

Communion is a Mystery

extracto de la Proposición XIII § i, ii

§ i. Communion of the body and blood of Christ is a mystery which is hidden from all natural people in their first fallen and degenerate state. As long as they remain that way they cannot understand communion, attain it, nor comprehend it, nor can they partake of it, nor can they “discern the Lord’s body.”¹ Since most of the Christian world, so called, has continued laboring, working, conceiving, and imagining in their own natural and unrenewed understanding about religion and the things of God, therefore this mystery has been mostly hidden from them. Meanwhile they have been contending, quarreling, and fighting with one another about the mere shadow and external form, but they remain strangers to the Substance, Life, and Power.

§ ii. The body of Christ which believers partake of is spiritual and not carnal; his blood which they drink is pure and heavenly, not human or elemental.² This is what Augustin says about the body of Christ which is eaten, in his Tractate on Psalm 98: “Unless a man eats my flesh, he does not have eternal life in him;”³ and Augustin says, “The words I speak to you are Spirit and life, so understand what I have said spiritually. You will not eat of this body which you see, nor drink this blood, which those who crucify me

¹ 1 Corinthians 11:29

² “Elementary” is a term which refers to the philosophy of Aristotle and the theology of Aquinas, which distinguish between the elemental and the substantial. In Catholic theology, the elemental (also accidental) means the physical aspect of the bread — texture, color, taste, etc. The substantial is the spiritual aspect. During the mass, transubstantiation changes the substance of the bread into the body of Christ, while the elements or accidents retain their natural qualities.

³ See John 6:53.

will spill. I am the living bread, who has descended from heaven. He called himself the bread who descended from heaven, exhorting us to believe in him,” etc.

Question: What is that body, and what is that flesh and blood?

Answer: I answer, it is that heavenly Seed, that divine spiritual, celestial Substance which we spoke about before, in the Fifth and Sixth Propositions. This is the *vehiculum Dei*,⁴ the spiritual body of Christ, through which he gives life to man, and salvation “to all who believe in him” and “receive him.”⁵ By this spiritual body man comes to have fellowship and communion with God. This is proved by the sixth chapter of John, from verse 32 to the end, where Christ speaks more completely about this subject than in any other place. Indeed this evangelist, the beloved disciple who lay in the bosom of the Lord, gives us a more complete account of the spiritual sayings and doctrine of Christ. It is notable that he says nothing about the ceremony which Christ performed, of breaking bread with his disciples, neither in his evangelical account of Christ’s life and sufferings nor in his epistles; nevertheless he is more complete in this account of the participation in the body, flesh and blood of Christ than any of them all. . . .

He tells them plainly (verse 63), “It is the Spirit that gives life, but the flesh is useless.” This is based on most sound and solid reason, because it is the soul, not the body, that is to be nourished by this flesh and blood. Outward flesh cannot nourish or feed the soul; there is no proportion nor similarity between them; the communion of the saints with God is not by a joining and mutual participation of the flesh, but of the Spirit: “He that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit with him”⁶ — it doesn’t say “is one flesh with him.” Flesh

⁴ the vehicle of God.

⁵ see John 1:12, Romans 1:16.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 6:17 RB

can only participate with flesh, and in the same way the spirit participates with the Spirit. (I mean outward flesh, like that Christ lived and walked in when he was on earth, and not “flesh” as a metaphor, understood spiritually.) The body cannot feed upon the Spirit, nor can the Spirit feed upon flesh. It is clear that the flesh spoken of here⁷ must be interpreted spiritually, because the one who feeds on it shall never die. All human bodies die; even the body of Christ himself died. This body and spiritual flesh and blood of Christ must be interpreted to mean that divine and heavenly Seed which we spoke about before; this is clear from its nature and its fruits. It is said, “it is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world;”⁸ this corresponds to the Light and Seed which John 1 testifies about, saying it is the “Light of the world” and the “Life of men.” When it receives a place in men’s hearts and room to sprout and grow there, that spiritual Light and Seed is like bread to the hungry and fainting soul which is, so to speak, buried and dead in the unbridled desires of the world. That soul receives life again, and revives, when it tastes and partakes of this heavenly bread. They that partake of it are considered to have come to Christ; and no one can have it except by coming to him, and believing in the appearance of his Light in their hearts. By receiving this Light, and believing in it, one knows the participation in this body and bread.

⁷ see John 6:51-57

⁸ see John 6:33.

Fuentes: Robert Barclay, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, Proposition XIII § i, ii (Glenside PA: Quaker Heritage Press, 2002) pp. 374-377 y Roberti Barclaii, *Teologiae verè Christianae apologia*, facsimile (Amsterdam: Jacob Claus, 1676) pp. 287-290.