

BEHOLD, IT IS I



# BEHOLD, IT IS I

SCRIPTURE, TRADITION, AND  
SCIENCE ON THE REAL PRESENCE

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FR. GEORGE ELLIOTT

TAN Books  
Gastonia, North Carolina

*Behold, It Is I: Scripture, Tradition, and Science on the Real Presence*

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Cover design by Caroline Green

Cover image: Holy Eucharist, photo by Prachaya Roekdeethaweasab/Shutterstock

Library of Congress Control Number: 2021941499

ISBN: 978-1-5051-1724-0

Kindle ISBN: 978-1-5051-1725-7

ePUB ISBN: 978-1-5051-1726-4

Published in the United States by

TAN Books

PO Box 269

Gastonia, NC 28053

[www.TANBooks.com](http://www.TANBooks.com)

To Annie Paniagua

*Blessed Carlo Acutis, pray for us.*

*On the night of that Last Supper,  
seated with His chosen band,  
He the Pascal victim eating,  
first fulfills the Law's command;  
then as Food to His Apostles  
gives Himself with His own hand.*

*Word-made-Flesh, the bread of nature  
by His word to Flesh He turns;  
wine into His Blood He changes;-  
what though sense no change discerns?  
Only be the heart in earnest,  
faith her lesson quickly learns.*

*Down in adoration falling,  
Lo! the sacred Host we hail;  
Lo! o'er ancient forms departing,  
newer rites of grace prevail;  
faith for all defects supplying,  
where the feeble sense fail.<sup>1</sup>*

—St. Thomas Aquinas

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1 St. Thomas Aquinas, “Pange Lingua Sing, My Tongue,” <https://www.preces-latinae.org/thesaurus/Hymni/Pange.html>.

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## FOREWORD

I am pleased to offer some brief comments regarding the book *Behold, It Is I*, which Father George Elliott and Doctor Stacy Trasancos have collaboratively offered to all who believe in the Real Presence. An initial thought is that the title is exactly expressive of the reality they explore. Many of us lament that we live in times where too many in the Catholic Church express ambiguity and even outright disbelief regarding the Eucharist. In this context, the title these good authors have chosen gets to the heart of the matter. The title, *Behold, It is I*, offers a Person speaking in the first person. As one man who has been blessed to continue to grow in his Eucharistic faith, I can say that much of that growth comes down to a deeper understanding that from the altar or from the tabernacle, an actual Person speaks to us. We all need to rekindle this kind of faith in our own hearts. This faith transformed the lives of the saints of old and gave many of them the strength to die rather than to deny their Eucharistic Lord. This is the kind of faith that I believe this book can nurture for those who take the time to read it. We must move from an abstract approach to the Eucharistic presence of the Lord to a more concrete and realistic approach. I believe this book can help us to focus more deeply on our faith, which says that the consecrated bread and wine that have become the body and blood of Jesus Christ are not an abstract idea. The Eucharistic presence of our savior and Lord is the opposite of abstract; He

is really, concretely, and dynamically with us. Let us hope the reader will grow in a deeper encounter with Jesus Christ who promised that He is “with us until the end of the age.” May this faith resonate through the Church and strengthen us in Him.

Turning to the subtitle of this book, *Scripture, Tradition, and Science on the Real Presence*, the authors have once again given the reader an important focus. As we embrace the truth proclaimed by the Catholic Church that the Eucharist is the “source and summit” of our Faith, this subtitle encompasses the entirety of this faith. One of the great strengths and blessings of the Church through the ages is the reality that we embrace both Scripture and Tradition. This highlights the important reality that in many ways the Church is a “both and” community. Since the beginning of Christianity, there has been a tendency to focus on one or the other and abandon “both and.” This is most dramatically significant in the person of Jesus Christ Himself. The early Church saw centuries of struggle with the question that Jesus raised as He walked this earth. One can say that Jesus of Nazareth was ultimately crucified because He claimed to be both God and man. Certainly, even for His disciples who believed Him to be truly the Son of God, the clarity of how this could be as expressed in the technical language of the hypostatic union would take centuries to develop. Even now we must admit that how Jesus Christ can be fully God and fully man is beyond our understanding.

Our struggles with coming to a deeper understanding of Jesus of Nazareth is naturally highlighted in our struggles to understand the Eucharistic presence He has left us. We look to Scripture and Tradition to understand the

God-Man, Jesus Christ, and we look to Scripture and Tradition to understand His Real Presence with us in the Most Blessed Sacrament, the Holy Eucharist. The great mystery that Jesus is the Incarnate Word can only be more deeply developed when we understand that Sacred Scripture is Jesus Christ. Through the two thousand years of Tradition, the faithful have constantly turned to Jesus present in the written word in order to more fully understand Him present in His incarnation and in His Eucharistic presence, which mysteriously continues His incarnate presence in the world.

Finally, turning to the additional term in the subtitle, *science*, I believe this volume broadens the focus of the reader in a significant way for this twenty-first century. We live in a time when for many, possibly most of humanity, science has become god. As we contemplate the beautiful meaning of the Blessed Sacrament and its essential role in the life of the Church, it is important that science be brought into the discussion. In a way, science is the third element that must be addressed, along with Scripture and Tradition, in our age. We must honestly bring our questions and our uncertainties to Jesus in Scripture and then to Jesus in Tradition, who then moves us in our day to address Jesus in science. And yet, this book will leave those who embrace science as their religion disappointed because their questions will not be answered in scientific terms. On the contrary, I pray this book will take believers into even deeper realms of mystery—mystery that is informed by reason and analysis but ultimately remains mystery.

Those who know their Lord and Savior present in the tabernacle and on the Eucharistic altar will find their faith nurtured and expanded as they read this book. And may

their deepened faith inspire them to engage our too often  
faithless world with the joy and the hope that is Jesus Christ.

+MOST REVEREND JOSEPH E. STRICKLAND  
Bishop of Tyler

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**W**E express many thanks to the people who helped us develop the ideas and texts of *Behold, It Is I*, including Hope Zubek, Kyle Sherling, Father Joshua Neu, Father Justin Braun, George and Andrea Elliott, and Maria Edens.

We are especially grateful to Dr. Oscar Paniagua, his wife, Kristina, and their family. One Sunday after Mass, Kristina asked their daughter, Annie, to research the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. During the Eucharistic prayer, Annie had been inattentive, as is so natural for children. Annie discovered a video about Eucharistic miracles in Buenos Aires and sent it to her parents. They sent the video to Bishop Joseph Strickland, and he sent it to Stacy Trasancos, urging the executive director of his St. Philip Institute to research the topic and consider giving a presentation to the people of the Diocese of Tyler. Those talks led Father George Elliott and Stacy to the idea of writing this book. It all started with the excitement of a child. Kristina later remarked, “It’s a good reminder to me that the little things have the potential to make a big impact.”



## INTRODUCTION

# THE LOGIC OF BEHOLD, IT IS I

### **On Faith**

**T**HIS is a book about faith. When dealing with apologetic proofs, the theological virtue of faith can seem unnecessary. Some may argue that a proof should stand on its own legs top to bottom, that every logical step can be demonstrated and obvious. But this is not how proofs work. They always begin with starting assumptions.

Doctrinal proofs begin with belief in the testimony, or the revelation, of Jesus Christ. It is not possible to grasp the mysteries of the divine without the gift of faith. As St. Thomas Aquinas points out in the *Summa Theologiae*, “the reasons that are brought forth by the Saints to prove the truths of the faith are not demonstrative, but persuasions or manifestations that what faith proposes is not impossible” (II-II, 1, ad. 2).

In other words, the task of Catholic apologetics is to prove that what the Church teaches is reasonable and to delineate a logical path from Divine Revelation, which we grant intellectual assent to as an act of theological faith, forward to derive dogmas and doctrines. Apologetic proofs disprove a given mystery’s *impossibility*. Scientific proofs, likewise, begin with observation (instead of revelation),

and equalities, formulas, laws, and theories are derived from there.

Here, in one work, we provide the most convincing proofs for the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist from Scripture and Tradition, notably the Fathers of the Church. Additionally, in keeping with modern times, we meticulously examine the scientific data from three of the approved investigations of Eucharistic miracles in the Church. This book will not, however, convey the message that Eucharistic miracles *prove* the Real Presence of Christ in the same way that Scripture and Tradition do.

Each proof deals with its own starting assumptions, especially in the case of science, with its limitations. In faith, we believe and profess that Jesus Christ is really and truly present in the Eucharist. We believe this in faith because we accept the testimony of Christ Himself. With each of these proofs, the reader will have to make an act of faith, either in God, which is most reasonable, or in another human being, which is far less certain.

We hope that the scriptural section of this work will sway any reader who believes God's Word is spoken through the Scriptures. We are confident that the Fathers of the Church will convince anyone who trusts the early Christian writers and the Holy Spirit working through them. Finally, we pray that the study of Eucharistic miracles, specifically the scientific findings and historical accounts, will strike the reader with greater appreciation. More than anything, we must warn you that detailed scientific investigations on their own will leave you wanting. The human limitations of the scientific method will ultimately point you in humility right back to the simple words of Christ, "This *is* my body."



More than humility, the theological virtue of faith requires the life of grace. Well accustomed to the disciples' dilemma in Matthew 13:11, we know that those who believe do so because "to [them] it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven." Therefore, we ardently pray and trust that our Lord will lavish you, the reader, with the grace to make an assent of faith and to accept fully the gift of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

### **On Certainty**

A fundamental framework required to approach apologetics is an understanding of the types of certainty. Apologetics is essentially the art of explaining why one has sufficient certainty to believe what one believes and the art of convincing the other to consider one's beliefs sufficiently certain to accept them.

Apologetics would be simple if we could have absolute certainty beyond any possible doubt in matters of faith, such as if Jesus Christ sat down next to us and offered up His Body. He did do that, and even then, people doubted! But that is the thing about faith: "faith comes from what is heard" (Rom 10:17), and what is heard leaves some room for doubt in an unbeliever. Therefore, in apologetics, we deal with degrees of certainty and accept that there is always the possibility that the other person will have doubt.

The distinction between types of certainty made its first appearance in Western thought with Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*. He says that for different fields of knowledge, we should expect different types of certainty: "In the same

spirit, therefore, should each type of statement be received; for it is the mark of an educated man to look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits; it is evidently equally foolish to accept probable reasoning from a mathematician and to demand from a rhetorician scientific proofs.”<sup>1</sup> It would make no sense to require mathematical certainty from something other than math, and it would be unreasonable to accept from a mathematician anything but mathematical certainty.

St. Thomas Aquinas further develops the concept of certainty by applying it to faith. In the *Summa Theologiae*, he poses the question: “Whether faith is more certain than knowledge and the other intellectual virtues?” He says that the content of faith in one sense is more certain because it is revealed by God, and God is the source of all truth.

In the subjective sense, St. Thomas states that faith is less certain, as it is beyond our understanding and our full grasp. To illustrate his point, he uses the image of someone with little knowledge trusting the words of an expert. Although the eyes of the person with little knowledge may not be able to fully grasp what is happening, the person trusts the words of the expert who explains the phenomenon to him.<sup>2</sup> For the person with little knowledge, the information is reasonably certain only if he is certain that the person speaking is an expert and that he properly understood the expert. For Catholics, we have the undoubtable certainty of faith whenever the Church pronounces a certain dogma

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1 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics I*, 3, trans. W. D. Ross, accessed December 31, 2020, <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.html>.

2 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae II-II*, a. 4, q. 8.

or doctrine. We are certain that God speaks through the Church, so we have the highest level of certainty regarding our faith.

In the first section of this work, we assume that the reader has accepted the Bible as divinely revealed. This section uses the historical and literary evidence found within the Bible to clarify what God meant by the inspired Word. The second section continues the argument of the first section but adds the evidence provided by the Fathers of the Church. It uses the same tools of historical and literary analysis to examine the Fathers' writings. The purpose of the first two sections is to present enough historical and literary evidence to convince someone beyond a reasonable doubt that God has revealed the doctrine of the Real Presence as understood by the Catholic Church. The third section of the book takes a different approach; it examines purported Eucharistic miracles through the eyes of science, requiring unique evidence and a distinct method separate from the first two sections in an attempt to arrive at scientific certainty.

### **On Structure**

We divided the book into three sections according to the evidence that we use to argue for the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The first section uses Scripture to argue for a holistic and contextual reading of the Bible that points to Jesus meaning what He said at the Last Supper: "This is my body" and "This is . . . my blood." However, the biblical section's weakness is twofold: first, to believe arguments from the Bible, one has to believe the Bible. For

non-Christians, this section will not be convincing. Also, as anyone who has done some apologetic work knows, the unsystematic nature of the Bible allows for different interpretations of the same passage depending on the hermeneutic or presuppositions with which one approaches the Scriptures. For someone who doesn't think that the Scriptures should be read as a united whole, such that each passage should be read contextually, the arguments in the first section of this book will not be convincing.

For that reason, we added the second section on the early Fathers of the Church. The Fathers of the Church are the early Christian saints and theologians. The earliest Fathers of the Church learned directly from the apostles themselves, or from their disciples. Therefore, the earliest Fathers proximity to our Lord makes their witness all the more compelling. Within one generation, a person's teachings can only mutate so much. The discipleship system at the time of Christ makes the Church Father's teachings even more convincing. The disciple's role was to memorize, internalize, and live the teaching of the master so that the teachings of a master could be preserved for many generations. And so, what the first several centuries of Christians believed is what Jesus taught. For us as Catholics, the Fathers of the Church are even more convincing because we believe that Jesus Christ sent His Holy Spirit to guide the Church to all truth, just as the Fathers of the Church were also guided and aided by the Holy Spirit. These two sections should be sufficient to convince someone with faith that Jesus Christ is really and truly present in the Eucharist.

The third section of this book examines three of the most well-known reports of alleged Eucharistic miracles:

Bolsena in 1263, Buenos Aires in the 1990s, and Lanciano in the 700s, including a review of the famous Linoli Report. The historical accounts and scientific findings of these miracles as they were presented to the local episcopacy have been reviewed critically. In these events, the bread was claimed to have turned into heart tissue and the wine into blood. Since today these approved investigations are offered as evidence for the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, we judge that a careful appraisal both for and against the scientific claims is necessary. More than ever, this is a time to assert that the claims of scientific findings are rarely absolute. Belief in science can never be as certain as faith in Christ. The data from these reports, which for various reasons is inconclusive, begs the ultimate question of the certainty of faith. Is it more reasonable to place faith in the experiments and analytical methods of man or the words of Christ? The reader may be joyfully surprised at where the journey of this book will lead.