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"THE BODY OF CHRIST: AMEN!": THE EXPANDING INCARNATION

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The article aims to refresh Christian sensibilities to the bodily character of ecclesial existence. It links Christ's incarnation with the continuing formation of his Body, arguing against any suggestion that the incarnation is less real following his resurrection and ascension than prior to them. Though massive changes have occurred in our understanding of the material universe, the expanding event of the incarnation remains the focus of Christian intentionality. In its commitment to the reality of God-with-us in Christ, an adequate theology of the Body of Christ can appeal to various analogical perspectives on the meaning of "bodiliness."

FOR CHRISTIAN FAITH, THE INCARNATION is the singular, constitutive event: "for in him the whole fullness of deity (*theototes*) dwells bodily [*somatikos*]" (Col 2:9[1]; see Jn 1:14). Christian sensibility to this "bodily" event means that many kinds of expression come into play, as in the languages of metaphor, symbol, sacrament, devotion and spirituality, art and moral praxis. In what follows, I consider just one aspect of this focal mystery of Christian faith, namely, the continuing incarnational character of God's self-communication in Christ. I hope to stimulate further exploration of this basic aspect of Christian intentionality—and its implications for Christian existence more generally. In that regard, Pope John Paul II's *The Theology of the Body*[2] has been widely influential as an unprecedented presentation of a Christian understanding of the body and sexual relations. Yet the pope does not explicitly discuss how the "nuptial meaning of the body"[3] is related

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[1] Note the two hapax legomena, *theotes* and *somatikos.* I use the RSV translation throughout.
[2] John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan*, foreword John S. Grabowski (Boston: Pauline, 1997).
[3] Ibid. 60–63.

to Christ's risen Body[4]; this question invites further research into a theology of marriage, sexual relationality, eschatological fulfilment, and allied questions.

My aim is to concentrate on the reality of the Body of Christ as the point of convergence for all other considerations of the bodily dimensions of human existence.

With this in mind, one cannot but be aware of vast areas of ecclesial and sacramental theology that bear on the question, and that are necessarily touched on in what follows. For instance, Louis-Marie Chauvet's magisterial synthesis, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, is pertinent.[5] Philosophy, anthropology, and the theology of church and sacraments combine to spread out a vast area of possible considerations if I am to consider the expanding reality of the incarnation in time. My aim, however, is more modest with its concentration on the Body of Christ, crucified and risen, as the focal phenomenon of God's incarnational communication. Given Chauvet's methodological approach, a consideration of the paschal Body of Christ as the "starting point"[6] appears only after some preliminary 470 pages. Clearly, here and elsewhere,[7] I would emphasize that the "starting point" for a theology of the sacraments should be the transformed Body of Christ at the beginning, and as an ever-present dimension, of any "bodily" theology of the sacraments and the church. This, I hope, will emerge from what follows.

THE INCARNATIONAL ECONOMY

The crucifixion terminated Christ's physical life on this earth. The empty tomb leaves a blank, ambiguous space, and the time of privileged "seeings"

[4] I capitalize "Body" to refer to the incarnation as it expands in history.

[5] Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, trans. Patrick Madigan, S.J., and Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1995).

[6] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament* 476. See the whole section dealing with the incarnation and liturgical celebration of the paschal mystery, 476–89, and leading into specifically sacramental considerations in the chapters following. A more popular presentation is found in Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2001). While I have no doubt that I, along with most readers, greatly profit from Chauvet's deep sensitivity to the incarnational economy and the relation of the sacraments to our embodied existence, to translate that phrase, *au risque du corps* in the original French subtitle, as "at the mercy of the body" is misleading. Whatever the meaning of the English idiom here, if there is any "mercy" involved, it is that of God in communication with our bodily humanity! The original French phrase would suggest more an interaction between the Word of God and human embodiment.

[7] Anthony J. Kelly, *The Resurrection Effect: Transforming Christian Life and Thought* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2008) esp. 1–24.

of the Risen One ended with Paul. When on so many counts the risen Jesus is invisible, his ascension seems to remove him completely from the terrestrial realm—into a heavenly cloud that takes him "out of sight"(Acts 1:9).[8] Is faith left, then, with only the memory of him as an example to follow, albeit always guided by the witness of the Spirit? To put the question in another way: has Christ's resurrection and ascension come to mean that he is now in a disembodied state, and that there is a diminishing sense of the incarnation in the world of contemporary experience?

Such questions are elemental. They provoke many possible answers. An illuminating perspective in this respect is to think of the incarnation as an unfolding event. God's self-communication does not cease to be incarnational and continues to be actualized in the church as the Body of Christ. Though I intend neither to exclude enriching senses of the church as, say, "communion in the Spirit" or the "people of God," nor to diminish the importance of researching data on the church's public and historical institutionality, I hope that my effort to focus on the incarnational realism of God's action will serve to refine and intensify the sensibility of Christian faith.

The seemingly simple and even elemental question regarding the incarnation as a continuing and expanding event in the reality of the world swarms with difficulties. For instance, scriptural commentaries understandably indicate a variety of "bodily" figures of speech, but the "body language" of the New Testament appears to presuppose something more inexpressible, concrete, and communicative.[9] But just how to relate the bodily reality of Christ to our present experience of the world—and to the historical reality of the church—is the problem. Theological methods generally guard against an understanding of Christian faith floating free from its ecclesial embodiment and setting, even if that does not preclude a consideration of other contexts—be they literary, historical, anthropological, cosmological, or religious.[10] Incarnational faith cannot be detached from its incorporation in history and community. Furthermore, the ecclesial Body of Christ necessarily includes the intersubjective relationship between Christ and Christians in a communion of mutual self-giving as depicted in the spousal imagery of Ephesians and elsewhere.[11] But to

[8] My *Resurrection Effect* made this point, but its provocative argument would have been more effective had it taken greater account of the incarnational significance of the ascension.

[9] Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, Sacra Pagina 7, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. (Collegeville, Minn.; Liturgical, 1999); Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, Sacra Pagina 17, ed. Daniel J. Harington, S.J. (Collegeville; Liturgical, 2000).

[10] See the section "The Mediation of the Church" in Chauvet, *Sacraments* 29–37.

[11] For a discussion of this point, see Paul McPartlan, "Who Is the Church? Zizioulas and von Balthasar on the Church's Identity," *Ecclesiology* 4 (2008) 271–88.

persist with my question: to what extent has the realism of the Body of Christ been attenuated in polyvalent figurations of the church so as to be understood in increasingly metaphorical and less intentionally incarnational terms?

Might one wonder whether the transcendent nature of this causality has been interpreted in too spiritual a fashion and without giving due weight to how God acts in and through materiality and embodiment? It is not as though the incarnate Word has vanished into nowhere, dimly imagined, if at all, only in an evanescent past or safely relegated to some utterly remote heaven.[12] But there is another quite traditional category, that of the divine missions—understood as the quasi-projection of the divine processions into the created world. These are often considered simply alongside the divine transcendent causality with no clearly worked out connection with it. The missions, whether visible or invisible, are, as the term implies, "sendings"—in that the divine self-giving means that the divine Persons come to exist in the space-time world in a new way (as Aquinas would have it, in *Summa theologiae* 1, q. 43, a. 1), to gather creation into the eternal life of the Trinity. Yet the challenge is to bring together our understanding of the divine causality and the trinitarian missions in order to gain a greater sense of the reality of the Body of Christ in all its dimensions.[13] Moreover, the Augustinian-Thomist distinction between the "invisible" and "visible" missions (see *ST* 1, q. 43, aa. 2–8) might be of considerable relevance to my question. The "invisible" missions of the Word and Spirit occur in the minds and hearts of all good people in the realm of grace; to that degree they span all space and time. The "visible" missions occur with a specific history in the incarnation of the Word in Jesus of Nazareth, and in the ecclesial outpouring of the Spirit—with consequences for our understanding of Scripture as the inspired word, and the sacraments as symbolized mediations of grace, and so on.

That is a valuable scheme, and increasingly so, especially as background for any theology of interreligious relations. However, the disjunction between invisible and visible is not quite as clear as we might presume. For example, is the risen (and ascended) Christ visible or invisible? In *The Resurrection Effect* (see n. 7) I argued for a more christophanic appreciation of the body of the Risen One in a horizon of transformation in which visibility

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In what follows, I am closer to Zizioulas. But even in his influential *Being as Communion*, one might ask whether the Body of Christ is fully recognized, given the emphasis on the trinitarian and pneumatological aspects of communion.

[12] Has the theology of Christian existence becomes too "spiritual" or soul-centered in its expression? I think so. The eschatology of an "afterlife" of "separated souls" awaiting the resurrection of the body needs some radical rethinking.

[13] In this context, note how Aquinas follows his treatment of the missions with his treatment of creation (cf. *Summa theologiae* [hereafter *ST*] 1, qq. 43–44).

and invisibility of the divine communication are more closely interrelated. This argument may lead to a more thoroughgoing appreciation of the continuing incarnation—and to a more "realized eschatology" of mission.

CHANGING WORLDS

In two provocative chapters, "Lost Heaven" and "The Interrupted Body," in the programmatic *Transformation Theology: Church in the World*, Oliver Davies presents the importance of stressing the continuing incarnation.[14] He indicates how a new cosmological understanding influenced Western theology at the critical time of the Reformation. One result was the loosening of "the relation between the domain of sensibility (the life of the senses) and the actuality of faith."[15] As the sensible domain became increasingly the field of new scientific exploration, the life of faith began to abandon the material world for a realm of interior subjectivity.[16] As a result, something of the bodily and sensuous experience proper to the incarnational and sacramental sense of faith was lost in the course of the last 500 years or so. The new Copernican heliocentric cosmology unsettled the cosmological imagination of faith based on a Ptolemaic conception of the universe. That premodern world had imagined heaven "up there" beyond the spheres—to which Christ has ascended, and where his risen body is now located. When such a spatial imagination was undermined, it seemed that there was no place for Christ to be.

Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, as Davies intriguingly points out,[17] must be given credit for resisting what they understood to be a materialistic objectivity in the expression of faith. It can be argued that they sensed that any naïve objectivism would be increasingly under threat from the new cosmological discoveries. If the body of Christ is so localized in space as to be regarded as physically "in" the bread and wine of the Eucharist, so "contained" within the material elements, it is understandable that the Reformers looked toward more subjective and symbolic modes of expression. It is left to a later age and less polemic times to consider how the bread and wine—and the world itself—are "in" the transformed and all-transforming risen Body of Christ. Those who disagreed with Copernicus and Galileo were demonstrably wrong in thinking that the sun moved round the earth; but there was, theologically speaking, an even greater error in losing the sensibility of participating in the temporal and spatial cosmos of God's creative self-incarnation.

[14] Oliver Davies, Paul D. Janz, and Clemens Sedmak, *Transformation Theology: Church in the World* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2007): "Lost Heaven" 11–36; "Interrupted Body" 37–59.

[15] Davies, "Lost Heaven" 11.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid. 18–21.

In the realist intentionality of faith, therefore, a theology of the still incarnate, risen, and ascended Christ must resist being essentially linked to ancient conceptions of a three-tiered universe; nor, for that matter, is it to be located exclusively in the modern Newtonian, or postmodern quantum world. What is at stake is basically communion between the self-incarnating Word and human beings in their embodiment in this world, whatever the findings of the current physics. This is not to suggest any essential theological hostility to, say, quantum cosmology. Notions of singularity, emergence, relationality, the multidimensional interaction of mass and energy, the role of strange attractors, and so on, are points of instructive dialogue.[18] But a fruitful dialogue with science presupposes that faith will continue to develop its own sense of incarnational reality. The challenge for Christian theology, then, is to expand the sense of the materiality and embodiment implicit in incarnational faith.[19] The powerful affirmation of Chalcedon remains: the bodily humanity of Jesus is indeed the incarnation and embodiment of the divine Word. And even after the resurrection and ascension it remains so (though such dimensions of the continuing incarnation are not mentioned in the classic Chalcedonian definition).

DIMENSIONS OF THE INCARNATIONAL EVENT

The following citation from Abbot Rupert of Deutz is instructive.[20] First, Rupert introduces the embodied unity of all in Christ:

> To the one and only Son of God and Son of Man, as to their head, all the members of the body are joined, all those who are received into the faith of this mystery, in the fullness of this love. Thus, there is one single body; it is a single person, a single Christ, the head with the members, who rises up to heaven, crying out in its gratitude

[18] On the subject of Pneumatology, see Wolfgang Vondey, "The Holy Spirit and the Physical Universe: The Impact of Scientific Paradigm Shifts on Pneumatology," *Theological Studies* 37 (2009) 3–37. Vondey argues that Pneumatology needs an up-to-date Einsteinian reexpression according to the dimensions of order, rationality, relationality, symmetry, and movement of Einstein's cosmology. Perhaps this is an easier project compared with the Christology of the incarnation: In what sense does it presuppose the incarnation? What exactly are the analogical applications of the above named dimensions to the Christian data?

[19] Davies ("Interrupted Body" 40–43) appreciates that some have risen to the challenge as in Thomas F. Torrance's *Time, Space, and Incarnation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997)—even if analogical correlations with science-based cosmological views are, to Davies' appreciative reading, too wedded to the metaphor of height, and so result in a certain remoteness from the incarnational materiality. For a fuller discussion, see Tapio Luoma, *Incarnation and Physics: Natural Science in the Theology of Thomas F. Torrance* (New York: Oxford University, 2002).

[20] Rupert of Deutz, *De divinis officiis* l.2, c. 11 (PL 170.43a–c); my translation. This quotation concludes Henri de Lubac's *Corpus Mysticum: L'Eucharistie et l'église au moyen age; Étude historique* (Paris: Aubier, 1948).

and showing to God the church of his glory, “Here is bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh!” and making seen that he and her come together in a veritable unity of person, he says further, “and the two will be one flesh.”

Second, this early medieval Benedictine writer directs our attention to the expanding eucharistic reality of the flesh of Christ:

Yes, there is a great mystery. The flesh of Christ which, before the passion, was the flesh of the sole Word of God, has so expanded by the Passion, it is so increased, and it has so filled the universe that all the elect who were from the beginning of the world or will live to the last among them, by the action of this sacrament that makes of them a new dough, he brings together in one Church where God and man are eternally united.

Third, Rupert emphasises the paschal reality of Christ’s transformed embodiment:

This flesh was only at first a grain of wheat, a single grain before it fell into the ground to die there. And behold now that it died, it increases on the altar, it bears fruit in our hands and in our bodies; and while the great and rich Lord of the harvest ascends, he takes up with him right to the barns of heaven this fruitful earth in the heart of which he has increased.

The incarnational dynamism that Rupert evokes involves three stages—which Davies also appreciates.[21] First, there is “God-with-us” in an embodied, historical, physical, and mortal humanity common to us all, even if the singularity of a human existence proper to the divine Word must be duly acknowledged.

Second, there is the presence of the risen—and still incarnate—Christ. This stage presupposes a continuity with the past mortal body of the Crucified, and is eventually recognized as such in the postresurrectional appearances. But this phase is transitional. For, this resurrection-stage is a prelude to a third phase that faith must respect, as in Jesus’ words to Magdalene, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father” (Jn 20:17). In this third expansion of the mystery of the Christ in the ascension, the cosmic proportions of the incarnation are disclosed (see Jn 1:3; Eph 1:10; Col 1:16; Heb 1:3; etc.). Jesus ascends to become the source of the Spirit and the Lord of history. He is thus revealed within a trinitarian form of divine self-communication. In him the “invisible” Father (Jn 1:18) is made visible (Jn 14:9), and from him comes the Spirit of truth, witnessing to Jesus and leading to all truth (Jn 16:12–15). In that trinitarian bodying-forth, the activity of the Spirit is known in its transformative effects in relation to the body of Christ—from his conception to his resurrection, and then in a final universal outpouring and animation of the church.[22]

[21] On this point, see Davies, “Interrupted Body” 45–55.

[22] Davies gives a fascinating account of Paul’s Damascus experience as an encounter with the ascended Christ (might not we also add the visionary experience

CHRIST'S ECCLESIAL EMBODIMENT

Even when these three stages are given their due, the intentionality of ecclesial faith is hard put to express, let alone imagine, the whole mystery of the incarnation and its transformative effect. In this regard, there is a cloud of unknowing. Yet there is also a way of going and doing, for the Christian community lives the presence of Christ performatively, so to speak, through the mediations of liturgy and preaching, in its missionary outreach and dialogical encounters, in its serving Christ in the neighbor, and in loving him even in the enemy. As suggested in the subtitle of the book of Davies et al., *Church in the World,* the ecclesial significance of the Body of Christ cannot be bypassed, being as it is an embodied community alive with a diversity of gifts.

In this respect, the church is the historically embodied mediation of Christ. Its paradigmatic moment occurs in celebration of the Eucharist as the sensible, sacramental, and relational setting of the ecclesial present. Eighteen hundred years ago, Irenaeus of Lyons had to deal with Gnosticism, the heady "new age" spirituality of his day. He laid down a basic rule for every age of the church: "Our way of thinking is attuned to the Eucharist; and the Eucharist in turn confirms our way of thinking."[23] Thus, the Eucharist is the basic criterion of incarnational sensibility and imagination. It is not simply a memorial intent on recapturing the past, nor an extrapolation of the present into an unknown future. It is rather an embodied instant, in which both past and future are brought to an intense significance.

The church, then, is not a theological symposium nor a conventicle of mystics. It is rather a "live performance" of faith, however amateur and poorly produced it might be, as it celebrates the Eucharist, the focus of its communion and the source of its mission. In this regard, the ecclesial milieu is intrinsic to a theological sense of the incarnation. As the Body of Christ, the church is the historical field of experience, witness and praxis in which Christian faith is formed—or better, performed—in thanksgiving for the gift of what has been given.[24] It demands a theological understanding of the church as the Body of Christ in more than a metaphorical sense. There is a

of the Seer of the Apocalypse?). Paul is blinded and cannot eat or drink. He suffers a radical disorientation. But after his vision is "mediated" (Acts 9:12–17) in the community, he is empowered in his mission to be the apostle to nations. When Ananias imposes hands on Paul, he regains his sight and receives the Holy Spirit. Significantly, the church-mediated reception of the Spirit enables Paul to recover his worldly life within the ecclesial body, and he is equipped for his mission to the nations.

[23] Irenaeus, *Adv. haereses* 4.18.5 (PG 7.1.1028).

[24] A valuable reference here is Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005) with its emphasis on the performative character of Christian faith.

realism of the church's union with the crucified and Risen One whose body is the organ of God's communication in the world. In the words of Augustine:

> If, therefore, you want to understand the body of Christ, listen to the Apostle telling the faithful, "but you are the body of Christ and its members" (1 Cor 12:27). So if you who are the body of Christ and its members, it is your own mystery that has been placed on the Lord's table; what you are receiving is your own mystery. You say *Amen* to what you are, and when you say that, you affirm what you are. You hear, "the Body of Christ," and you reply, "Amen!" Be, then, a member of the body of Christ in order to make that *Amen* true.[25]

In this ecclesial embodiment of the Body of Christ in history, the three stages of incarnation already mentioned also interplay. The historical bodily existence of Jesus is subsumed into the historical particularity of the church. In this regard, the church shares in the limitations of Christ's initial incarnation, with all its ambiguity and vulnerability. Yet the blooming of that incarnation into the crucified and risen Body is a disruptive event. It opens ecclesial consciousness to another dimension of the fullness of time and life. The church is already pregnant with the new life of creation and breathes the life of the Spirit. But even here, incarnational faith is not confined to the empty tomb, nor to the past history of episodic appearances of the Risen One. For his ascended Body is the limitless sphere of the church's present mission and eschatological hope, with Christ present to his disciples in every time, place, and nation.

By participating in the ongoing drama of the incarnation, each Christian is a member of the Body of Christ. Each one is an irreplaceable character in a precise "plot" or divine economy as it unfolds under the direction of the Spirit. At the same time, it calls on the traditions of interpretation expressed in those "actors" who, over the generations, have been gifts of Christ for the fulfillment of his Body (see Eph 4:7–13).

CHRISTIAN "BODY LANGUAGE"

As the Eucharist forms the church and the church performs the Eucharist, a unique "body language" is implied. What this idiom means in Christian terms involves questions of tantalizing complexity. But there can be no glimmer of an adequate response if a reductively materialist understanding

[25] Corpus ergo Christi si vis intellegere, Apostolum audi dicentem fidelibus: Vos autem estis corpus Christi, et membra. Si ergo vos estis corpus Christi et membra, mysterium vestrum in mensa Dominica positum est: mysterium vestrum accipitis. Ad id quod estis, Amen respondetis, et respondendo subscribitis. Audis enim, Corpus Christi; et respondes, Amen. Esto membrum corporis Christi, ut verum sit Amen. Augustine, Sermo 272 (PL 38.1247), my translation. For a less literal translation, see Augustine, *Sermons: III/7 (230–272B) On the Liturgical Seasons*, Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, pt. 3, vol. 7, trans. and notes Edmund Hill; ed. John E. Rotelle (New York: New City, 1993) 300.

of the body is presumed. The body is more than what someone "has" in a transient way, that is, as a physical organism and as a delimited object in time and space. The body as a human phenomenon cannot be appreciated except as a personal "somebody" that is organically immersed in a field of communication and relationships with others. A consideration of the experienced reality of this "somebody" throws light on the "body language" in which Christian faith expresses its distinctively incarnate intentionality.[26]

When the Body of Christ is understood in its expansive totality, it includes the whole church and even the materiality of the whole universe, while affecting the connotation of two indefinable terms, "heaven" and "the world," as Davies remarks.[27] Heaven, to which Christ has ascended to sit "at the right hand of the Father," is not the empyrean, a determined locality in ancient cosmology. It is rather coterminous with the immanent and transcendent presence of God. Given this divine universal presence operating through Christ as the "conjoined instrument" or organ,[28] heaven, far from being remote in some numinous transcendent sphere, Christ's session "at the right hand of the Father," whence he sends the Spirit, unfolds as a field of communication with the world. To believe is to see "heaven opened" (Jn 1:51) in an ongoing communication between God and creation in Christ. Heaven is not therefore the realm of pure spirits, but the sphere of the new dimension of incarnate communication. It is the sphere of an unbroken and ultimately unbreakable relationship in and through his Body. Consequently, the Holy Spirit comes not as a substitute for a lost incarnation but as the transforming agent of its expansion. The Spirit, active in the conception of Jesus in the womb of the Virgin Mary, is working in every stage of the ongoing incarnation of the Word—in Christ's life, death, resurrection, and ascension. It is to our advantage—and even, we might say, to the advantage of the Incarnate One—that the Holy Spirit will come (Jn 16:5–15). While his death and burial ends his earthly mode of relating to his disciples, they will now relate to him in a new dimension of his bodily reality through the Spirit. The Risen One does not cease to be present to them: they will eat his flesh and drink his blood (Jn 6) in the mutual indwelling determined by his new embodied existence. Because Jesus' risen and ascended life is a new phase of the incarnation, it promises a new mode of presence rather than the blank fact of absence. If he has

[26] In the labor of *distinguer pour unir*, many distinctions need to be made that cannot be treated here—between body and soul, matter and spirit, person and community, the one and the many, the church and the world, etc.; these are some of the distinctions necessary for a full exploration of what the Body of Christ means.

[27] Davies, "Lost Heaven" 12–14.

[28] See Aquinas, *ST* 3, q. 7, a. 1, ad 3; q. 8, a. 1, ad 1; q.18, a. 1, ad 2; q. 62, a. 5, ad 1; q. 64, a. 3; q. 69, a. 5.

gone from this earthly life, it does not mean that he is not "coming" in a way determined by the incarnate mode of God's self-communication.

Then there is the equally elusive term, "the world." It is polyvalent in its connotations. Though it is a zone of opposition to God, the world remains, as a whole, the object of God's love, and the sphere to which Christ has been sent as light and life. It is not just the realm of materiality as opposed to the spiritual. Nor is it the sum total of our present understanding, however scientific it might be, of reality in general. It is an indeterminate "given," in every moment, as an expansive totality that resists full objectification, but as the milieu in which human existence unfolds, and in which it is embodied. It is at once our native place and the span of an indefinable and limitless otherness. Theologically speaking, to know the world fully would be to know the full extent of the Word made flesh in it (see Jn 2:21).

Though Jesus departs from human sight in his resurrection and ascension, he does not cease to be present to the world—even if the Lukan narrative of events (see Lk 24:50–53; Acts 1:9–11) is not explicitly mentioned in other New Testament texts, such as Romans 8:34, 10:6; Ephesians 1:20–21; and Colossians 3:1.[29] As to the narrative presentation of Luke-Acts, Jesus' departure leads to an open field of communication in which the mission of the church will unfold in history. Clearly, New Testament perspectives differ, but they do converge in that faith's experience of the risen Lord is the horizon within which all the New Testament scriptures witness to him in their respective ways (see Jn 6:62, 20:17; Eph 4:8–10; 1 Tim 3:16)—and never with any implication that his embodied existence has diminished, let alone ceased.

This is to say that the bodily resurrection and ascension of Christ inaugurates a new expansion of the incarnation and, consequently, a new way of relating to Christ (see Col 3). What the bodily dimension of this might mean, and what bodily connatural sensibility to it is implied, resists adequate expression, as I have already conceded. In current understanding, the very nature of matter itself as quasi-solidified energy is a realm of immense complexity. The dimensions of time and place characterizing former cosmologies are long gone. Even the meaning of energy and its various manifestations is not a matter of clear definition.[30] When the implicit cosmology of much of Christian tradition has been so radically called into question, the question rebounds: Is it not better to leave the body to science? Is the theologian better advised to leave behind such material concerns by

[29] Mikael C. Parsons, *The Departure of Jesus in Luke-Acts: The Ascension Narratives in Context* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1987).

[30] See P. C. W. Davies and J. R. Brown, eds., *The Ghost in the Atom: A Discussion of the Mysteries of Quantum Physics* (New York: Cambridge University, 1993) 26. For further remarks, see James P. Mackey, *The Scientist and the Theologian: On the Origins and Ends of Creation* (Dublin: Columba, 2007) 192–95.

amplifying the domain of the spiritual self and its transcendence over matter? Certainly the incarnation is the original defining event, but should not faith be now concentrated in the gift of the Spirit?

Nonetheless, the "body-language" of the New Testament provokes continual rethinking of the salvific reality of the Body of Christ and its relation to human existence in the present world. At the very least, that would mean acknowledging that the incarnate Word has not been "ex-carnated" by being raised and taken up into heaven. Though he is indeed "out of sight" as far as his physical, historical presence among us as Jesus of Nazareth is concerned, he is not so lost in the clouds of heaven as to be removed from all human communication and dematerialized into some other realm. To repeat: it is not as though he has become disembodied. Rather, it is better to admit that we human beings are not yet fully embodied in the Body of Christ. From this point of view, the resurrection-ascension of Christ is an expanding bodily event, in accord with God's continuing incarnational action in the world. That means neither the disappearance of the risen Body from a primitively imagined cosmos, nor, in terms of more recent categories, is it dissolved in the material universe—perhaps swallowed into a "black hole" or becoming "dark matter/energy." Nor does the connaturality of incarnational faith call for the invention of some new form of celestial physics as though in reaction to what current cosmology might tell us. Science will, we hope, continue to astound us with its explorations, but the humble task of theology is to elaborate first of all what pertains to the phenomenality of the primal Christian event precisely as incarnational.

In exploring the intentionality or "sensibility" of faith connatural to the continuing and expanding reality of the Body of Christ, the problem is not only theological. The real problem may well be anthropological, that is, regarding our own conception of bodily existence and the different dimensions of corporeality. On the one hand, a Platonic suspicion of matter is still an influence; on the other, a deeper understanding of the metabolic relationship of our infinitesimal physical being with the immense cosmic process makes any reference to a particular biological body all but nugatory, especially given the exciting developments in contemporary cosmological and evolutionary science.

While a reflective faith must continue to build connections with philosophical and scientific world views, there must be a sensitive receptivity to what the data of faith are—if mutually beneficial connections are to be made. Before attempting any correlation of incarnational realism with contemporary science, theology's first task is to insist that faith be receptive to its own data. Drawing on recent phenomenological studies, I have previously attempted to sketch a phenomenology of the resurrection: before theology is "faith seeking understanding," a necessary first step is to be attentive not only to what has been given to understand but also to the way

it has been given—as gift—and to the source and goal of such giving.[31] There is much to be learned from the generalized phenomenology of revelation as a whole, so as to allow the "given" to come to our consciousness on its own terms—that is, as a gift, before hurrying to press it into other frames of reference.[32] If christological phenomenology does not seek to be receptive to the epiphany of Christ in the flesh, it is dealing with abstractions. This christophanic phenomenon includes the risen Body of Christ and expands to the church as his Body, above all, in the Eucharist.

The phenomenality—or mode of givenness—of the total Christ event can be blocked by a narrowly empiricist concern. To the degree we are affected by this, we tend to take "my body" as something I "have," as one among many physical bodies, rather than consider it more intentionally as a field of relationships shaping human consciousness. The human body is, of course, a physical and physiological object. It is both legitimate and indeed desirable that it be treated as such, when, for instance, the physician measures blood pressure, weight, heart rate, and breathing capacity. The dimensions of physiological and scientific objectivity must be respected, given, for example, the stupendous neural complexity of the human brain.

But the consideration of *somebody* only in this way, detached from personal consciousness, is obscene. To reduce the body to a sexual object or to a unit of energy in slave-labor camp or to a specimen for scientific experimentation does violence to the phenomenon. The human body is relegated to an alien state. There is something fundamentally awry when theology, hurrying past the revealed phenomenon, treats the incarnate Word as a body-object in a historical, sociological, or biological fashion, yet without registering a sense of the divine *economia* of incarnation and incorporation in the Body of Christ.

Things appear differently when the body is appreciated as the "saturated phenomenon" of a personal *somebody*. It is disclosed through a special sense of immediacy and unobjectifiable intimacy in regard to oneself and others. At this point, I distinguish the "body-object" and the "body-subject."[33] As body-subject, my body is not merely something I possess, but is rather the field of my communication with the other. The body or "flesh" intimately constitutes the subject's being in the world. It implies possibilities of intimate self-giving and self-disclosure, as in the case of erotic or maternal love. In this sense, the flesh, our incarnate consciousness, is a field of mutual indwelling, of being with and for the other. In the eros and

[31] See Kelly, *Resurrection Effect* 15–43.

[32] See Rolf Kühn, "Phänomenologische Leibbegriff und christologische Inkarnation," *Münchener theologische Zeitschrift* 59 (2008) 239–55.

[33] See Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, esp. 146–55.

generativity of love, one's bodily being is reexperienced in, with, and through the flesh of the other.[34]

Thus, the body-subject is more than its objectification as a physical body in a material world of many such objects. It is a field of conscious interactions, a zone of incarnated relationships.[35] For the body of my conscious being is affected by the encompassing phenomenon of the world and in turn affects it. It is at once an elemental bonding with the world, an immediate exposure to it, an immediate participation in it, and a primal communication within it.[36]

JOHANNINE INCARNATION AND PAULINE EMBODIMENT

A phenomenality of the body-subject has a theological sense in regard to the body of Christ and its relation to the world. The incarnate Word is still "somebody" in this sense. Christ crucified, risen, and ascended to the right hand of the Father, remains in embodied communication with the world. Christian intentionality is first of all receptivity to the self-giving bodily reality of Christ. For instance, from the Johannine perspective, the flesh of Christ is the field of mutual indwelling (see, e.g., Jn 6:56). There is no bypassing the communicative reality of his "flesh" (1 Jn 4:2). The "flesh" of Jesus, when transformed itself, will be transformative in its effect: "the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh" (Jn 6:51). In the teeth of objections to this peculiar realism (v. 52), Jesus makes his provocation even more intense:

> Amen, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them (Jn 6:53–56).

Again, objections arising from a grossly materialistic reduction are met by referring to the realism belonging to another realm, that of the Spirit. When his disciples recognize "that this teaching is difficult" (v. 60)—even to the extent of compromising its acceptance—Jesus asks: "Does this teaching offend you?" (v. 61). He proceeds to ask how it would appear if, in fact, he were revealed as establishing the vital link between the human world and the divine realm: "Then what if you were to see the Son of Man

[34] Jean-Luc Marion, *Le phénomène érotique: Six meditations* (Paris: Grasset, 2003) 185. John Paul II's treatment of this point is necessarily more general but still with a strong phenomenological emphasis; see *Theology of the Body* 42–63.

[35] Marion, *Le phénomène érotique* 170.

[36] See Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Barraud (New York: Fordham University, 2002) 100; and *Le phénomène érotique* 170, 180–81.

ascending to where he was before?" (v. 62). It is on this level of relationship with God that the shocking realism of his teaching is to be understood: "It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless" (v. 63). His words and his flesh and blood have salvific sense only in the economy of God's giving and attraction: "No one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father" (v. 65).

For Paul, on the other hand, the Body of Christ is the sphere of the new creation. It implies something more than a sociological metaphor, for it looks to an incorporation of his "members," as body-subjects, into the transformed Body in its present vital relationship to the reality of the universe of space and time. Paul pushes Christian consciousness toward a distinctive realism in this regard. However this might be articulated, it goes further than any facile metaphorical application. The apostle presents the Christian community as composed of members of the body of Christ: "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ" (1 Cor 12:12). With the plurality and diversity of the many spiritual gifts, "you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Cor 12:27). The shocking implications of this identification appear in Paul's admonitions against sexual immorality: "The body is not meant for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body" (1 Cor 6:13). Clearly, a bodily mutuality is implied: "And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power" (v. 14). It is sharpened with the question, "Do you know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute?" (v. 15). Paul, as if to answer objections arising from a crude or misplaced notion of biological physicality, makes a vital clarification. Between Christ and his members there is indeed a corporal relationship, but this in the sphere of the Spirit: "But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him" (v. 17), so that body is now a "temple of the Holy Spirit" (v. 19). The injunction follows: "glorify God in your body" (v. 20b). The provocative force of Paul's remarks turns on a distinctive realism. Christians must live their Christ-embodied reality, not in some celestial sphere, but in the here-and-now world of erotic impulses and allure: there is no "mystical body" on that level! The body does, however, remain the realm of communication with the risen Lord through the power of his Spirit. Indeed, this Spirit exercises a bodily or corporate influence. It is, as it were, the shared breath, the living atmosphere, the vital principle of the body of Christ, manifested in the profusion of gifts. In this one Spirit, "we are all baptized into one body . . . and made to drink of the one Spirit" (1 Cor 12:13). Thus, the Spirit is by no means a disembodied reality, but the sustaining principle of the body, disclosed though bodily analogies related to movement, energy, joining, and drinking. The Spirit invigorates the Body of Christ as the vital breath, and the church, as Christ's Body, breathes by the life-giving air of the Spirit.

Both the manifold Pauline senses of the "body of Christ" and the reality of the life-giving "flesh" of Christ typical of a more Johannine approach converge as dimensions of incarnational realism. Both justify a distinctive "body-language" that aims to express the expanding and inclusive excess of the Word made flesh as the Body of Christ. Each perspective leads to a distinctive Christian realism. Each has its disruptive and even scandalous elements in their respective and provocative emphases on the life-giving, bodily reality of Christ's presence. For John, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (Jn 1:14); and in that flesh, he lived, proclaimed the kingdom of God, suffered—and was raised from the dead.[37] For Paul, in Christ crucified and risen, "the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Col 2:9). Both these perspectives—Johannine incarnation and Pauline embodiment—point to one reality: the transformed humanity of Christ. Despite the organic and social limits of the earthly existence of Jesus of Nazareth, his resurrection and ascension do not mean that he has ceased to be God's bodily organ of communication. The incarnational event expands in a manner proper to the new creation inaugurated at Easter.

The incarnational realism of Christian sensibility to the Body of Christ inevitably strains against abstractly spiritual or intellectualistic modes of interpretation. The Body of Christ is more than a metaphorical social "body" of coreligionists. The intentionality of faith stretches toward a living reality that is beyond the capacity of figurative speech. Metaphors, of course, come into play, as in the Johannine idiom, "I am the vine, you the branches" (Jn 15:5); but here, I insist, metaphors are employed to throw further light on an incarnate mutual indwelling. For a theological phenomenology, Christ's Body is the organic field of his relationship to the world. It affects and is affected by the manifold reality of our embodied coexistence in him. Though Christ is the form, goal, and agent of a transformed existence, his risen body continues in its "natal bond" with the world. It expresses the immediacy of his exposure to the world in the process of its transformation in him. Paul goes so far as to say that in his flesh he is "completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church" (Col 1:24). Through their incorporation into the subjective body of Christ, the members of his Body awaken to the world on its way to transformation. Such is the distinctive realism of Christian corporate existence. It discloses a distinctive sense of intersubjectivity and mutual indwelling within the field of incarnate communication. Jesus prays "that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me, and I in you, may they also be in us" (Jn 17:21).[38] The incarnate "Word of Life" (1 Jn 1:1) takes the

[37] Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University, 2002) 239.

[38] Michel Henry, *Incarnation: Une philosophie de la chair* (Paris: Seuil, 2000) 350–52.

form of a communal existence, declared with the vigor of an immediately sensuous and affect-charged experience of hearing, seeing, touching, and union: "what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—we declare what we have seen and heard" (1 Jn 1:2–3).

The incarnation, at its transforming apex in the crucified and risen Christ, is extended into the living corporate form of the church. The members of this Christ-Body are drawn into the vitality of self-giving love. For they are, in Christ, "members, one of another" (Eph 4:25), "for no man hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body" (Eph 5:30). Indeed, the Letter to the Ephesians does not hesitate to appeal to spousal love as the most intimate, ecstatic, and generative human experience of the body to express Christ's relationship to the ecclesial body. Just as man and woman become "one flesh" (Gen 2:23; Mt 19:6; Mk 10:8), the Risen One is one flesh with the community of believers. The extraordinary development from the early church's prizing of virginity—and the inevitable downplaying of the married state—to the comparatively much later recognition of the sacramentality of marriage arose, we must presume, from a fuller sense of the incarnate character of the Christian vocation.[39]

Furthermore, the inclusion of the suffering body of our humanity in the eschatological reality of Christ's Body is suggested in John's depiction of the risen body of the Lord still marked by the wounds of the cross (Jn 20:24–26; see Rev 5:6–9). The Risen One is ever the Crucified One, in compassionate involvement with suffering humanity and with the whole "groaning" reality of creation (see Rom 8:18–25). Christ's life-giving transformation beyond death does not mean disincarnation, but a new form of incarnation. A bodily "mutation" has occurred: "the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh" (Jn 6:51). By sacramentally assimilating his flesh and blood, given and outpoured for the life of the world, believers are conformed to his risen life: "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink" (Jn 6:55).

In short, Christ's risen existence continues and expands his communication in the flesh. Embodied in this way, he is the focus and source of a new order of relationships for which no metaphor is adequate. The limits of

[39] The radical character of this development occurring in the experience of Christian faith over the centuries is striking. The early Church Fathers may well be astonished by a pope in this far later age speaking of the "nuptial meaning of the body." See note 3 above.

mutual indwelling inherent in the physicality of the body-object are now transformed into a new mode of mutual coinherence: "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood, abide in me and I in them" (Jn 6:56; see 15:4, 6). In this eschatological realm, believers "abide in the Son and in the Father" (1 Jn 2:24; see 3:24). They begin to inhabit a field of love in which earthly eros is subsumed into the agape of the divine self-giving: "God is love, and those who abide in love, abide in God, and God abides in them" (1 Jn 4:16). To the degree that faith assimilates Christ's flesh and blood and Spirit, there is new sight, hearing, touching, tasting, eating and drinking, feeling and indwelling—the new senses of faith, as Origen recognized so clearly.[40] Because of its unobjectifiable immediacy and mutuality, the body-subject of Christ is the zone of an intersubjectivity that "earths" and enfleshes faith's experience of the Risen One. Neither a spiritual immateriality nor a sensate materialism is implied, but rather a participation in genuinely bodily life in the world affected by the transformation that has occurred. Christian imagination cannot rest content with a play of metaphors but must continually seek, in theory and in practice, in its attitudes to life and death, to intend the all-inclusive, corporate reality of Christ: "for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory" (Col 3:3–4). A newly embodied self emerges: "you have stripped off the old self and its practices and clothed yourself with the new self which is being renewed in knowledge, according to the image of its creator" (Col 3:10). In this renewed embodied existence, believers are offered a new sense of corporate coexistence: "In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free, but Christ is all and in all" (Col 3:11).

THE ANALOGICAL LANGUAGE OF BODY

A theologically realistic expression of the Body of Christ necessarily remains analogical. Its language must stretch to compare and contrast disparate bodily entities, that is, different kinds of bodies. In our precise context, the focal reality is the Body of Christ "in whom dwells the fullness of God corporeally" (Col 2:9) in relation to our human bodily existence. At this point, Christian body-language calls on a wide variety of analogies, old and new, to develop its meaning. The great saint of East and West, Maximus the Confessor, speaks of the human being as "the laboratory in which everything is concentrated and itself naturally mediates between the extremities of each division, having been drawn into everything in a good

[40] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 7, *Theology: The New Covenant*, trans. Brian McNeil, C.R.V. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989) 308–9.

and fitting way through its development."[41] More recently, under the influence of modern cosmology, Teilhard de Chardin perceptively remarked, "My own body is not these or those cells which belong exclusively to me. It is what, in these cells and in the rest of the world, feels my influence and reacts against me. *My* matter is not a *part* of the universe that I possess *totaliter*. It is the totality of the universe that I possess *partialiter*."[42] With his christocentric perspective, Teilhard insists, "Christ must be kept as large as creation and remains its Head. No matter how large we discover the world to be, the figure of Jesus, risen from the dead, must embrace it in its entirety."[43]

Further, we cannot ignore the fact that today we are all participants, however disoriented on occasion, in the amazing development of the "cyberspace body" of our humanity. Electronic energies are employed to extend not only the senses but also the consciousness of the body-subject itself. Our embodied humanity is in some measure being re-formed through the experience of new kinds of communication and a sense of "being in contact" to a hitherto unimaginable degree.

This re-formation is occurring most obviously in channels of information exchange, but also as a factor in global consciousness and sensibility. Human existence, either individual or communal, previously restricted by the limitations of time and space, now possesses the potential to expand within limitless patterns of relationships, with the promise of new forms of coexistence and community. In this sense, the world itself has become the shared body of our being together. It possesses a kind of electronic nervous system—ideally at the service of human intelligence while making for a larger solidarity in world-shaping events, as well as enabling increasing levels of communication and creativity. Present and future technological possibilities cannot but affect what it means to be a body as field of communication.

The healthy challenge for theology is to make analogical connections between these global dimensions of the body of humanity and the expansive mystery of the Body of the Christ. Without romanticizing these

[41] Maximus Confessor, *Difficulty* 41:1305B. See Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London: Routledge, 1996) 19–33. I use Louth's translation. See also, Lars Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos: The Vision of St. Maximus the Confessor* (New York: St. Vladimirs's Seminary, 1985) 132–37.

[42] Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Science and Christ*, trans. René Hague (London: Collins, 1965) 13.

[43] Cited in Christopher Mooney, S.J., *Teilhard de Chardin and the Mystery of Christ* (London: Collins, 1966) 136. While I have been arguing for the unique realism of the church as the Body of Christ, I am not thereby conceiving of the whole universe as his body, even though he is "head," etc., of all creation. I am leaving open the question of what that universal and cosmic headship entails.

developments—the potential for control, surveillance, manipulation, and self-enclosure remain—human existence has moved into a new dimension of embodiment. It has led to a larger "earthing" or incarnation of the human spirit as it penetrates more deeply into matter and energy and assimilates these realities into its range of its being in the world. As writers such as Teilhard de Chardin and Walter Ong noted decades ago, such developments cannot be left unrelated to the event of the incarnation of the Word as it continues to expand throughout history.[44] Our understanding of the Word becoming flesh is extended not only to the evolutionary and ecological world, but also to the electronic or cyberspace dimensions of the world of communication.

We can ask, then, to what degree these developments contribute to our understanding of the Body of Christ. In some analogical sense, what is happening prefigures an ultimate transformation of all things and suggests the form of a new creation. If the spirit of human inventiveness and creativity has so transformed our embodied existence, how will the Holy Spirit, having already raised the Crucified One from the tomb and animated the risen Body of Christ, penetrate and transform all creation? This is not the occasion to ponder the value of medieval speculation on the *dotes* of the Body of Christ in glory.[45] Still, the experience of the developing world of our embodiment may well suggest a range of analogies illuminating the manner in which all communicate in the one Body of Christ, how all are mutually present in the solidarity of love and in the exchanges of prayer and intercession.

In this field of differing embodiments, the analogical imagination must weave its way between the extremes of a univocity that recognizes no differences in the notion of body, and an equivocity that leaves only a nominal likeness between supposedly completely different entities.[46] It is

[44] See, for example, Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002).

[45] For the gifts of *subtilitas*, *agilitas* and *claritas*, see *ST Supplementum*, qq. 83–85; q. 95 considers these in relation to the risen Christ.

[46] Some years ago, philosophically minded theologians began speaking of the world as "God's Body." Oddly, in one influential instance of this new univocity of "body," we find no reference to the Body of Christ. See Grace M. Jantzen, *God's World, God's Body* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1984). But, even in a more general perspective, the divine Spirit is not a partial principle informing matter as another partial principle, to constitute one more complete reality. God is not a part of anything. In the venerable hylomorphic tradition, the soul is transcendentally related to matter to form the body-person. But God *freely* relates to the world as a theater of divine activity and self-disclosure: apart from the singularity of the incarnation of the Word, there is no question of divine embodiment in creation, whatever the metaphors employed for the divine immanence. Thus, the eschatological and transformative dimensions of the bodily analogy are not given their due.

not as though the crucified body of Jesus of Nazareth, his risen body, and the Body of Christ developing in history have only the word "body" in common, without any overlap of meaning or mutual influence. Confusion results when different orders of reality are not clearly distinguished.

Analogical thinking, on the other hand, works within the interrelated world of partial likenesses and unlikenesses, to advance from the more known or immediately experienced to the unknown or less known. In this case, the aim is to establish some basic analogical reference to the meaning of "body" in a given field of experience. What, then, is the basic analogate for the Body of Christ to which all other usages of the term are referred? This is an area of some complication, since the literal and the metaphorical, the physical and phenomenological, the philosophical and the theological can be tangled into a formidable knot preventing the recognition of a fine weave of interlacing associations. In the theological context, too, there is a kind of fruitful and provocative confusion. Does "the Body of Christ" refer to the humanity of the risen Lord? Does it mean the church as his Body? Does it mean his presence in the Eucharist? Does it turn us to recognize Christ in our suffering neighbor (Mt 25)? In what sense is the Body of Christ, not only the form, exemplar, and anticipation of the new creation but also the source of transformation for our present embodied existence—in life and in death? The different aspects or realizations of Christ's Body are so interwoven, that one has a sense of a corporeal field of incarnational communication rather than of discrete entities.

Still, in this field of incarnational communication, we can recognize interrelated analogical meanings of "body" itself. From each perspective, be it biophysical, sociological, philosophical, personal and interpersonal, ecclesial, christological and theological, the prime analogate for bodily existence will vary. In the field of associations, what, then, is the primary instance of body around which other instances gather, either caused by it or participating in it in some way? Answers will differ, depending on what consideration is the primary focus. Indeed, the choice of a prime analogate at this point could be so exclusive that the analogical field of connotation could easily collapse into equivocity. Such would be the case if one's outlook were exclusively determined by a materialist, literary, or metaphysical standpoint.

In the present instance, given our precise incarnational perspective, I suggest that the prime theological analogate is the transformed Body of Christ himself. To it all other instances of body are related and in some sense subsumed within it. Here it is not a matter of ascending from the data of the natural world of bodies to the Body of Christ as a kind of

See also John A. T. Robinson, *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology* (London: SCM, 1952).

supernatural entity. Rather, for Christian faith, it is a question of attending to the *donum*, the grace of God's self-revelation in the Body of Christ.

Admittedly, this suggestion raises a special problem. Though the Body of Christ is the first in the divine intention, it is not the first in the way we know in the experienced world of body-objects and body-subjects. Does this mean that an incarnational theology is left to interpret the more known (actual physical bodies) in the light of the less known (the Body of Christ)? Does the analogy of faith—and the consequent interconnection of the mysteries in reference to our "last end" as incorporated in Christ—inevitably clash with other versions of analogy based in more or less easily available human experience? This, of course, is not a new problem. It is usually approached by applying the axiom of grace healing, perfecting, and transforming the natural. But talking about the Body of Christ is a special problem. Can the risen and ascended Body of Christ be related as "grace" to the body of nature and person, to heal, perfect, and transform our bodily existence?

The short answer, energized by the affirmative realism of faith, must be yes. The elaboration of a longer answer of a theology refocused in the divine incarnational economy, remains a difficult question. One aspect of this difficulty is that the analogical thinking of faith is dealing rather with a field of communication. It includes the material world, the world of body-subjects, the incarnate body-subject of the divine Word, the church as his Body, and the Eucharist as the bodily actualization or enactment of our unity in the Body. Moreover, an eschatological reserve is required, expressed in an appropriate *theologia negativa*: what he is and what we will be are deferred to a final vision: "Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is" (1 Jn 3:2). There is no escaping the necessary darkness inherent in the life of faith and hope. Still, the life of faith has its own sensibility and connatural sense of reality.[47] In this respect, the analogical intentionality of faith, rather than trying to find a common meaning between different discrete objects in the realm of nature or faith, works within a relational field of embodied communication.

To bring out this point, I consider Ephesians 2:13–18 (emphases added):

> But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near by *the blood of Christ*. For he is our peace; *in his flesh* he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in

[47] Quid est ergo credere in eum? Credendo amare, credendo diligere, credendo in eum ire, et eius membris incorporari (Augustine, *Tractatus in Evangelium Joannis*, Tr. 29, 6 [on Jn 6:29] [PL 35.1631]).

himself *one new humanity* in place of two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God *in one body* through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. And so he came and proclaimed peace to those who were near, for both of us have access *in one Spirit* to the Father.

Given the density of such a statement, theology faces a sense of inevitable defeat in its search for adequate categories by which to express the incarnational sensibility of faith in all its dimensions. The problem lies in being distracted—or abstracted—into the profusion of the different juridical, sacrificial, social, spatial, and vital metaphors that are in play in this text. Nonetheless, the "blood of Christ" has been shed and now is sacramentally consumed in the Eucharist as "our spiritual drink." The "flesh" of Christ is presented as the form of healing in which the religiously and culturally estranged are united. Christ himself is the form and goal of "one new humanity" living in receptivity to the self-giving of God. This gifted, pacific humanity is realized in, and indeed nourished by, the crucified body of the Lord, so that the vital principle of the Body, "the one Spirit," can be shared by all in their free access to the Father. Here and elsewhere, the Body and Spirit are never played off against each another but exist in a positive reciprocity: the more of the Body, the more there is of the Spirit; and the more there is of this one Spirit, the more believers are united in the Body.

Realism of a precise cognitive kind is clearly in evidence, in terms of time, space, and emerging form. In terms of time, "now" is a moment in a great turning point of reconciliation that has occurred "in Christ" though his self-offering on the cross. It does not bypass the historical and antagonistic reality of the separation of Jews and Gentiles—"the dividing wall." There is an implication of a new space of coexistence, for the "near and far," hitherto living behind a wall of division. Above all, there is a form of humanity "in progress" under the action of God, which is both a present reality and an eschatological goal.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION . . . AND FURTHER QUESTIONS

My line of argument has concentrated on one point, namely, to resist relegating the incarnation to the past alone, without setting it in the continuing economy of God's self-communication. Christ is still incarnate, and we are already members of his paschal Body. On the one hand, this does not imply an uncritical univocity that would result in a kind of physical monophysitism or "monosomatism" of the incarnate reality of Christ in relation to our present bodily existence. On the other hand, the Body is not to be reduced to a vague sense of a metaphorical or symbolic "mystical body." Something more vital, more material, and specifically incarnational is involved, especially when the gift of the Spirit is not considered as a substitute for the abiding reality of the incarnation (see Jn 16:7, 12–15). The rapid

advances of science have led to a radically changed sense of matter, time, and space. This undoubtedly affects the sensibilities of faith in the Word incarnate in the material universe, especially if such faith remains tethered to bypassed cosmological conceptions. As a result, the sense of time, space, and relationships intrinsic to the Body of Christ would replace or at least attenuate conceptions of reality already structured in a nontheological or even antitheological manner. If that is the case, the Christian sense of the Body of Christ loses its assurance as a cosmic and historical reality, and veers toward a new kind of docetism. On the other hand, a renewed appreciation of the incarnational event and the unfolding mystery of the Body of Christ can fruitfully confront the "soul-less body" of materialistic modernity, and, for that matter, the "bodiless soul" of a rootless postmodernity.

What does this emphasis on the life of faith as an actual participation in the Body of Christ amount to? There is in Catholic tradition a sense of intense physicality in the understanding of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. But this does not always inspire a larger body-consciousness flowing from the Eucharist into every aspect of Christian life. This "summit" and "font"[48] of the life of the church can provoke ecological responsibility, an openness to the cosmic dimensions of faith, and inspire solidarity with the suffering, and, in the context of a nuptial mass, express a redemptive affirmation of sexuality. But to what degree is the experience of faith truly attuned to the incarnating and incorporating presence and action of God forming the Body of Christ? It is almost as though the real presence of the Body of Christ, head and members, has been tabernacled in an interiority that has lost a sense of corporate and incarnate relationships. The reality of the one expansive Body of Christ slips out of the intentionality of faith. Of course, the doctrine of the incarnation continues to inspire a grand vision of human culture, but its assimilation is somewhat anorexic when it comes to bodily expressiveness in prayer, artistic imagination, community relations, and moral conduct. While there is no need to fabricate some new ideology of body, there is a need to recover a sense of participating in the Body of Christ in the cosmic and communitarian dimensions of the new creation. An individualistic interiority works against the graced materiality and vitality of participation in the living Body of the Lord.

Many further questions need to be faced if we are to appreciate the expanding character of the incarnation. It might be that a satisfactory answer lies beyond the epistemic capabilities and imagination of our age. There are some senses of the Body of Christ that may well be reserved to those most fully transformed into him. For the rest of us, we must be

[48] Vatican II, The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum concilium* no. 10, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html (accessed July 26, 2010).

alert to the point of convergence of many aspects of faith: the risen Lord already fills the universe and through the Eucharist forms the body of the church as the dwelling place of God.[49]

But a range of eschatological questions must be faced regarding the materiality of Christ's Body and its relationship to a transformed universe. With the solemn declaration of the dogma of the Assumption of Our Lady in 1950, the intentionality of faith has hurried past its powers of expression. If Mary is declared to be assumed, body and soul, into heaven, the authority of the Catholic Church is thereby committed to a view of materiality, corporeality, and physicality in a sense that is as yet beyond our powers of expression.

Allied to eschatological questions are those of a more ecclesiological type. How is the church the Body of Christ? It is, on the one hand, a "holy communion" through which Christ nourishes the church with his own bodily reality and joins believers into a corporate identity in him. On the other hand, the Body is not bound to its present limits; it grows, and the mission of the church is intrinsic to the formation of the whole Body of Christ, the Risen One who reveals himself to those to whom he sends his disciples (see, e.g., Jn 20:21).

The Body of Christ necessarily grows in a moral fashion, as Christian morality expresses itself in the "corporal works of mercy," serving Christ present in the suffering other. Likewise, Christian spirituality must continually reappropriate the mystery of the incarnation in all its amplitude. It might explore more deeply the creativity of art and the exuberant corporeality of the Psalms, charged as they are with bodily sensibility to music, song, gesture, movement and procession, sadness and joy, pilgrimage and place. That might cause theology to be shocked into a fresh bodily awareness and open up an appreciation of secularity in new ways.

[49] As Mary L. Coloe (*Dwelling in the Household of God: Johannine Ecclesiology and Spirituality* [Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2007]), points out, it is not a matter merely of future existence in a divine realm but of God dwelling with us in the world, in the great household of faith (see also 1 Pt 3:21–22; Acts 3:21).