



Martin Luther on Transubstantiation

Luther argued that Christ could be really present in the Eucharistic bread and wine even if the bread and wine were not literally changed into his body and blood (transubstantiated).

“What is true concerning Christ is also true concerning the sacrament. In order for the divinity to dwell in the human body, it is not necessary for the human nature to be transubstantiated and the divinity contained under the accidents* of the human nature. Both natures are simply there in their entirety. It is true to say: this man is God, this God is man”. Even though philosophy is not capable of grasping this, faith is. And the authority of God’s word is greater than the capacity of our intellect to grasp it. In the same way, it is not necessary in the sacrament that the bread and wine be transubstantiated and that Christ be contained under the accidents in order that the real body and real blood may be present. But both remain there at the same time, and it is truly said: this bread is my body; this wine is my blood”, and vice versa.” (Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*).

* The idea of **accidents** points to a debate about the difference between the **substance** of bread and wine and the **accidents** of bread and wine. The Catholic Church teaches that the **substance** of the Eucharistic offering (either bread alone, or bread and wine) is changed into both the body and blood of Christ. All that is accessible to the senses (the outward appearances) remains unchanged. What remains unaltered is also referred to as the **accidents** of the bread and wine, but the term “accidents” is not used in the official definition of the doctrine by the Council of Trent in 1551. The manner in which the change occurs, the Catholic Church teaches, is a mystery: “The signs of bread and wine become, in a way surpassing understanding, the Body and Blood of Christ.” It is this distinction between ‘substance’ changing and accidents unchanging that Luther thought was absurd – a juggling with words.

(source: wikipedia, Eucharist)



What was Luther's argument for a real presence but not a transubstantiation in the Eucharistic bread and wine?

ANSWER:

Luther felt Christ could be really present by his Spirit without any physical change in bread and wine, and that the attempt by medieval theologians to distinguish between substance (which changes) and outward appearances or accidents of bread and wine (which obviously don't change) was playing with words. Just as iron placed in the fire glows – and both heat and iron are present – so, argued Luther, in the bread and wine both Christ and the actual bread and wine are present together – a doctrine sometimes called 'consubstantiation'. These kinds of distinctions between substance and accident are an attempt to rationalise a mystery.