

Medieval Sourcebook: John Wycliffe: On the Sacrament of Communion

Wyclif's Trialogus is a long treatise in the Scholastic style on various subjects which he believed were being wrongfully taught in the Catholic Church. He cast the argument in the form of a classical dialogue between three people called Alithia, Pseudis and Phronesis. The argument against transubstantiation, a small part of which follows, is based on his logical proof that bread and body cannot be in the same place at the same time.

ALITHIA. I must request you, brother, to show still farther, from reason or Scripture, that there is no identification of the bread with the body of Christ... For I am no means pleased with the spurious writings which the moderns use, to prove an accident without a subject, because the church so teaches. Such evidence should satisfy no one.

PHRONESIS. As to identification, we must, in the first place, agree on what you mean by the term. It signifies, God's making natures, which are distinct in species or number, one and the same - as though, for instance, he should make the person of Peter to be one with Paul... For if A is identical with B, then both of them remain; since a thing which is destroyed is not made identical, but is annihilated, or ceases to be. And if both of them remain, then they differ as much as at first, and differ consequently in number, and so are not, in the sense given, the same...

PSEUDIS. In the first place, you cannot escape from this expository syllogism: First, This bread becomes corrupt, or is eaten by a mouse. Second, The same bread is the body of Christ. Third, Therefore the body of Christ does thus become corrupt, and is thus eaten; - and thus you are involved in inconsistency.

From: *Tracts and Treatises of John de Wycliffe*, ed. Robert Vaughan. London: Blackburn and Pardon, 1845, pp. 150, 152.