

The Lord's Supper- 3 Positions and a Synthesis

Transubstantiation

Transubstantiation" is the official Roman Catholic concept referring to the change that takes place during the sacrament of Holy Communion (Eucharist). This change involves the substances of bread and wine being turned miraculously into the substance of Christ himself. The underlying essence of these elements is changed, and they retain only the appearance, taste, and texture of bread and wine. Catholic doctrine holds that the Godhead is indivisible, so every particle or drop thus changed is wholly identical in substance with the divinity, body, and blood of the Savior.

Consubstantiation

Consubstantiation is the Lutheran doctrine that, in the Eucharist, Jesus Christ is only present mystically, right alongside the elements of bread and wine. Thus, unlike the Catholic dogma of transubstantiation, the essences of bread and wine are not transformed.

Emblematic

Evangelical churches (including Baptists) see it as communion, known as the Lord's Table, as a commemoration of the crucifixion of Jesus and time of self-examination and recommitment. The elements, as they are called, themselves have no significance or power. Participation in the "Lord's supper" is "the proclamation of Christ's death" and doing it is only an emblem of remembrance of Jesus' sacrifice for salvation of the believer.

Rethinking communion – a synthesis:

The Roman Catholic position has merit not in the sense of a change in substance but in a qualified sense of communion as a sacrament. Sacraments affect an individual's salvation. Certainly I reject that communion saves us by justifying us before God. Only Jesus Christ can do that. I also reject any notion that communion regenerates our nature, only the Holy Spirit can do that. Also, there is no ultimate glorification of our nature in communion for Jesus Christ does that at His second coming. The aspect of salvation that is affected is that of sanctification. If participated in communion rightly, spiritual examination leads spiritual transformation of the way we think. As we conform to Christ by this changed thought-life we are set aside to Him, sanctified and therein in a sense saved from our sinful selves.

The Lutheran position of a mystical presence with Christ at communion has merit as well. Surely, inviting the Holy Spirit to reveal anything that stands between you and Christ during self examination brings Christ's presence into the communion experience. His forgiveness brings in His personal and communal presence as well. When we partake of the bread we partake of His life giving sustenance. When we partake of the wine we partake of His forgiveness and the joy of hope in our future perfection.

Finally, the notion of communion as an emblem, while risking a reduction to just a physical thing we do to proclaim Jesus' death, has merit as well. That merit is found in self-examination or better the Holy Spirit's examination which opens a space for conviction as well as an "again coming under the mission Christ called us to."

I commend this explanation to you for reflection and comment.