

The Tabernacle: Its History, Structure and Custody

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I.

The tabernacle has direct reference to the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. The Holy Eucharist was instituted by our Lord on the eve of His Passion, when at the Last Supper He took bread and wine and said over these substances: "This is my body; this is my blood." [1] By these words our Lord intimated very plainly that what was bread before had become His body, and what was wine before had become His blood. The same great miracle is performed whenever the priests of Christ, acting under Christ's direction, pronounce the above words over the bread and wine in the sacrifice of the Mass. In other words Christ is really present in the Holy Eucharist under the appearances of bread and wine. This has been the belief of the faithful from the earliest times. We find utterances of that faith in a number of writings that were composed in the very first centuries of Christianity. One of the oldest of such works is the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, commonly known as the Didache. It speaks of the contents of the chalice as being the wine of David made known through Jesus, the Son of God; of the broken bread as being the life and the knowledge made known through Jesus, the Son of God; of the partaking of these gifts as placing the holy name of God in the hearts of the faithful, as making known to them knowledge and faith and immortality, and as bringing

Description

This interesting essay examines the history of the tabernacle and the practice of reserving the Holy Eucharist in it.

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a spiritual food and a spiritual beverage (chps. IX, X); of the sacrifice offered up by the Christians as being a clean oblation (chp. XIV).

It is true that these statements are not entirely specific in regard to the real presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist; but they seem to imply it. If the contents of the chalice in the eucharistic sacrifice are something special, made known or given by Jesus Christ, they must be something more than pure natural wine; if the eucharistic bread is life and knowledge given by Jesus Christ, it must be something more than mere natural bread; if the eucharistic gifts place the name of God in the hearts of the faithful, if they bestow knowledge and faith and immortality, if they are a spiritual food and a spiritual beverage, they must be something higher than mere bread and wine; if the sacrifice of the Christians is a clean oblation, it must be something higher than the sacrifices of the Old Law. All these expressions seem to indicate that Christ, the Son of God, was present in the Holy Eucharist.

There are more explicit statements in the works of other writers. St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch in the latter part of the first century and in the beginning of the second, suffered martyrdom in the year 107 in the imperial city of Rome. During his journey from Antioch to Rome he wrote several letters directed to various Christian communities in Asia, one to the Christians of Rome, and one to St. Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna. In various passages of these letters he speaks of the Holy Eucharist as being the flesh and blood of our Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ. His testimony is the more important, because he lived so close to the apostolic times; in all likelihood he knew several of the Apostles. St. Justin Martyr, who was put to death for the Christian faith about the year 165, says in the first apology, written in defence of Christianity, that the Holy Eucharist is not a common bread nor a common beverage, but the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, our Saviour. St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons in the latter part of the second century, writes in his work against the heresies, that in the Holy Eucharist the bread becomes the body of the Lord, and the chalice

contains His blood. Clement of Alexandria, a prominent Christian writer and president of the catechetical school in that city in the latter part of the second century, says in his *Paedagogus*, that those who receive the Blessed Sacrament eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Lord. Origen, a pupil of Clement and, after him, president of the Alexandrian school, says in one of his homilies that the Lord Jesus in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist gives His body and His blood. St. Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria in the middle part of the third century, calls the Eucharist a sacred food, the body and blood of our Lord. The African writer Tertullian, who flourished in the latter part of the second and in the early part of the third centuries, speaks repeatedly of the Holy Eucharist in his works and calls it the body of the Lord and God's banquet. St. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage in Africa and martyr in the middle part of the third century, has frequent references to the Blessed Sacrament in his works, and calls it a heavenly food, the body and blood of the Lord.

From the little that has been said it appears evident that the belief in the real presence of our Lord in the Holy Eucharist was general among the Christians of the early centuries; and it remained so during subsequent ages. The works of the Fathers and of the ecclesiastical writers are replete with statements on the subject. Suffice it to refer to St. John Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople (344-407), among the Greek Fathers, to St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (354-430), among the Latin Fathers, and to St. Thomas of Aquin (1225-1274), author of the Corpus Christi Office, among the theologians of the Middle Ages. With few exceptions this truth was never questioned by the men of those times. The exceptions center mainly round two scholars of the Middle Ages: John Scotus Erigena, the philosopher and theologian of the ninth century, and the theologian Berengarius of Tours in the eleventh century, who both denied the real presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist. It was not until the advent of the Protestant Reformation, that this dogma was more generally rejected by the partisans of Protestantism. The Church

ratified the general belief of her children on various occasions. Thus in the Council of Nicaea, held in the year 325, the Holy Eucharist was called the body of Christ (can. 18). A solemn definition of the Catholic truth was proclaimed by the Council of Trent in the thirteenth session held in the year 1551.

The Christians firmly believed that Christ, the Son of God made Man, was in the Holy Eucharist under the appearances of bread and wine; and from this belief they drew several practical conclusions. They felt that they were bound to exhibit the utmost respect and reverence to this sacrament, because it contained their God; that this respect and reverence had to be shown whenever they came into close contact with the species of the sacrament; that this respect and reverence culminated in acts of worship and adoration, such as they are paid to God alone; and that this worship and adoration was displayed outwardly by various postures of their bodies.

There are some passages on these points in the works of the writers of the early centuries. Thus, Origen says that those that are accustomed to assist at the sacred mysteries, receive the body of Christ with all care and reverence. Tertullian speaks of the great care taken by those who received the sacred body, that no disrespect would be shown to it. St. Cyprian says that whatever disrespect is displayed toward the body and blood of Christ is turned against the Lord Christ Himself. Similar sentiments are expressed by writers of later centuries. St. Cyril of Jerusalem (315-386) recommends to those about to receive Communion to approach the Holy Eucharist with modest demeanor and respectful attitude. St. John Chrysostom exhorts the faithful not to dishonor the sacred body of the Lord, when receiving it in Holy Communion. St. Ambrose of Milan (340-397) maintains that respectful worship should be paid to the Holy Eucharist. St. Augustine makes the same statement, when saying that those who approach the Holy Eucharist at the time of Communion should first pay respectful worship to it.

The respect and reverence due to the Holy Eucharist was to be exhibited in a particular manner whenever the faithful came into contact with the particles of the Blessed Sacrament. There were several customs observed by the early Christians in their dealing with this sacred object, which would appear strange to us at the present time. They were inspired by the fact that the Eucharistic Christ was looked upon very much as He was when walking upon this earth. As the people then mingled freely with Him, handled Him and touched Him, so likewise the Christians of the early ages felt entitled to come into direct contact with the species of the Holy Eucharist, which contained Christ. Thus, whenever they approached the table of Communion, they received the sacred particle in the palm of their right-hand. They held it there, blessed themselves with it, and then placed it on the tongue. They were permitted also to take the Blessed Eucharist to their houses, so as to be able to commune, whenever they were unable to be present at the religious services, either on account of illness or on account of severe persecution. Finally, they were authorized to carry the sacred particle with them on journeys that were dangerous, so as to have the all-powerful protection of their Lord and God. On all such occasions particular care was taken to handle the Blessed Sacrament with the utmost care and respect.

Several of the writers already mentioned, such as Tertullian, Origen, and St. Cyril of Jerusalem, warn the faithful not to permit any particle of the Sacrament to drop on the floor, while they were holding it in their hand at Communion, because that would be a profanation inflicted on the holiest of objects. Moreover, Tertullian condemns very severely those Christians who touched the body of the Lord at Communion with the same hand with which they manufactured idols for the false worship of the pagans.

When the Blessed Eucharist was taken to private homes, care was to be observed that no dishonor should come to it; and it was presumed that its custodians should be pure in soul and body. Tertullian, in his work *Ad*

Uxorem, recommends to his wife not to remarry after his death, unless the man of her choice were endowed with the Christian faith. If she were to marry a pagan, there would be the possibility of a profanation of the Holy Eucharist, which she might wish to keep at home. St. Cyprian in his work *De Lapsis* tells of a perverse Christian who assisted at a pagan sacrifice, then went to the Eucharistic service of the Christians, received the body of the Lord, and carried it away. On his return home he opened the hand in which he was holding the sacred particle, and to his astonishment he beheld that he was carrying ashes. He speaks also of a woman who was keeping the sacred host in a small case at her home. When she tried to open the receptacle, she was stopped from taking hold of the particle by flames of fire that came out from it. In both these examples the man and the woman were unworthy of receiving the body of the Lord; their souls were not free from sin. The stories were told for the purpose of admonishing others to be always pure of soul when handling or receiving the body of Christ.

When the Holy Eucharist was taken on journeys, it was always treated with much respect. The sacred particle was wrapped up in a piece of linen, or closed in a small case, and suspended on the breast in a way that it could not be seen. St. Ambrose, in the work on the death of his brother Satyrus, describes this custom. It happened that his brother was making a journey on sea and the ship that was carrying him and the others was almost shipwrecked. Not having received Baptism as yet, he was not permitted to carry the Holy Eucharist with him. But he knew some Christian fellow-passengers who had the Blessed Sacrament with them. He asked them to let him have a particle of the sacred mystery, not so much for the purpose of looking at it curiously, but rather to obtain protection in the danger that was threatening, and to die in the Christian faith if death were to come. His request was granted. He concealed the precious gift in a piece of linen, and carried it on his breast. His humble faith was rewarded. He was saved from

death and on landing he went to a church to give thanks to God for the great favor, and to be admitted to the full fruition of the Christian religion.

The respectful attitude displayed by the early Christians toward the Holy Eucharist received its highest expression in the act of homage given to God alone, in the worship of adoration. This practice is not expressed very explicitly in the writings of the early Fathers; but it is abundantly testified to in the works of later writers. St. Cyril of Jerusalem instructed the faithful to approach the Blessed Sacrament at Communion with a spirit of adoration and reverence. St. John Chrysostom admonishes the people to adore the body of Christ in the Holy Eucharist, just as the Magi adored it at the time of their visit to the Divine Infant in the crib of Bethlehem. St. Ambrose tells us that the Christians of his time adored the body of Christ in the sacred mysteries, just as the Apostles adored the living Jesus. St. Augustine says that the body of Christ in the Holy Eucharist should be adored because it is the same flesh which Christ assumed for His sojourn on earth.

The worship of adoration was manifested outwardly by various gestures or postures of the body. The Christians realized that it is natural for a human being to manifest inner sentiments by various motions of the body; and they applied this to their intercourse with the Christ-God in the Holy Eucharist. References to practice of this kind are found in the writings of some of the Fathers. St. Cyril of Jerusalem recommends that he who is about to receive Communion stretch forward his hands and bow his body in reverence. St. Augustine says that the proper thing to do in the presence of the body of Christ is to bow the body and prostrate oneself on the ground. These same manifestations of faith and respect, i. e. stretching the arms, bowing the upper body, and prostration on the ground, are still practised in our day. Thus the early Christians had the same faith in the Blessed Eucharist and the same respect for it as we have today.

II.

The faith in the real presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist and the respect shown to this sacrament were responsible for the particular care taken by the Christians and the ecclesiastical authorities in providing for a place in which the sacred particles were kept after the conclusion of the Eucharistic sacrifice. This place is now commonly known as the Tabernacle. The Latin word is *tabernaculum*, a hut or tent. Cicero uses the word with reference to the tents carried and used by travellers, soothsayers, and soldiers. Its root is the monosyllable *tab*, whence are derived also the words *tabula* (table) and *taberna* (a hut or dwelling-place). The original meaning therefore conveys the idea of a structure at which or in which to dwell or to rest.

The word occurs very frequently in the Latin version of the Old Testament, where it admits of various interpretations. It was used to designate that movable sanctuary of the Hebrews, known as the tabernacle of the testimony, in which were kept the Ark of the Covenant and other sacred objects. It was used also in the general sense of House of God, e.g. in Psalm 42:3, where the sacred writer, speaking to God, says: "Send forth Thy light and Thy truth: they have conducted me and brought me unto Thy holy hill and into Thy Tabernacles." It was also used in connexion with a Jewish feast, known as the feast of the Tabernacles. This feast was celebrated during the seventh month—corresponding about to our month of September—in commemoration of the fact that the Israelites dwelt in tents during their wanderings in the wilderness. All faithful Jews were expected to live in tents for seven days.

There are other meanings attached to it; but in all of them appears the original sense of the Latin word, i. e. of a dwelling place or place in which to rest. The word occurs also in the Latin version of the New Testament; it is used there either in reference to the tabernacle of the Old Law, or else in the sense of habitation or dwelling-place. St. Peter employed the expression in

this latter meaning when speaking to the Master at the time of the Transfiguration: " Lord, it is good for us to be here: if Thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles, one for Thee) and one for Moses, and one for Elias " (Matth. 17:4). From this brief description the conclusion may be drawn that the word tabernacle was aptly chosen to designate the receptacle or case in which the Blessed Sacrament is kept. For it is the dwelling-place of our Eucharistic Lord; and it is the sanctuary of the New Law, just as the Tabernacle of the Testimony was the sanctuary of the Old Law, wherein the Lord God dwelled.

There is an opinion among some historians that in the early centuries of the Christian era, say from the first to the fourth, no provision was made to keep the Blessed Sacrament in the churches or in places where the Eucharistic services were held. There is some foundation for this belief. In those times the Holy Eucharist was taken to the private houses of the Christians) as stated above. If that was the case, there appears to be no reason for supposing that it was reserved in the churches or other places of worship. The opinion is strengthened by the consideration of the circumstances of the time. The condition of the Christians in the early centuries was very precarious. Without legal standing in the Roman Empire, they were open to persecution at any time for professing Christianity. If they kept the Holy Eucharist in their places of worship, they ran the risk of exposing it to the profanation of the Gentiles, since the guardians of the law could have entered these edifices at any moment and taken possession of them. Therefore, if the Holy Eucharist was not kept in the churches) there was no need for such a thing as a tabernacle in which to reserve the particles.

Another practice observed in the early ages with regard to the Holy Eucharist is thought to give strength to this opinion. St. Irenaeus, in a letter to Pope Victor (192-202), relates that several popes of the second century sent particles of the Holy Eucharist to bishops residing in distant lands. Some

bishops were accustomed to do the same thing, particularly at Easter. The custom was forbidden in canon 14 of the council held at Laodicea during the latter part of the fourth century. Some of the popes of the fourth and fifth centuries sent consecrated particles to the priests stationed at the various titular or parish churches in the City of Rome, and this usually on Sundays. It is then argued that, since the Holy Eucharist was sent by the popes and bishops to various places, the Holy Eucharist was not kept in these places. It must be observed, however, that the practices just indicated had a different meaning altogether. The popes and the bishops sent the Holy Eucharist to other dignitaries as a token that all were in communion with the one Church founded by Christ, whose sacred body was sent as a visible memorial of that fact. Likewise, the popes of the fourth and fifth centuries sent the Holy Eucharist to their priests in Rome to remind them that, although they held separate services in their churches, still they were in communion with him, their chief shepherd.

Other scholars maintain that even during the early centuries the Holy Eucharist was reserved in churches or other places of worship. To confirm this opinion they quote a passage from the work of Tertullian against the Gnostic heresy of the Valentinians. The text reads: "The house of our dove is simple; it is found on elevated sites, is always open, and is placed toward the light. For the image of the Holy Spirit loves the direction of the rising sun, which is the symbol of Christ." Tertullian here calls the church "the house of our dove," apparently meaning by the expression "our dove" the home of the Eucharist, which in many places was kept in a vessel having the form of a dove, considered as the symbol of the Holy Ghost.

In view of the scarcity of documentary evidence it is difficult to decide which of the two opinions is correct. Perhaps it is best to say that the Christians, and above all the ecclesiastical authorities, acted in this regard according to the exigencies of circumstances. When the persecutions were particularly severe,

most likely they refrained from leaving the Holy of Holies in their sacred edifices. But when the severity of imperial power was somewhat relaxed, they took the liberty of keeping the Eucharistic Lord in their houses of prayer. There is no doubt that during the age of persecutions there were periods when the Christians were somewhat more free to practise their religion and to do things which their illegal status would rather forbid. To mention only one circumstance, it is evident that the Christians erected many churches, at least in the course of the third century. Their existence is proven from various incidents. After the persecutions of the middle of the third century, under Decius (249-251), Gallus (251-253), and Valerian (253-260), it was Gallienus (260-268) who returned to the Christians their places of worship confiscated during the previous persecutions. The first edict issued by Diocletian (284-305) against the Christians in the year 303, ordered the destruction of their churches. Eusebius states expressly in his *Ecclesiastical History*, that the Christians had erected many churches throughout all the cities of the empire. If the Christians ventured to build churches in the open it is fair to conclude that they reserved in those same churches the body of the Lord, the holiest object of their religion.

Whatever may be true of the early centuries, it is certain that from the fourth century onward the practice of reserving the Holy Eucharist in churches became general. The form or shape of the receptacles in which it was enclosed, the location of these receptacles, and the names given to them, differed in the various epochs and in the various countries. One of the earliest statements concerning preservation of the Holy Eucharist in churches, leaving aside the passage of Tertullian quoted above, is found in the Apostolic Constitutions, a compilation of ecclesiastical laws and ordinances attributed to the Apostles, but in reality composed toward the end of the fourth century. In the part which contains a description of the liturgical services, is found this passage: "After all the faithful of both sexes have received Communion the

deacons gather what is left over and carry it to the Pastophorion." A similar passage is found in the commentary on Ezechiel by St. Jerome, the learned Biblical scholar of the fourth and fifth centuries. It says: "The sacred place, where the body of Christ is kept, who is the true bridegroom of the Church and of our soul, is called Thalamus or Pastophorion." Hence there was in the churches a place or receptacle in which the Holy Eucharist was kept— the Pastophorion. The word is of Greek origin and means a bridal chamber. It was applied to that part of the church where the Holy Eucharist was reserved. The reason of this appellation is given by St. Jerome. Christ, our Lord, was considered to be the bridegroom of the Church and of our soul; and so His Eucharistic habitation received the name of bridal chamber.

Of what form these Pastophoria were, and where they were located, cannot be learned with certainty from the existing documents. But in all likelihood they were niches made either in the lateral walls of the churches, or else in the walls of the rear part or apse, i. e. near the place where the altar was, and what is now called the sanctuary. This latter opinion receives confirmation from a passage in a poem of the Christian writer Paulinus of Nola, in southern Italy, who flourished in the latter part of the fourth and the early section of the fifth century. In this poem the writer gives a description of the basilica of the martyr St. Felix of Nola; and he says that in the apse there were two small chambers, in one of which was kept the sacred food, as he calls the Holy Eucharist. Judging from the character of the testimonies quoted, the Pastophoria were in use both in the East and in the West, in the West at least in Italy.

Another kind of receptacle for the Holy Eucharist came into existence contemporaneously with the Pastophoria in the course of the fourth and fifth centuries; and it consisted of a vessel in the form of a dove. With the early Christians the dove symbolized the Holy Ghost, because it was in this form that the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity came upon our Lord at the time

of His baptism by St. John (Matth. 3:16; Luke 3:22). It was likewise a favorite thought among them to bring the Holy Ghost into close association with the Blessed Sacrament; for, since the Holy Ghost formed the human body of our Lord in the womb of the Blessed Virgin (Matth. 1:20; Luke 1:35), it was believed that the Holy Ghost was instrumental in bringing about the Eucharistic existence of our Lord, or the transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. Accordingly when the question of an appropriate receptacle for the Blessed Sacrament rose, they had recourse spontaneously to a vessel bearing the figure of what was the symbol of the Holy Ghost.

Many passages in the ancient writings contain references to this custom in the Christian churches. Perhaps the earliest testimony) after that of Tertullian quoted above, is contained in one of the homilies of St. John Chrysostom. Speaking of the Holy Eucharist he says: "The body of the Lord is laid on the altar, not wrapped in swaddling clothes, but vested with the Holy Ghost." By this expression he alludes evidently to the dove, symbol of the Holy Ghost, which enclosed the sacred species. A similar expression is found in the work of the Christian poet Sedulius, who flourished in the early part of the fifteenth century. He says that the Holy Spirit in the figure of a dove has vested Christ with honor. In a biography of St. Basil, Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia in the latter part of the fourth century, we read that he ordered a dove to be made of pure gold, and in it deposited a part of the body of the Lord, and suspended it above the sacred table, i. e. above the altar. In the lives of several of the early popes contained in the *Liber Pontificalis*, compiled in the sixth century, mention is made of the manufacture of such doves and of their presentation to several churches in Rome. In the life of Pope Silvester I (314-335) we read that the emperor Constantine (306-337) donated a dove made of pure gold to the basilica of St. Peter. In the life of Pope Innocent I (401-417) we find that a dove made of gold was given to the church of the holy

martyrs Gervasius and Protasius. In the life of Pope Hilarius (461-468) it is said that a dove made of pure gold was given to the church of St. John surnamed "In Fonte"— the baptistery or baptismal chapel near St. John Lateran. A certain Bishop Perpetuus of Tours in Gaul, who lived toward the end of the fifth century, made provision in his last will for a dove to be made of silver to serve for the custody of the Holy Eucharist, and it was to be given to one of his churches. In the acts of the council held in the city of Tyre in Palestine in 518, mention is made of several doves made of gold and silver which were placed above the altars, They had been appropriated unlawfully by Bishop Severus of Antioch.

The material gold or silver, out of which these doves were made, is indicated in several of the above passages. As a rule the Eucharistic dove was placed above the altar, and suspended with chains from the ceiling of the canopy or baldachin, which was erected over the altar in many of the churches of Christian antiquity, and which is found even today in a number of Catholic temples. These canopies were called *ciboria*, from the Greek *chiborion* a cover in the shape of an inverted cup. As the passages testifying to the existence of these sacramental doves are found in works both of the eastern and the western Church, it is evident that the use of them was general throughout Christendom. The custom was followed to about the twelfth century. Of its prevalence in the eleventh century we have a testimony in the work of the monk Udalricus of that age, who describes the customs of the monastery of Clugny in France. He makes specific mention of the Eucharistic dove suspended over the altars at all times. In places the custom was maintained in later ages. Fr. Bianchini, the learned editor of the *Liber Pontificate*,^[3] asserts that in his day the Eucharistic dove was seen suspended over the altar in the cathedral church of Notre Dame in Paris. The Basilian monks of the little town of Grotta Ferrata near Rome, who follow the Greek rite in their liturgy, have it over the altar of their church at the present

time.

A third receptacle was used for the Holy Eucharist in the period of Christian antiquity and in the middle ages. It was in the form of a tower, called by its Latin equivalent *turris*, or in its diminutive form, *turricula*. Reference to it is found principally in writings of Roman or Gallic origin. Thus mention is made of a *turris* in each of the passages found in the lives of Pope Silvester (314-335), Pope Innocent I (401-417) and Pope Hilarus (461-468), to which reference was made before. In each case a tower made of either gold or silver was given together with a Eucharistic dove to the churches named in the previous section. We read in the life of St. Remigius, Bishop of Rheims at the close of the fifth century, that in his last will he requested his successor in the see of Rheims to have a tower made for the safekeeping of the Holy Eucharist. St. Felix, Bishop of Bourges in the sixth century, had a tower made of gold to preserve therein the body of Christ. St. Gregory, Bishop of Tours in the last part of the sixth century, has a passage in his work *De Gloria Martyrum*, in which he speaks of the tower for the reservation of the mystery of the body of the Lord. A similar expression is found in a poem of Venantius Fortunatus, a contemporary of Gregory of Tours and Bishop of Poitiers. "In the tower," he says, "was laid the golden gift of the body of the sacred lamb." The abbot Hugo of the Benedictine monastery of Fontanelle in Normandy in the tenth century gave to his abbey church a tower of gold. Even in the seventeenth century were such towers found in the church of the monastery of Marmoutiers near Tours, and in the Roman basilicas of St. Clement, St. Agnes, and St. Lawrence, as has been attested by Edmund Martene, a Benedictine scholar of France, of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The material out of which these towers were made was, as in the case of the Eucharistic doves, either gold or silver. The places where these towers were used were the city of Rome and various sections of France. The custom prevailed from the fourth down to the seventeenth century. The sacramental

towers, according to the information available, were of different sizes, and were used in different ways. In France the towers were comparatively small, and were kept in the *Secretarium* or Sacrarium, i. e. in what now we call the sacristy, and were placed on the altar at the time of the Holy Sacrifice. This is plainly indicated in the passage of St. Gregory of Tours, who tells us that at the beginning of the Sacrifice of the Mass the deacon of the Mass takes the tower with the body of the Lord, carries it to the door of the temple, enters the temple, and places it on the altar. It may also be inferred from the passage which mentions the gift of a tower made by the abbot Hugo of Fontanelle to his monastery, when it says that its weight was about six pounds, and therefore easily portable. The towers used in the churches of Rome were considerably larger. Those spoken of in the lives of the popes already mentioned weighed thirty pounds, and one even sixty pounds. In all probability these towers were placed and fastened on the altar; or they were suspended with chains from the ceiling of the *ciborium*. This arrangement was resorted to in the churches of Rome, of which the learned writer Martene speaks. In this case it is also probable that when tower and dove are spoken of simultaneously, as happens with regard to the churches of Rome at the time of the popes spoken of, the dove was placed inside the tower, and was not suspended from the *ciborium*.

Finally there came a fourth receptacle for the Holy Eucharist, called the Sacrament-House. It consisted of a structure, usually made of stone, and often of considerable height, reaching in some instances to the vaulting of the church or chapel in which it was found. It was separate from the altar, and was placed either in that part of the church known as the choir, or in a side chapel especially reserved for the Blessed Sacrament. The custom of making Sacrament-Houses arose toward the end of the thirteenth century, and lasted, at least in some instances, until after the middle of the nineteenth century. It prevailed particularly in Belgium, Germany, and Austria. In the cathedral

church of Muenster, in the Province of Westphalia, Germany, one may still see the beautiful structure which served to house the Blessed Sacrament in the past. The Sacred Congregation of Rites, 21 August, 1863, forbade the use of these Sacrament-Houses. Thus they disappeared, or ceased to be used.

As a permanent substitute for all of these receptacles we have the tabernacle, as we see it today; i. e. the small case or cabinet of rectangular or of round shape, placed right above the center of the altar. The name of tabernacle given to it, as well as the object designated by the name, has come into general use in comparatively recent times. The word tabernacle has been used since the middle ages; but its occurrence is not very frequent. It is found in the *Constitutiones Synodicae* of Odo, Bishop of Paris in the twelfth century; in the *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum* of William Durandus, a learned canonist of the thirteenth century; and in a decree of a council held in the city of Alix, southern France, in 1585, where detailed regulations are laid down for the construction and maintainance of the tabernacle. The Council of Trent (1545-1563) decreed that the Blessed Sacrament be reserved in the churches (Sess. XIII., Cap. VI., Can. VII.); but in designating the receptacle for it, it has recourse not to the word tabernacle, but to the word *Sacrarium*. Since then, however, the word tabernacle has been used regularly in ecclesiastical legislation, e.g. in the decrees of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, 29 November, 1574) and 10 February, 1579, and also in the decrees of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, 21 August, 1863, and 6 February, 1875. The liturgical books, such as the *Caeremoniale Episcoporum* and the Roman Ritual, which give directions regarding reservation of the Blessed Sacrament, also make use of this expression.

The use of the tabernacle became quite general in the Church after the Council of Trent. France and Italy were the first to adopt it. St. Charles Borromeo, Archbishop of Milan in the sixteenth century, did much to make this practice prevail. The above-mentioned liturgical books, and the decree of

the Sacred Congregation of Rites of 21 August, 1863, made its adoption obligatory for all churches of the Catholic world. Other kinds of receptacles, if they are maintained anywhere, are used only in exceptional and isolated instances.

III.

The legislation of the Code on the tabernacle is contained in the three canons 1268, 1269, and 1271. The first speaks of the place where the Blessed Sacrament should be reserved, or where the tabernacle should be placed; the second, of the tabernacle itself, of its position, of its construction and its ornamentation; and the third, of the lamp before the tabernacle.

The three paragraphs of canon 1268 that bear on the subject, read as follows:

1. The Blessed Sacrament cannot be reserved continually or regularly on more than one altar in the same church.
2. The Blessed Sacrament is to be reserved in the most prominent place of honor, and therefore, generally on the main altar, unless there is one more conveniently located and better suited for the veneration and worship of this august Sacrament. The rules regarding the last three days of Holy Week, however, must be observed.
3. In cathedral, collegiate, and conventual churches, in which choir functions are held at the main altar, the Blessed Sacrament is, as a rule, to be reserved in another chapel or on another than the high altar, in order not to interfere with the services.

The first paragraph of this canon lays down the general rule, that the Blessed Sacrament is to be reserved only on one altar in the same church, and therefore not on two or several more. Only one exception has been made to

this general law; and that is in favor of churches where perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is observed. According to a decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, 18 May, 1878, these churches must have another tabernacle on another altar, at which Holy Communion may be distributed to the faithful.

It must be noted that the text says: The Blessed Sacrament is not to be reserved continually or regularly on more than one altar in the same church. Hence there may be occasions when the Blessed Sacrament for a time should or may be kept on several altars. One such occasion is the celebration of the Forty Hours, if this devotion is continued uninterruptedly. In that case it is proper that the Blessed Sacrament be kept on another altar than the altar of exposition, and this for the distribution of Holy Communion. It is also lawful to transfer the Blessed Sacrament, let us say the Benediction Host, from the regular altar to another, dedicated to a special saint or to one of the mysteries of our faith, if a special devotion, say a triduum or novena, be held in honor of that saint or mystery, and be followed by Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

The second paragraph of the canon designates the one place or the one altar at which or on which the Blessed Sacrament should be kept, by saying that the place should be the most prominent and most honored in the church. Since the high altar is as a rule the most prominent and most honored spot in the church, the Blessed Sacrament should be reserved on that altar. An exception may be made, if there should be in the church another altar that would be more appropriate and more becoming for the veneration due to the Blessed Sacrament. This general rule of having the Blessed Sacrament ordinarily on the high altar does not affect the rubrical regulations concerning reservation of the Blessed Sacrament during the last three days of Holy Week. In fact, on Holy Thursday the sacred host to be used at the service of the Presanctified on Good Friday is carried to the repository prepared in a

side chapel of the church, and left there until the following morning. The other consecrated particles are removed from the high altar and placed in a chapel separated from the church or in a case in the sacristy, where they remain until after the services of Holy Saturday.

This paragraph of the canon says that the Blessed Sacrament should be kept on the main or high altar as a rule, *regulariter*. This means that there may be exceptions to the general rule, a few of which are mentioned in the same paragraph. The third paragraph contains a further exception. It says that in cathedral, collegiate, and conventual churches it is preferable to have the Blessed Sacrament ordinarily not on the high altar, but in another chapel or on another altar.

Three classes of churches are specified in this section of the canon. The first is that of cathedral churches in episcopal cities, where the bishops have their "cathedra," their episcopal chair. The second is that of collegiate churches, i. e. churches to which is attached a college or a body of priests or canons whose main object is the solemn celebration of the divine office in choir; just as it is done by the canons of cathedral churches. The third class is that of conventual churches, i. e. churches of monastic institutions, in which also is held the solemn celebration of the divine office. In all of these churches it is preferable that the Blessed Sacrament be kept at another altar. The reason assigned in the text is that the ceremonies of the ecclesiastical services might be carried out more freely. So many movements are made, and so many positions are taken during these solemn services by those taking part in them, that it would seem irreverent to the Blessed Sacrament if these solemn ceremonies were carried out around the altar where the Holy Eucharist is kept. It must be noticed that this part of the canon is not prescriptive, in the sense that it does not command the custody of the Blessed Sacrament on another than the high altar in the above churches. The text says *opportunitum est*, "it is opportune or it is preferable, that it should be done; it does not say

that it must be done under all circumstances. And thus, apparently, this section of the canon does not apply to the cathedral churches of America, to which no college of canons is attached, and in which the solemn celebration of the divine office is not carried out regularly.

To complete this subject, mention must be made of a regulation contained in the *Caeremoniale Episcoporum*, according to which the Blessed Sacrament is to be removed from the altar at which the bishop solemnly pontificates. The four paragraphs of canon 1269 read as follows:

1. The Blessed Sacrament is to be kept in an immovable tabernacle in the middle of the altar.
2. The tabernacle is to be skillfully constructed and safely locked, fittingly decorated according to the liturgical rules, kept free from other objects, and so carefully guarded that there is no danger of sacriligious profanation.
3. For any reason that seems good to the Ordinary, the Blessed Sacrament may be reserved elsewhere at night, but in a quite safe and fitting place, and always on a corporal.
4. The key to the tabernacle in which the Blessed Sacrament is reserved is to be guarded carefully, and the responsibility for carrying out this law rests with the priest who is in charge of the church or oratory.

The second paragraph of this canon contains five different directions on as many different points. The first matter referred to is the construction of the tabernacle, about which it says that it should be of good craftsmanship, made skillfully and beautifully. Nothing is said about the material out of which the tabernacle should be made. It may be of wood, stone or metal, and the more precious the material is, the more becoming the tabernacle will be. The

second point demands that the tabernacle be securely closed all around. This requires that the door should be provided with lock and key. The third point concerns the adornment of the tabernacle. It must be becoming, in accordance with the liturgical laws. The principal prescriptions in this regard, as contained in the Roman Ritual, the decrees of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, and of Rites, and in the works on sacred liturgy, demand that a corporal be laid inside, on which the Blessed Sacrament is to be placed, that the interior walls be lined with silk, silver, gold, or other good material, and that the exterior or door be covered with a veil. This veil may be either white or of the color of the office of the day. However, on All Souls' day, at funerals, and other such occasions, when the Mass is said in black vestments, the veil should be, not black, but purple.

The fourth point prescribes that nothing be kept in the tabernacle except the Blessed Sacrament. This section probably has reference to a former custom of having sacred relics kept in the tabernacle. This was forbidden by a decree of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, 3 May, 1693. The fifth point recommends that the tabernacle be so vigilantly guarded as to exclude all danger of profanation.

Canon 1271, which speaks of the lamp that should burn before the tabernacle, reads as follows:

At least one lamp is to be kept burning day and night before the tabernacle in which the Blessed Sacrament is kept. In this lamp olive oil or beeswax is to be used; but where olive oil is not available, with the sanction of the Ordinary other oils may be used, but they should be vegetable oils, if possible.

This canon prescribes that at least one lamp should burn continually before the tabernacle in which the Blessed Sacrament is contained. This lamp may

be right in front of the tabernacle, hanging down from the ceiling or vault of the sanctuary, as is the case in many parish churches; or it may be fastened with a bracket on the side wall; or it may be placed on the altar alongside the tabernacle. The fuel should be either olive oil or beeswax; if oil is used, and olive oil cannot be had, then the Ordinary may permit the use of other oils, of vegetable oils if at all possible. Among these latter may be mentioned linseed oil and sesame oil. The use of electric light, which was permitted during the late war by a decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, 23 November, 1916, is excluded now by this canon, and so it should not be used. However, electric or even gas light may be used on the altar as an aid to reading and for ornamental purposes.

All these detailed prescriptions of the Gode show very distinctly the Church's desire to show in all things the profoundest respect to the Holy Eucharist. This desire springs from the abiding faith in the real presence of our Lord in His Holy Sacrament.

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ENDNOTES

1 Matth. 26:26 ff.; Mark 14:22 ff.; Luke 22:19 f.: I Cor. 11:23 ff.

2 Lib. VIII, cap. I.

2 Rome, 1718.

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