In his Preface of the *Treatise on the Love of God*, dated 29 June 1616, St. Francis de Sales himself indicates the year he composed this piece: “Nineteen years ago,” he states, i.e., in 1597 and probably in the first months since its publication came before the two letters or theses addressed to the minister Viret in May or June.

We know that on Christmas night of 1596 the Apostle of the Chablais had the joy of celebrating Mass for the first time in the Church of Saint-Hippolyte in Thonon. From that time on, Viret, who several months before suffered a humiliating defeat, redoubled his blasphemies against the Holy Eucharist and august Sacrifice. He “exclaimed in a disjointed way that the Mass of the papists was pure idolatry, that re-establishing it in the Chablais was the desolation predicted by the prophet Daniel, and especially, that the Catholic teaching of the real presence of the body of the Savior in the Eucharist destroyed the Symbol and the analogy of faith (for it was very easy to use the word analogy which was not understood by his listeners, in order to appear very learned). And on this matter,” continues the saint, “the other preachers charged me to write something to refute this presumptuousness, and I did what seemed to me to be appropriate, by writing this brief Meditation on the Symbol of the Apostles to affirm the truth.”

Published soon afterward, “all the copies were distributed in this diocese where I no longer find any,” the saintly Bishop adds. In fact, it has not been possible to discover a single copy of the first printing. In place of this, we take our text from the second printing in the *opusculum* entitled, “The Debate Agreed Upon by the Catholic

In reality, the second part of this little volume … forms a special opusculum with its own frontispiece, vignette, date, etc., like that in the Conference. Its title is as follows: “The Theses Publicly Posted in the City of Geneva In Order to Be Discussed Between the Catholic Preachers of the Order of Capuchins and the Ministers of the Said Geneva in the City of Thonon.” The first thesis is given hereinafter, as no. VIII. The present “Meditation,” which constitutes the second in the little printed volume, has the title: Simple Consideration on the Symbol of the Apostles, for the Confirmation of the Catholic Faith Regarding the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar. We believe we should substitute for this title the one that it had in the first edition since the saintly author himself has kept it in his brief description of it in the Preface of the Treatise on the Love of God, even though in his first letter to Viret he used the word “Consideration.”

Dom Mackey noted in his General Introduction the error committed by Father Truchet by attributing to Father Chérubin the composition of this piece “replete with such elevated and gracious insights” and which “exudes such a fervent piety.” The title of opusculum [Life of Fr. Chérubin] printed by Binet in 1598, and the Approbation of the Doctors (3 and 12 August), where only the Capucin is mentioned, very likely occasioned this error.

A SHORT MEDITATION ON THE SYMBOL OF THE APOSTLES TO CONFIRM THE CATHOLIC TRUTH ON THE REAL PRESENCE OF THE LORD’S BODY IN THE HOLY SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR

I BELIEVE

If I consider, O my Savior, my God, your sacred body, which you have seasoned with so many miracles to nourish us in our deserts, and that, completely awestruck in admiration, nothing else remains in my mouth but this protestation of my insufficiency: What is this? What is this? Manhu? Manhu? [Exod.16:15]. O Lord, look at me! My human judgment, my flesh, my senses assault me in a thousand ways. They say to me: How is it possible for the Savior to give his flesh to eat? Oh how hard is this saying! And who can accept it [John 6:53,61] or believe it?

But, it is by your grace, my God, that these seducers have not yet bested me. I have always opposed them with the word and Symbol that your Apostles once taught to those who have gone before us. Following the advice of these great servants of your Majesty, Ambrose and Augustine, I armed myself as with the sign of your protection; I have closed and sealed my heart with this seal so that it will not be open to their suggestions. It is like a quiver which furnishes me with thousands and thousands of arrows to combat them. And what about this sacred word which is the beginning of this Symbol, would it not suffice, if the word would be no other to frustrate all of the efforts of these seditious people? I BELIEVE. This is the word that I pronounced since my baptism by the mouth of those who presented me. I am then a believer and faithful [cf. John 20:27], not a hearer nor one who understands. And yet, the more it becomes difficult to understand and comprehend, the more it becomes believable and worthy of veneration. Faith has more luster where understanding has more obscurity.
IN GOD THE ALMIGHTY FATHER, CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

God is God in all of his works, but in those that are greater, he causes us to better see his divinity. And since this sacrament is a great work of God, what greater mark of assurance can he bring to his Worker in order to be believed by me than to be admirable and incomprehensible?

Are there not three Persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – in one same and simple essence? The faith that digests this sovereign difficulty, what problem can it have in believing that one body can be in several places? God does not want me to be like those rebellious people who badmouthed his divine Majesty by saying: Can he set up a table here in the desert? [Ps. 77:19]. Those parts of the paschal Lamb that I cannot chew, I will throw in the fire [Exod. 12:10] of the infinite power of this almighty Father in whom I believe. How long with these little clouds of difficulty which our natural eyes see in this sacrament last in the force of God’s wind [cf. Luke 1:37]? What kind of irresolvable obduracy is there that this fire cannot overcome?

The word of God had such power in itself that things that did not exist came into existence [Gen. 1:1ff.; Ps. 148:5]. How much more power will it have to cause to exist wherever it pleases those that exist and change them into other things? It has put into a place that which did not exist. Why will it not put in several places that which is in one place?

IN JESUS CHRIST HIS ONLY SON, OUR LORD

When I see, O my Savior, your Father loving the world so much that he gave you [John 3:16] to be its Shepherd and Doctor, alas, what marvel it is, I say, [if] the Son, of equal and same goodness, gave himself to be both the food and the medicine in order all the more to be Savior, King and Lord, of everything and be everywhere ours.

WHO WAS CONCEIVED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY

How were you conceived, O my God, in the womb of a Virgin without any male component? And why will one look for the order of nature in your body which was formed quite above the natural order and born of a Virgin?

And since your body did not occupy space while coming forth from the virginal womb of your Mother (otherwise it would have breached her virginity), but penetrated it like a ray of light through a glass, why will one find it incredible if it does not occupy any space in this admirable sacrament?

SUFFERED UNDER PONTIUS PILATE, WAS CRUCIFIED, DIED AND WAS BURIED

The one who loved you so much, O my soul, that being capable of saving you with just one drop of his blood and the least of his sufferings, willed nonetheless to completely expose his body to
the dolours and suffering of a very bitter death to give you life, and, yes, it is the very same one who, to preserve it for you, nourishes you with this same body. Isn’t it really believable? The love of mothers is not content merely to have produced an infant from her substance but it still causes to nourish the child with her body. And truly, after so many exquisite celebrations of this Passion with which the servants were fed, as was the case with the paschal lamb, the manna and several other instances, it would have been a very sparse and cold commemoration of it for the children to utilize anything other than simple bread and wine.

**HE DESCENDED TO HELL, THE THIRD DAY HE ROSE FROM THE DEAD**¹⁷

He is the one who, having the power to visit those *in the bosom of Abraham* [cf. Luke 16:23] in a thousand different ways, nevertheless descended to the nether world by the real presence of his soul. It is not surprising that, having the power to nourish us in several other ways, he chose the dearest, the most admirable and most lovable way, which is to give us as food his own flesh.

But if, by the resurrection, he freed his body of the indelicate qualities of being capable of suffering, of weight, density, imperviousness to light and other similar qualities; if he passed through the rock [of the tomb – Matt. 28:2] and entered [the upper room] *with the doors closed* [John 20:19,26; Luke 24:36] (which cannot be done without placing two bodies in the same space in such a way that the one does not occupy the space of the other); if he made himself invisible, impalpable, imperceptible and without occupying space, why would he not be, in this Sacrament, invisible and without occupying space since he said that he is there? For what reason would we look more for in him the conditions of a mortal and corruptible body? [cf. 1 Cor. 15:42-45].

**HE ASCENDED TO HEAVEN, IS SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE FATHER ALMIGHTY**¹⁸

Will we find it strange that this body really and truly, although supernaturally, comes into ours since, lighter than a bird, going beyond all of the rules of a human body, it *ascended above all the heavens*? [Eph. 4:10]. “He is seated at the right hand of God the Father” *above all the heavens*, where he no longer occupies place nor space, for what surface area can envelope the body which is far above every other body? Why would it not be fitting here below not to be in a place or fill any space?

**FROM THERE HE WILL COME TO JUDGE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD**¹⁹

Thus, no longer being subject to either space, nor place, nor weight, he will appear in the air on the last day with his saints, visible to all men wherever they may be [Matt. 24:27,30; 25:31,32; Apoc. 1:7], albeit with different results. This would be as great a miracle as that by which he is invisible in this great Sacrament.
At that time, he will judge as guilty of his body and of his blood those who eat and drink unworthily this precious and adorable Sacrament for not having discerned the body of the Lord [1 Cor. 11:27,29]. Of what other food has it ever been said that the one who would eat it unworthily was guilty of the body of Jesus Christ, if not of this body those who abuse it and do not discern it at all? Such a severe decree has not been rendered for the manna and the paschal lamb, although in this case one eats, by faith and spiritually, Jesus himself [1 Cor. 10:3,4].

_I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT_[^20]

Just as everything God has made he has made by the work of the Holy Spirit, so even now he makes by the work of the Holy Spirit these supernatural things which faith cannot conceive of. _How will this be done to me, says the Blessed Virgin, since I do not know man?_ The archangel Gabriel responds: _The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you_ [Luke 1:34,35]. And now you ask how bread becomes the body of Jesus Christ? My response is: The Holy Spirit overshadows and works these things far above every word and thought.

The Holy Spirit has dictated the Sacred Scriptures [John 14:26, 2 Tim. 3:16, 2 Pet. 1:20,21].[^21] Would he have put in them words so expressive and vivid as these: _This is my body_ [Matt. 26:26; Mark 14:22] if this were not the true body of Our Lord?[^22] Would he not have given some declaration of his intention if he intended something other than the proper and obvious meaning of these words? And he who is a Doctor of the Church [St. John Chrysostom] would he have allowed, in an article so important, error and deceit? Would [the Holy Spirit] have abandoned us for such a long time?

_THE HOLY UNIVERSAL CHURCH, THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS_[^23]

Truly, how could one call the Church holy (which alone is universal), if it did not maintain the truth both in this matter and in others, at all times, in all places and among all nations? This would not have been the case if the true body of Our Lord were not in this Sacrament.

But is there a more perfect communion of saints than this one in which we are all one bread and one body, in as much as we all share the same _bread which came down from heaven, living and life-giving_ [John 6:33,41,50,51]. And how are we able to eat the same bread if this bread were not the body of Jesus Christ? There would be as many different kinds of bread as there are places. And if we were not to eat the _one same spiritual food_ by faith, what greater communion would the Christian have with other Christians than with the ancient Jews who also eat Jesus Christ by faith and consequently the one same spiritual food? [1 Cor. 10:3]. Don’t we have something more than they?
THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

Lord, you have said that your body and your blood in this Sacrament was given, broken, shared by many for the forgiveness of sins [Matt. 26:28; Luke 22:19,20; Mark 14:24; 1 Cor. 11:24]. Ah! May it never come about that I believe it was some other blood that was poured out and another body given for the remission of my sins than your own natural body. Now would a simple figure of speech and commemoration really have this power? The blood of the heifer poured out, although a figure of the blood shed on the cross, only sanctified with regard to the purity of the flesh. No, it is the very blood of your Majesty which cleanses our consciences of dead works in order to serve the living God [Heb. 9:13,14].

THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY

Ah, blessed Jesus, when in an instant, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet, will the dead rise and the same flesh of each one, already disintegrated in a thousand ways, be reproduced from its former flesh into an incorruptible and immortal body? [1 Cor. 15:52]. My God, what a marvel! However, I marvel at something almost like it: in an instant, in the blink of an eye, at the trumpet of your word, your very body, which is seated at the right hand of the Father in Heaven [Mark 16:19], is, in a certain way, reproduced in this Holy Sacrament everywhere the mystery is celebrated.

But, O admirable Savior, if a little bit of leaven causes the whole batch of dough to rise [1 Cor. 5:6], if a spark suffices to set a house on fire, if a grain placed in the earth makes the ground fertile and reproduces others, how much more should I hope that your blessed body entering mine, when the time arrives, will raise it from its corruption, inflame it with its glory and make it immortal, impassable, subtle, agile, resplendent and adorned with all of the glorious qualities that one can ever hope for! This power cannot be found in figurative language; it has to come from the truth of your very precious body.

LIFE EVERLASTING

Indeed, what other food, O Savior, if not your body, can give everlasting life? A living bread is what is needed to give life; a bread come down from heaven [John 6:52,55] to give heavenly life, a bread that is your very self, my Savior and my God, to give life immortal, eternal and everlasting. The manna, although a true figure of your body, was not able to do so [John 6:49]; what was required was a more solid and meaty food, for such a life. What other food can be so employed but you, who are living forever and ever? Amen.

UNSHAKEABLE FAITH
The word “symbol” comes from the word *symballein*, “meaning in English: to come together, to throw together. The background to the word’s etymology is an ancient usage: two corresponding halves of a ring, a staff, or a tablet were used as tokens of identity for guests, messengers or partners to a treaty. Possession of the corresponding piece entitled the holder to receive a thing or simply to hospitality. A *symbolum* is something that points to its complementary other half and thus creates mutual recognition and unity. It is the expression and means of unity. Thus in the description of the creed or profession of faith as the *symbolum* we have at the same time a profound interpretation of its true nature. For in fact this is what the original meaning or aim of dogmatic formulations in the Church was: to facilitate a common profession of faith in God, common worship of him. As *symbolum*, it points to the other person, to the unity of the spirit in the one Word” (JOSEPH CARDINAL RATZINGER, *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. by J.R. Foster [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004], 98).

1 This is a translation of the editor’s first footnote on this writing found in the Annecy edition, vol. XXIII, pp. 18-19


3 La Conference accordée entre les predicatours catholiques de l’Ordre des Capuccins et les Ministres de Genève...ensemble les Theses qui ont esté affigées audit Geneve, qui seront rabant enim quid esset quibus ait Moses iste est

4 Nunc...§...De Sacerd., (§)...A Paris...


6 Oeuvres I, note 2, p. lxxx.

7 Vie du P. Chérubin de Maurienne, de l’Ordre des Frères Mineurs Capucins, Chambéry, 1880, chap. IX.

8 Translators note: De Sales uses this apparent Hebrew expression which was included in the Vulgate translation of Ex 16:15 and is retained, interestingly, in both the original Latin and an English translation: “*quod cum vidisset filii Israhel dixerunt ad invicem man hu quod significat quid est hoc ignorabaut enim quid esset quibus ait Moses iste est panis quem dedit Dominus vobis ad vescendum.*” (“And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another: Manhu! which signifieth: What is this? for they knew not what it was. And Moses said to them: This is the bread which the Lord hath given you to eat.”)

9 The scriptural references are retained in italics as in the French work.

10 Amb., lib. III de Virg.

11 A...§...Augustin, lib. (Nunc Serm.) I De Symbol. ad Catech., c. 1 (§1), et lib. II, c. 1 (§1). The editors note that Sermons II, II, and IV sur le Symbole, designated under the title of Books, have been attributed to Saint Augustine but do not appear to be from him.


13 Amb., lib. IV de Sacrament., cc. iv and v.

14 Chrysost., hom. lx ad populum Antioch. (Now, in Matt., lxxxii, §§ 4,5,6).

15 Amb., ubi sup., et c. ix, De iis qui init.myster. (Nunc, De myster., § 53.) Amb., epist. lxi (al. lxiid), ad Siriciun, (§ 7). Hieron., contra Helvid. (De perpetua virginit. B. Mariae.)

16 Chrysost., ubi sup. Amb., ubi sup. (id est, De mysteriis, c. ix.)

17 Iren., l. V, in fin., (§ 31.)

18 Cyril., lib. IV in Jo., c. xxi. (Nunc, l. IV in Joan. vi, 62,63.)

19 Basil., lib. II, de Bapt., c. (al. qua.) iii.


22 Chrysost., hom. lx ad populum Antioch. (Nunc, in Matt., lxxxii, § 4.).

23 St. Leon., epist. xxiii (al. lxx), ad Cler. et pleb. Constant.

24 Chrysost. homil. lxi ad populum Antioch. (Nunc, in Joan., hom. xlvi, al. xlv, §§ 2,3.).


26 This is a translation of the anagram of St. Francis de Sales’ name which he himself made.