in themselves. The written letter also was real, yet contained all meaning, even mystical, within itself, just as the physical nature of Christ was real while the divine nature of Christ concealed within it was real as well.<sup>7</sup> The mystagogue's role was to bring light to bear on material, physical, literal and diurnal realities for enlightenment. Or, better phrased in the salient expression Francis uses here, the mystagogue lets the light shine *through* these realities "as a ray of light penetrates glass" (*penetre comme un rayon faict au verre*). This locates him in the oral and communitarian tradition of the schoolmen, and distinguishes him from the emerging typographic and individualistic culture embraced by the reformers.

## THE AESTHETICS OF LIGHT

In an early sermon on transubstantiation (October, 1594), Francis distinguished the corporal presence of Christ in the Eucharist from carnal presence.<sup>8</sup> In the sermons of July 1597, he explains that the presence of Christ is real but does not occupy space, as we naturally understand it. He gives many scriptural examples of this. However, among those examples, he includes a theologoumenon, *virginitas in partu*, and his defense of this occupies the major portion of his first letter to Viret (May-June, 1597).<sup>9</sup>

A theologoumenon is not a binding article of faith, but something akin to a theological opinion. Still, there are opinions and then there are opinions. Not all are of equal weight. A theologoumenon is more like a truth in search

of a definition. It makes use of available systems of thought and representation to help the understanding approach comprehension. Some theologoumena have waited well over fifteen hundred years to sift out apocrypha, exegetical distortion, outright error and the historical accretions of pious imagination before arriving at a definitive articulation that has the status of binding dogma. The Immaculate Conception, for instance, is one such example. It began as a feast of the Conception of St. Anna, was celebrated as miraculous, included apocryphal testimony (the protoevangelicum of James) and did not achieve definitive status (i.e., reaching the point where it cannot be revised without serious error) until 1854.

When Francis appealed to *virginitas in partu* to explicate the non-spatial presence of Christ's real body in the Eucharist, he accepted it in a literal sense and defended it with Isaiah's prophecy. Viret had not questioned the dogma *natus ex virgine*, but Francis does not distinguish the dogma from the subsequent theologoumenon in his sermon. In his letter to Viret, Francis says, "without such integrity we do not have the perfection of virginity."<sup>10</sup> In 1960 the Holy Office banned all discussion of this theologoumenon because it devolves into matters that are offensive to many.

In his sermon, however, Francis omits the explication of the theologoumenon that he had used in the *Meditation*, that *virginitas in partu* is analogous with sunlight's passing through glass:

And since your body did not already occupied a place at the going out from the virginal womb of your Mother (otherwise it would have breached her virginity), **but penetrates as a ray through glass**, why would one find unbelievable that it no more occupies it in this admirable Sacrament?<sup>11</sup>

Viret had not objected to Francis' use of John 20:19, Matthew 28:2 and Mark 16:4 in reference to the physical qualities of Our Lord's glorified body, but he strongly objected to Francis' literal handling of the theologoumenon. Francis spends the better part of his letter to Viret defending it.

Francis did not deny that the glorified body of Jesus has a distinct modality from the terrestrial body, but he held that the divine nature of the historical Jesus endowed Him with supernatural qualities by miraculous investment different from, but not contradictory to, human nature. That

was the argument he used in his first letter to Viret. Jesus was hungry in the desert and that was natural, but that Jesus survived without food was supernatural. That he walked our roads was natural, but that he walked on water was supernatural.

His sermon argues that the real body of Christ does not necessarily occupy space in the Eucharist any more than it did in his birth. Francis does not strain the argument in the sermon further by layering on the “light through glass” explication, yet it is clear that in his mind that the dogma, the theologoumenon and the explication work in tandem.

It is beyond the scope of this commentary to describe how a theologoumenon might move to a defined article of faith. One of the criteria, however, is that it enjoys at least the implicit consent of the Fathers. When Francis preached on the Assumption (a strong theologoumenon at the time, but not defined until 1950), he appealed to the tradition of the Eastern Fathers and ignored the opinion of Aquinas. But when arguing with Viret, he ignored the Eastern tradition, which holds that in giving birth, the Blessed Mother was exempt from the all consequences of original sin, namely exempt from the specific kind of pain (anguish, confusion, regret, etc.) that we associate with the absence of grace as the consequence of the fall.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the Council of Ephesus (III, chap ix) held that delivery was not violation of virginity.<sup>13</sup>

Francis uses the theologoumenon to support the teaching that the body of Christ is not subject to the laws of space, but he omits the medieval image he had used in the *Meditation* to explicate it. Perhaps he knew that the Calvinists, increasingly drawn to the literal text, would not be moved by a medieval trope, and decided to restrict his appeal to scriptural imagery and patristic authority. After all, for the most part, they accepted the *in partu* opinion.

His explication, however, is not original, nor is it unique. It demonstrates an older (oral) culture’s ability to maintain multi-layered realities. He invites the audience to contemplate the images, not to analyze them. In the emerging mercantile culture of the European centers where the reformers were flourishing, one analyzes. The burghers of Amsterdam, the bankers of Zurich, the investors of Geneva and the accountants of Paris were analysts. Analysts sit alone at desks and analyze printed texts. They thrive in privatized

interpretation. They want things to balance. They are not looking for light to come shining through a page. Francis belongs to an older, communal culture. He sets up multi-layered images of the Body of Christ: the glorified body, historic body and the body of the theologoumenon. Viret wanted to analyze. Francis asked him to contemplate.

Francis’ images – a “ray of light” and a “pane of glass” – are real, but they are given symbolic meaning, lowering the level of abstraction without compressing the range of meaning. For Francis de Sales, as with the schoolmen, the text was the place where light shone through to reveal other realities. The mystagogue’s work was to let the light shine through. Origen had observed that when the Word came into the world, all saw the flesh; knowledge of divinity, however, was given to a chosen few. The letter-spirit dichotomy applied. The role of the mystagogue is to release the light from within the texts, “penetrating as a ray through the glass.”

## THE FORTY HOURS

The relatively suave tone of the July sermons hides the frenetic activity Francis de Sales moved through. In March of 1597, war broke out between Savoy and France. Spain invaded Savoy to fight France and effectively usurped Charles Emmanuel’s dignity. Cardinal de Medicis soon mediated peace, but this left Charles Emmanuel morally impotent. He was slow to invoke the civil “interim” allowing dual cult in some places, for fear that the Protestant city of Berne would create an alliance with the French Huguenots and reopen the war.

Francis spent the next three months in secret dialogue with Beza, opened a missionary base in Thonon, prepared the diocesan synod, took pastoral exams for the pastorate at Petit Bornand, and organized the Annemasse Conference of July 29. He also wrote the sermons on the Real Presence.

On July 29, 1597, Franciscan Fathers Esprit and Cherubim, Jesuit Fr. Saunier, Louis de Sales, Fr. Balthasar and Baron de Viry met with Francis de Sales to plan mission strategy. Their agenda covered financing, securing properties, financial benefits for converts (i.e., tax exemption for Catholics), a Jesuit college at Thonon, and a proposal for public disputation. Cherubim brought their resolutions to the Duke and petitioned a celebration of Forty Hours.

Clement VIII had recently encouraged the devotional practice of Forty Hours of uninterrupted prayer in time of unrest within the Church, particularly in consideration of the offenses of Christians, the “distracted” state of France and the threat of Turkish invasion (1592). It was prayer in relay before the Blessed Sacrament during times of crisis.

Both the Duke and the Papal Nuncio financed the proposed project, with the Duke contributing silver, hangings and carpets from his own chapel. The Annemasse Conference determined what the participants would experience, and in this Francis was successful. The preparations were exhausting: providing housing and meals, planning events, hiring musicians, constructing stage and scenery, preparing forty sermons, and organizing local leadership. Civil authorities were intent on maintaining order to keep Catholics from rushing the barricades blocking the road to Geneva, and to keep Calvinists from attacking the procession of the cross through the countryside.

The small congregations from the forty district parishes processed from villages and towns and converged on the road to Annemasse. Villagers newly reconciled with the Church met, socialized, shared food, sang and prayed with other pilgrims and townspeople from Annecy, Thonon, and newly formed Catholic centers. Francis’ own foundation, the Confraternity of the Cross, approached from Annecy and joined the festivities. Music and salvos from muskets accompanied the crowd that was chanting litanies as they swelled to eight hundred pilgrims approaching Annemasse. There an ecstatic crowd of Catholics proudly walking under police protection from Geneva greeted them. Even though Geneva threatened imprisonment for anyone selling food or wine to the pilgrims and ordered a public day of penance, the Calvinists en route were visibly edified, as was the intention of the Conference.

This was the experience of Annemasse: the reconciliations, the sharing, the solidarity, the prayer, and the adoration of the Sacrament. The Church is most the Church around the Eucharist. The Church is most the Church in its remembrance, in the *anamnesis*.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The role of the mystagogue is to lead the baptized into the experience of the sacred. The great mystagogues (Chrysostom, Cyril of Jerusalem,

Ambrose, Augustine) left us treatises and homilies that accompanied their pastoral practice. Often it is from other sources, mostly ritual, that we find what the mystagogue was actually doing: dispossessing the candidate of earthly adornment before the descent into the baptismal pool, presenting the neophytes with their oiled faces shimmering in candle-light to the receptive community before dawn, or assigning an initiate to the care of a deacon. It was experiential.

The sermons of St. Francis de Sales likewise have to be seen in the full context of our experience of the Holy Eucharist. The Eucharist celebrates our incorporation into His Body, our reconciliation, our hope and our mission. The pastoral theology of “the Bridegroom of the soul,” which Francis de Sales considers elsewhere is never apart from his effort to enhance our incorporation into the Church.

The July sermons are structured to revive memories of what the listeners found most blessed within the Church. The Forty Hours at Annemasse was a celebration of incorporation, reconciliation, hope and mission. It was pre-eminently an experience of participation, an experience that Francis de Sales gave priority to in pastoral practice, which would be the subject of another commentary.

The structuring of his arguments in the 1597 sermons is foreign to us today; the juxtaposition of imagery on several levels of thought is almost post-modern. Yet it was the kind of argument that allowed one to apprehend the sacred within the secular.

The function of memory is paramount in these sermons, as it was in the Annemasse celebration. No one would be likely to forget all that happened on the road and how each came to see Jesus in the breaking of the Bread. And because it was participative, the memory of the experience could be revived every time one saw a neighbor. Memory is not the same as reminiscence. Scriptural imagery, like pageant events, provides striking images that could be dwelt on with affection so that they could be revived and brought to bear on present experience.

It is a comfort to look back four hundred years and admire what a man accomplished so well in response to the needs of his time and the societal framework he lived in. It is more difficult to examine social fragmentation

today, structurally biased systems, and pluriformity. It is even more difficult to design or discover the experiences that are needed to respond gracefully to this and invite others to enter. It could be a temptation to sit back and unquestioningly accept the status quo where life and liturgy, sermon and experience, do not meet. St. Francis de Sales encourages us through his episcopal motto: *caritas numquam excidit* – “charity never gives up.”

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> “Real presence” is a separate doctrine from “transubstantiation.” with related but different issues. Francis de Sales’ earliest sermon on “transubstantiation” was written in October, 1594 (OEA VII: 223-230) in “the plain style of the Savoyard” that he used for the *Meditations sur l’église* and that drew the accolade “he doesn’t sound like a papist.”

<sup>2</sup> Just how benignly Francis de Sales wrote is evident when one reads Luther’s final invectives against the *sacramentarians* (a term ironically applied to those who say only symbolic value in the Eucharist). When Luther ceased to elevate the host for adoration, sacramentarians thought he had abandoned belief in the real presence. Schwenkfeld sent a hast congratulatory note to Luther, who was so incensed that he responded in language that is seldom translated today. See “Luther’s Last Attack on the Sacramentarians: His Relation to Calvin” <<http://www.ccel.org/s/schaff/hcc7/html/ii.vii.ix.htm>>.

<sup>3</sup> “Mediation on the Apostles’ Creed,” OEA XXIII: 21.

<sup>4</sup> Lewis Fiorelli (ed.), *The Sermons of St. Francis de Sales for Lent, Given in 1622* (Rockford, IL: Tan, 1987), 95-96.

<sup>5</sup> OEA XXIII: 33-42.

<sup>6</sup> In “Liturgical Drama and the Ludus Danielis,” Streber cites Michael Camille’s insight that the art of the time does not make a sharply cleaved division between the secular and the profane and should not be seen in terms of binary opposition <[www.ryanstreber.com/content/portfolio/writings/index.php](http://www.ryanstreber.com/content/portfolio/writings/index.php)>. People were accustomed to the ambiguity that informed liturgy and literature and that was crucial for religious sensibilities. See Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 29.

<sup>7</sup> Lewis Fiorelli (ed.), *The Sermons of St. Francis de Sales on Our Lady* (Rockville, IL: Tan Books, 1985), 156, 174-175.

<sup>8</sup> OEA VII: 223-230.

<sup>9</sup> OEA XXIII: 34-35, 41-42.

<sup>10</sup> OEA XXIII: 41.

<sup>11</sup> OEA XXIII: 21.

<sup>12</sup> This, of course, lends itself to other theologoumena. If Adam had not sinned, would he still have spontaneously grimaced and said “ouch!” when he stepped on a thorn? Or would he have been insensate? Or would preternatural knowledge have foreseen the spiny twig in the forest so he could have avoided it? Francis believed that Mary felt no discomfort in her pregnancy and was able to move in haste to visit Elizabeth because she was not inconvenienced like other women who are burdened and unable to walk in pregnancy because the unborn children that they carry are in sin. See his “Sermon on the Visitation,” 11/21/1618.

<sup>13</sup> I suspect that the Council of Ephesus brought the question to conclusion because scriptural proof (Luke 2:23 or Rev 12:2) could not support it, nor had their tradition (Tertullian, Origen). Francis de Sales’ explication of the “ray of light” is satisfying as an archetypal symbol, and far more satisfying than an analogy with the teleportation of Star Trek which is what it would sound like to someone hearing it today. Fides quarens intellectum allows the theologian latitude in speculation; he is not bound to thirteenth century physics. Great minds like Descartes and Varignon attempted to explain the Real Presence with mathematics, just as some moderns have appealed to theories of physics. But, like Origen who referred to parthenogenesis in defending the virginal conception against Celsius, even well-intentioned apologetics that are based on theories of material substances usually have corollaries that are repugnant to faith.



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