

## IN PERSONA CHRISTI: TOWARDS A SECOND NAÏVETÉ

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IN ATTEMPTING to implement with some degree of methodological order the wise Leonine adage that genuine development builds upon the past and carries it forward, the theologian's first task, as Lonergan noted, is to determine what the past really was.<sup>1</sup> Given the slow-footed nature of human knowing,<sup>2</sup> such efforts at precision, while methodologically necessary, are seldom methodologically pure, especially when received readings of the past seem to hinder that more sophisticated understanding which current awareness makes not only possible but necessary. In such cases, attempts to retrieve the past in a creative manner inevitably begin with a kind of exorcism in which the mind "deconstructs" these received readings in order to establish a new and more contemporary horizon. Well and good, provided deconstruction is self-critical enough to exorcise itself of a triumphalist myopia of the present that confuses received truth with merely historical accretion. For deconstruction is only the first step of a genuine retrieval. The second, perhaps even more difficult, step is a reconstruction in which the new insight that provides the basis for deconstruction is itself de-absolutized so as to allow the perduring truth coming out of the past to be positively preserved in a new instantiation. In this process, the mind experiences a kind of "second naïveté," in which the past comes to view not as a demon holding it in thrall, but as a previous stage of its own historical existence and hence as vital to its ongoing self-identity.

The present essay is an attempt at such a "second naïveté" in light of the "deconstruction" of the representational view of the priesthood developed in my recent articles on *in persona Christi* in this journal.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bernard J. F. Lonergan, commenting on *vetera novis augere et perficere*, the phrase used by Leo XIII in *Aeterni Patris* in inaugurating the modern revival of Thomism (*Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas* [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1967] 220).

<sup>2</sup> See the great "walking image" of scientific inquiry presented by St. Thomas in *In III Metaph.*, lect. 1, 339–41; see also *Summa Theologiae* (ST) 1, q. 79, a. 2, and q. 85, a. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Dennis Michael Ferrara, "Representation or Self-Effacement? The Axiom *In Persona Christi* in St. Thomas and the Magisterium," *TS* 55 (1994) 195–224; "The Ordination of Women: Tradition and Meaning," *TS* 55 (1994) 706–19; "‘In Persona Christi’: A Reply to Sara Butler," *TS* 56 (1995) 81–91, the latter in response to Sara Butler, "‘In Persona Christi’: A Response to Dennis M. Ferrara," *TS* 56 (1995) 61–80. See also "‘In Persona Christi’: Representation of Christ or Servant of Christ's Presence?" *Catholic Theological Society of America Proceedings* 50 (1995) 138–45.

For in proposing a ministerial and “apophatic” notion of the priesthood as an antidote to the ubiquitous and, I believe now, dangerous myth of representationalism, these articles, while presupposing the traditional Catholic doctrine of the transcendental dignity and ecclesial uniqueness of the priesthood—that the priest truly speaks for Christ in the Church and alone is competent, by virtue of the sacerdotal character, to consecrate the Eucharist—failed to explain precisely how this traditional doctrine is positively preserved, though perforce in a more nuanced sense, within the horizon of apophaticism. The burden of the present article is to attempt this more nuanced retrieval, to bring to light, within apophaticism, the substance of the traditional doctrine in a “second naïveté.”

The argument will proceed in two steps, corresponding, respectively, to the phenomenal (*prius quoad nos*) and transcendental (*prius quoad se*) dimensions of the sacraments. Part 1 will argue the essential ecclesiality of the sacraments and the role played therein by the priest as the representative or “spokesperson” for the Church (*in persona Ecclesiae*), thereby further deconstructing the notion that the priest represents Christ, but at the same time establishing a horizon of thought that forces us to retrace our steps in order to specify how and in what precise sense the priest, within this ecclesial role, acts as the instrument of Christ himself. Accordingly, Part 2 will attempt, via analyses of the two dimensions of the sacramental word and of the role played therein by the Spirit of Christ, to deconstruct this same ecclesiality<sup>4</sup> by viewing it as instrumental of the presence of Christ, an instrumentality which reaches its recapitulating climax in the Eucharist as the ecclesial word spoken *in persona Christi*. An initial section will attempt to clear the air by distinguishing the doctrine of the Church on the priesthood from the representationalist interpretation of this doctrine.

#### WHAT IS THE DOCTRINE?

That the fundamental teaching of the Church in the matter at hand concerns the effectiveness and uniqueness of the priest’s power to con-

<sup>4</sup> The formally ecclesial role of the priest in celebrating the Eucharist was long advocated by the late Edward J. Kilmartin, S.J. (e.g. “Apostolic Office: Sacrament of Christ,” *TS* 36 [1975] 243–64; “The Catholic Tradition of Eucharistic Theology: Towards the Third Millennium,” *TS* 55 [1994] 405–57, at 412–13 and 439–41). I agree with Kilmartin’s position insofar as it combats the notion of the priest as directly representing Christ and insofar as it opens up a path to the East by its important insistence on the eucharistic role of the Holy Spirit, but not with his apparent replacement of the traditional understanding of *in persona Christi* with the notion that the priest acts “as the official representative of the Church of which Jesus Christ is the head” and therefore in the name of Jesus Christ the Head of the Church” (“The Catholic Tradition” 440–41), a view which accords neither with St. Thomas nor with what seems clearly intended by the pertinent magisterial statements above and beyond their representationalist wording. In what follows, I try as best I can to wend my way through this difficult maze.

fect the Eucharist, not the representationalist language and theology used to explain it, is clear from the *Doctrina de sacramento ordinis* of the Council of Trent, which, while staunchly reaffirming against the Reformers “the constant faith of the Church” in the priestly power “to offer and administer the body and blood and to forgive and retain sins,”<sup>5</sup> as well as the distinctiveness of the sacerdotal character as the foundation for the hierarchical structure of the Church,<sup>6</sup> makes no mention whatsoever of an alleged priestly “representation” of Christ. The sufficiency of Trent’s teaching is confirmed by the fact that the representationalist language used by the later magisterium in reaffirming this teaching is generally nontechnical and nonthematic in nature (as distinct from the deliberate coinage of technical terms such as *homooisios* and *transsubstantiatio* to specify the Catholic import of a doctrine under attack), e.g. the passing statements of Vatican II,<sup>7</sup> or Pope John Paul II’s assertion that the priest acts “*in persona Christi* . . . in specific sacramental identification with the High and Eternal Priest who is the author and principal actor of this sacrifice of his.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed, it is precisely when the magisterium’s representationalist language begins to assume a technical air that it begins to strain doctrinal and theoretical credibility. The 1983 letter of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) on the subject, for example, takes the language of “identification” a dangerous step forward when it asserts that in acting *in persona Christi* “the one celebrating in a peculiar and sacramental way is completely the same as the ‘high and eternal priest’.”<sup>9</sup> Even here, however, “identification” has no technically defined meaning, its purpose being to highlight the principal authorship of Christ, as the text goes on to say, although the language remains theologically confused inasmuch as it transfers the true locus of Christ’s identification in the Eucharist from the Body and Blood to the ministerial priest. In any case, the main doctrinal affirmation of the letter does not go beyond what was taught by Trent that “only the ministerial priesthood, in virtue of the sacrament of orders, enjoys the power of confecting the eucharistic sacrifice in the person of Christ and of offering it in the name of the whole Christian people.”<sup>10</sup>

And the same must be said of Pius XII’s encyclical *Mediator Dei*, the

<sup>5</sup> Council of Trent, Sess. XXIII, *Doctrina de sacramento ordinis*, cap. 1 and can. 1, in *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, ed. G. Alberigo et al. (Bologna: Istituto per le Scienze Religiose, 1973) 742–43.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* cap. 4 and can. 6, in *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta* 743–44.

<sup>7</sup> For citations and commentary, see Ferrara, “Representation or Self-Effacement?” 217–18.

<sup>8</sup> *Dominicae cenae*, Holy Thursday Letter of Pope John Paul II, nos. 8–9, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (AAS) 72 (1980) 113–48, at 128–29.

<sup>9</sup> *Letter of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on the Subject of the Role of the Ordained Ministry of the Episcopate and Presbyterate in the Celebration of the Eucharist*, Aug. 6, 1983, AAS 75 (1983) 1001–09, at 1006.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 1001.

“father” of 20th-century magisterial representationalism, where we read that “the minister at the altar in offering a sacrifice in the name of all His members represents Christ, the Head of the Mystical Body,”<sup>11</sup> and that “the priest acts for the people only because he represents Jesus Christ, Who is Head of all His members and offers Himself in their stead.”<sup>12</sup> The language of representation notwithstanding, the pope’s doctrinal intention in these passages, especially the latter, is clearly to reaffirm<sup>13</sup> Trent’s distinction between the clergy and the laity, a distinction founded in the priest’s power, not shared by the laity, to consecrate the Eucharist as the minister of Christ. It is precisely in virtue of this power and ministry, rooted in the sacerdotal character, that the priest, as the pope goes on to say, “goes to the altar . . . superior to the people” and in this sense may be called a mediator, whereas “the people . . . since they in no sense represent the Divine Redeemer and are not a mediator between themselves and God, can in no way possess the sacerdotal power.”<sup>14</sup> That the affirmation of this unique priestly power expresses the core of the Catholic faith regarding the priesthood and, perhaps more tellingly, embodies the enduring Catholic “sense” of the priesthood, is beyond question; even in this “age of the laity,” one still needs a priest “to say Mass and hear confessions.” But that this doctrinal affirmation implies that the priest directly represents or is “identified” with Christ is difficult to maintain even on Pius’s own terms, for he speaks of the priest as “the minister of Christ” who, precisely as minister, is “inferior to Christ,”<sup>15</sup> a view which seems better to accord with a theory of instrumentality than with one of direct representation, much less of “identification.”

The correctness of the above interpretation of the magisterial texts, and, by inference, the acceptability of interpreting them in terms of the traditional theory of instrumental causality, would, I believe, be sufficiently clear were it not for the confusion over the meaning of representation occasioned by *Inter insigniores*.<sup>16</sup> For apart from this Declaration, the magisterium’s references to representation concern the interior sacerdotal character, the precise nature of which, despite the representationalist language used in describing it, remains elusive, mysterious, and undefined. The distinctive teaching, I would even say novelty, of *Inter insigniores* consists in taking the notion of interior “representation” literally rather than metaphorically, canonizing it, and transferring it to the external and visible level on the basis of a

<sup>11</sup> *Mediator Dei: Encyclical Letter of His Holiness Pius XII on the Sacred Liturgy* (Washington: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1947) no. 93. For the complete text of the original, see AAS 39 (1947) 521–95.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* no. 84.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* where the pope rehearses these points as “errors long condemned.”

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* no. 83.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* no. 84.

<sup>16</sup> “On the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood” (*Inter insigniores*), Declaration of Oct. 15, 1976 of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (Washington: USCC, 1977).

view of the sacraments as bearing a "sacramental reference to constitutive events of Christianity and to Christ himself,"<sup>17</sup> and, more precisely still, of the sacraments as "represent[ing] what they signify by natural resemblance."<sup>18</sup> It is on this basis that the Declaration affirms the necessity of a "'natural resemblance' . . . between Christ and his minister,"<sup>19</sup> resulting in the well-known conclusion that only a man can represent Christ in the celebration of the Eucharist.<sup>20</sup> With this understanding, the priest appears as a kind of sacramental "double" of Christ, a view which pushes even further into the background the referential biblical concepts of apostle, witness, and ambassador, according to which the one sent speaks in the name and power of the one who sent him and not on his own authority.<sup>21</sup> And as these biblical concepts recede, there recedes also the primacy of the living Christ.

The Declaration's inability to ground its assertion of visible representation in any coherent analysis of the sacramental rites themselves<sup>22</sup> is evident in its appeal to nuptial imagery, a move endorsed by Pope John Paul II in *Mulieris dignitatem*.<sup>23</sup> In all candor, however, this argument must be judged irrelevant. For, as I pointed out in my original article, nuptiality, though a valid image of the ultimate *res* of the Eucharist as "the sacrament of the [loving union of the] Bridegroom and the Bride,"<sup>24</sup> is essentially misplaced when predicated of the con-

<sup>17</sup> *Inter insigniores* no. 4.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* no. 5.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Thomas, it may be noted, though speaking of sacramental character in general (he has no detailed analysis of the sacerdotal character) as "configuring" (*configuratur*) the faithful to the priesthood of Christ" (*ST* 3, q. 63, a. 3), goes on to explain this *configuratio* not in terms of a *similitudo*, a notion which for him bespeaks a formal indifferentiation between likeness and exemplar (*ST* 1, q. 4, a. 3), but as a referring of the one signed to his leader, as "configuring one to some principal person in whom is invested the authority over that to which he is assigned," in the way, for example, that a soldier is marked with the sign of his leader (*ibid.* ad 2) and hence during battle can be distinguished from the soldiers of the enemy (*ibid.* ad 3). Thomas's insistence, detailed in my original article, on the purely instrumental nature of the character, advances this referential reading of the character, which retains continuity with the scriptural understanding of apostle, a step further.

<sup>22</sup> The priest's action *in persona Christi* formally stems, as *Inter insigniores* section 5 itself acknowledges, from the priestly character. But the latter is essentially interior. By insisting that the axiom implies an external and visible representation of Christ, the Declaration is either trivializing the axiom by reducing its essentially metaphysical meaning to the epistemological level of what is readily understandable ("a sign that must be readily perceptible" [*ibid.*]), or is making the priest, as visible sacrament of Christ, part of the *sacramentum tantum* of the Eucharist. On the novelty and unacceptability of the latter view, see Ferrara, "Representation of Christ" 139 n. 5. At the heart of the Declaration's position is an erroneous formalizing of the function of the "natural sign" in the Christian sacraments. For the traditional view as expounded by St. Thomas, see below 7–8, and also Ferrara, "A Reply to Sara Butler" 85–87.

<sup>23</sup> "On the Dignity and Vocation of Women" (*Mulieris dignitatem*), Apostolic Letter of Aug. 15, 1988 of Pope John Paul II (*Origins* 18 [Oct. 6, 1988] 26; AAS 80 [1988] 1653–1729, at 1715–16).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

crete liturgical rite, which quite obviously has the visible form not of a wedding but of a meal, as is acknowledged as a matter of course even by such a staunch defender of representationalism as Sara Butler.<sup>25</sup> Nor has the magisterium come forward with a more satisfying rationale for "visible representation," preferring instead, as in *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*,<sup>26</sup> to argue the case against the ordination of women on the basis of Christ's institution and the tradition of the Church, a move that brings with it its own set of problems.

From all this it may fairly be concluded, I think, that the representationalist view of the priesthood is not the doctrine of the Church, the substance of which is expressed by the Council of Trent, but rather a language, for the most part conventional and nontechnical, for expressing this doctrine, a language which, when pushed to give a critical account of itself in the light of new questions, has become profoundly questionable, as evident in the implausible move made by *Inter insigniores* from "interior" to "exterior" representation, a move which, given the axiom *agere sequitur esse*, should follow as a matter of course.

*IN PERSONA ECCLESIAE: THE SACRAMENTS AS OFFICIAL ACTS OF THE  
CHURCH AND THE PRIEST AS REPRESENTATIVE OF THE CHURCH*

In my original article, I countered representationalism by proposing, on the basis of St. Thomas's instrumental view of the sacerdotal power, a theory of the priest as the "instrument of Christ." Yet in and of itself, such a theory is insufficient, since it seems to leave the priest hanging in mid-air between Christ and the Church. To specify—but also make more problematic—the meaning of priestly instrumentality, it is therefore necessary to place it in its ecclesial context by viewing the sacraments as expressive of the Church as the primordial "sacrament of Christ" and thus, as Rahner puts it, as "the essential functions that bring into activity the very essence of the Church herself . . . in which she herself attains the highest degree of actualization of what she always is: the presence of redemptive grace for men, historically visible and manifest as the sign of the eschatologically victorious grace of God in the world."<sup>27</sup> In Schillebeeckx's succinct formulation, a sacrament is "a personal saving act of the risen Christ himself, but realized in the visible form of an official act of the Church as such."<sup>28</sup>

To speak of the sacraments, then, is to speak of the ecclesial mediation of Christ's grace, of grace as mediated by an ecclesial act with its

<sup>25</sup> Sara Butler, "A Response to Dennis M. Ferrara" 72.

<sup>26</sup> "Priestly Ordination" (*Ordinatio sacerdotalis*), Apostolic Letter on Ordination and Women of Pope John Paul II of May 30, 1994 (*Origins* 24 [June 9, 1994] 50–52).

<sup>27</sup> Karl Rahner, "The Church and the Sacraments," in *Inquiries* (New York: Herder, 1964) 204.

<sup>28</sup> E. Schillebeeckx, *Christ, the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963) 54.

own immanent and identifiable structure. Only when this ecclesiality is explicitly recognized is it possible to speak non-mythologically of the sacraments as acts of Christ. More specifically, the sacraments are, in their proximately available form, acts of the Church, indeed, official and ritual acts, in which the Church, as a visible and hierarchically ordered body, incorporates and commissions new members in Christ, welcomes them back when they have strayed, strengthens them at the approach of death, renews its leadership, and above all celebrates its own nature as the Bride and life-giving Body of Christ. From here it is a small step to viewing the priest as the minister and representative of the Church in the celebration of the sacraments. For except in the case of baptism, only a bishop or priest can confer or serve as the official ecclesial witness to the sacrament in such a way as is required for its validity as an official act of the Church and hence as a sacrament of Christ. This general truth takes on greater specificity in light of the formality of the ecclesial-priestly word in the sacramental act.

In analyzing the internal structure of the sacraments, Thomas distinguishes two elements: the natural reality, which serves as the material and as such indeterminate basis for the sign, and the word, which serves as its formal and determining component by lending the natural reality a specifically Christian significance. In the classic formulation of Augustine, which Thomas adopts at this point, "the word is added to the element and this becomes a sacrament."<sup>29</sup> Only when the word is spoken does the natural sign—which we today see more as an action than as a physical element—take on a spiritual or Christian meaning "in accordance with the sense of the words which is held by faith."<sup>30</sup> Thus, immersion into and emergence out of water may naturally signify cleansing and death and rebirth, but it signifies our pass-over in Christ only through the ministerial invocation of the thrice-holy God. Again, in the sacrament of Order the transfer of power and authority signified by the traditional laying on of hands takes on a Christian meaning and reality in light of the bishop's prayer beseeching God to bestow upon his servant here present the dignity of the presbyterate.

Now if for the moment we prescind from the Eucharist, it is evident that the proximate subject uttering the sacramental word is not Christ, but the Church, or rather, the sacramental minister serving as "spokesperson" for the Church: "I baptize you," "I absolve you from your sins," "May the Lord forgive you by this holy anointing whatever sins you have committed," etc. The sacramental word is thus, in its proximately available form, the word of the Church, not indeed, any word, but precisely that "official" (Schillebeeckx) word in virtue of which the Church, through its official minister and representative, actualizes here and now its own abiding and essential nature as the sacrament of

<sup>29</sup> *ST* 3, q. 60, a. 5, *sed contra*.

<sup>30</sup> *ST* 3, q. 60, a. 7 ad 1.

Christ (Rahner). This view takes on deeper meaning when, in line with Rahner's theology of the word to be discussed below, we consider the sacramental word as the culmination of the Church's proclamation of the gospel, a task which, according to Vatican II (following up on the Council of Trent),<sup>31</sup> is the central function of the episcopal and priestly office: "priests, as co-workers with their bishops, have as their primary duty the proclamation of the gospel of God to all."<sup>32</sup> Here the proclamation of the word is defined as an act of "office" (*munus*) and hence as an "official word," a teaching reaffirmed, somewhat ironically, by *Inter insigniores* itself when it insists that the apostles are "the official witnesses to the Resurrection"<sup>33</sup> and that "the official and public proclamation of the message . . . belongs exclusively to the apostolic mission."<sup>34</sup>

To sum up: if the sacraments, in their proximately available form, are official, self-actualizing acts of the Church as the sacrament of Christ; and if, further, the power to confect or witness these acts derives (except in the case of baptism) from the episcopal or sacerdotal office; and if, finally, the utterance of the word which is the determining form of these acts constitutes the climax of the apostolic proclamation of the gospel which it is the precise function of the episcopal and sacerdotal office to continue—then it seems not only legitimate but necessary to conceive the priest's ministry as a ministry not only *for* but very precisely *of* the Church, and to view the priest's role in celebrating the sacraments as one of acting "in the person of" the Church: *in persona Ecclesiae*.

But just at this point arises the necessity of a "second naïveté." How, within the categorial priority of the Church, is it still possible to speak, as speak we must, of the Church's sacraments and of its priesthood as that reality in and through which Christ himself continues to act effectively and visibly as "author of the Covenant, the Bridegroom and Head of the Church"?<sup>35</sup> How, most particularly, is rigorous insistence on the ecclesiality of the sacraments consonant with the unique mystery of the Eucharist? Here the argument for ecclesial mediation appears truly to founder, for here, it seems, the priest does take Christ's place directly, to the point of uttering the historical words of Christ in Christ's very person and thereby effecting here and now the real presence of Christ's historical sacrifice. Thomas himself so sharply distinguishes the two levels of priestly "impersonation" as apparently to place the consecrating priest "outside the Church": "The priest in reciting the prayers of the Mass speaks in the place of the Church, in

<sup>31</sup> Council of Trent, Sess. 5, Decr. 2, *Super lectione et praedicatione*, in *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta* 667–70, at 669 n. 9.

<sup>32</sup> *Presbyterorum ordinis* no. 4, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. W. M. Abbott (New York: Guild, 1966). All citations from Vatican II are taken from the Abbott edition.

<sup>33</sup> *Inter insigniores* no. 2.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* no. 3.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* no. 5.



whose unity he remains; but in consecrating the sacrament he speaks as in the person of Christ, whose place he holds by the power of his orders."<sup>36</sup> An attempt to answer these questions forms the burden of the next section.

#### FROM ACT OF THE CHURCH TO ACT OF CHRIST

##### *The Two-Fold Nature of the Sacramental Word*

Like its very being, the Church's sacramental word "serves [Christ] as a living instrument of salvation."<sup>37</sup> A living instrument, a genuine means and mediation of grace, and yet only a means, only a mediation. The Church may utter the words of absolution, for example, but it does so in the name and power of Christ, for "who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:7). These two dimensions of the Church's sacramentality—that it truly mediates the grace of God and yet does so only as an instrument of Christ's saving action—are mirrored in the two dimensions of its sacramental word, as noted by Schillebeeckx:

[T]he substance of a sacrament always includes a twofold element: an *epiclesis* in the form of a request (*in forma deprecativa*) that is to say, a prayer in which we plead with the Father by the power of the Spirit and together with Christ; and a definitive bestowal [of grace] (*in forma indicativa*). Both elements are always present, even when they no longer appear, as was formerly the case, in two separate ritual moments of the Liturgy. Moreover, the one essential moment (whether it be an expression in the form of an *epiclesis* or an exclusively indicative formula) has in any case the twofold significance.<sup>38</sup>

As Schillebeeckx implies, the sacramental formulae exhibit considerable variety in exhibiting these two correlative dimensions. In baptism, for example, the indicative form predominates—"I baptize you"—with the deprecative form implicit in the trinitarian invocation (and in any case abundantly manifest in the surrounding prayers), whereas in Order the deprecative form takes precedence, though with complete confidence that the prayer is heard: "Grant, we beseech You, Almighty Father, the dignity of the priesthood to this your servant, etc." In penance, both dimensions are equally evident: "May our Lord Jesus Christ absolve you, and by his authority I absolve you of all your sins".

The efficacy of the *forma indicativa* is essentially misunderstood, however, unless seen as God's response to the *forma deprecativa*, the prayer addressed to God officially by the Church in the name of Christ and in complete reliance upon the merits of his passion and the power of his resurrection. Through this ecclesial prayer (which, as Schillebeeckx says, is always present, if not always with complete clarity, as

<sup>36</sup> ST 3, q. 82, a. 7 ad 3.

<sup>37</sup> *Lumen gentium* no. 8.

<sup>38</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Christ, the Sacrament of the Encounter* 72.

an essential element of the sacramental act), there is fulfilled Christ's promise that whatever we ask the Father in his name will be granted (John 16:23). The Church prays "in the name of" and "in reliance upon" Christ, not, moreover, in a merely external and historical sense, but in an internal and present sense, since it does so in explicit consciousness of its abiding union with its head and with his prayer, which, as Schillebeeckx says, "is always heard,"<sup>39</sup> for "Jesus, because he remains forever, has a priesthood which does not pass away. Therefore he is always able to save those who approach God through him, since he forever lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:24-25). The sacramental word as uttered by the Church is thus first and foremost a word of supplication, a word uttered in faith, for only thus can it be the word of sacramental efficacy and power without presumption and blasphemy. "I baptize you'," says the Church, "not in my own name or in virtue of my own power, but 'in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.'" For the Church can do nothing on its own. The *forma indicativa* of a sacrament can never signify an autonomous exercise of power, as if Christ, in deist fashion, had left the Church a treasury of grace to be dispensed in its own name and as it sees fit. For Christ is the *present* author of grace in every sacrament. Underlying every authoritative bestowal of grace, therefore, is the suppliant faith of the Church, operative, as Thomas points out, through the intention of the ecclesial minister: "The minister of the sacrament acts in the person of the whole Church, whose minister he is, for in the words he utters there is expressed the intention of the Church, which suffices for the perfection of the sacrament."<sup>40</sup>

Underlying both forms of the Church's sacramental word is the action of the Spirit of Christ, the "soul of the Church."

*The Holy Spirit as the Principle of the Church's Sacramental  
Unity-in-Difference with Christ and Its Two-Fold Action in the  
Sacramental Word*

Many mythic, dangerous, and downright false understandings of the Church and thus of its sacraments, its priesthood, and its power could be avoided if from the outset we thematized the fact that the principle

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 68.

<sup>40</sup> ST 3, q. 64, a. 8 and 2. Although the validity of the sacrament only requires that the minister place the sacramental sign with the intention "to do what the Church does" (*intentio faciendi id quod facit Ecclesia*) and not what the Church "intends" (*intentio faciendi id quod intendit Ecclesia*), in "doing what the Church does" the minister in fact effects what the Church "intends," namely, the sacramental mediation of Christ's grace. For while the minister may be devoid of grace, the Church is indefectible. In its case there can be no disassociation between "doing" and "intending"; rather, they necessarily coincide. As Thomas points out, even a minister who thinks the rite he performs is worthless can intend to do what the Church "does," and such an intention suffices for validity, since "the minister of a sacrament acts in the person of the Church, by whose faith any defect in the minister's faith is made good" (ST 3, q. 64, a. 9 ad 1).

which binds the Church to Christ is at the same time the principle that differentiates it from him within this unity: the Holy Spirit. Useful for this purpose is the "excellent analogy" drawn in *Lumen gentium* between the sacramental being of Christ and the Church respectively:

Christ, the one Mediator, established and ceaselessly sustains here on earth His holy Church, the community of faith, hope, and love, as a visible structure. Through her He communicates truth and grace to all. But the society furnished with hierarchical agencies and the Mystical Body of Christ are not to be considered two realities, nor are the visible assembly and the spiritual community, nor the earthly Church and the Church enriched with heavenly things. Rather they form one interlocked reality which is comprised of a divine and a human element. For this reason, by an excellent analogy, this reality is compared to the mystery of the incarnate Word. Just as the assumed nature inseparably united to the divine Word serves Him as a living instrument of salvation, so, in a similar way, does the communal structure of the Church serve Christ's Spirit, who vivifies it by way of building up the body (cf. Eph. 4:16).<sup>41</sup>

Directly, this analogy inculcates the intrinsic and sacramental union between the two elements of the Church's nature: the earthly, bodily, and communal on the one hand, and the transcendent and spiritual on the other. This union is analogous, according to the council, to the intrinsic and sacramental union between the divine and the human in Christ. Underlying the similarity that makes the conciliar analogy possible, however, is the dissimilarity that keeps it only an analogy. For by linking the Church's visible and communal structure not to Christ but to Christ's Spirit, the council teaches that it is not directly but in and through his Spirit that Christ lives in, forms, and acts through the Church as his body. Such had already been implied in the previous paragraph on the Holy Spirit as the "soul of the Church": "In order that we may be unceasingly renewed in Him (cf. Eph 4:23), He has shared with us His Spirit who, existing as one and the same being in the head and in the members, vivifies, unifies, and moves the whole body. This He does in such a way that His work could be compared by the holy Fathers with the function which the soul fulfills in the human body, whose principle of life the soul is."<sup>42</sup>

Specification of the Holy Spirit as the principle uniting Christ and the Church reveals the intrinsic limits, and thus precludes false or misleading understandings of, the image of the Church as Christ's mystical body. For while the body image aptly signifies the communion of life between Christ and Church, so that one may rightly speak of "the whole Christ, head and members,"<sup>43</sup> in no way may this vital communion be thought of as that of a single person. For the "conjoinedness" of Christ's humanity to the Word is hypostatic: *unio in persona divina*. Precisely because of this hypostatic unity, Christ is not two, but

<sup>41</sup> *Lumen gentium* no. 8.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* no. 7.

<sup>43</sup> *ST* 1, q. 1, a. 7.

one,<sup>44</sup> more precisely, one in being or *esse*:<sup>45</sup> the divinity of person, while not confusing or obliterating the duality of natures, is yet the ground of its unity.<sup>46</sup> Such unity does not and cannot obtain between Christ and the Church, for the union between the two is effected through another divine person. All this indicates the *otherness* of Christ and the Church within their inseparable union. Otherness, not separation; otherness in fact as the condition of union, a union, however, that does not submerge one identity in another but preserves both intact and is therefore not physical and animist, as might be suggested by a literal reading of the body image, but spiritual and therefore also personal, or, more precisely, interpersonal, since it concerns two subjects, Christ and the Church, a union of steadfast faith and enduring love—in a word, a nuptial union, the union of the Bridegroom and the Bride. The principle of this union of faith and love is precisely the Holy Spirit, who is therefore also the transcendently immanent principle constituting the Church as subject vis-à-vis Christ. As Thomas puts it: “There is in the Church a certain continuity by reason of the Holy Spirit, who numerically one and the same fills and unifies the whole Church; hence Christ according to his human nature is called head of the Church by reason of his influence”.<sup>47</sup>

It is, in short, not directly but in and through his Spirit that Christ is united to the Church as its Head and Lord. It is thus also in and through his Spirit that Christ continues, through the Church, his saving activity and, in particular, “acts in the sacraments.”

Of the two dimensions of the Church’s sacramental word, the *forma*

<sup>44</sup> ST 3, q. 17, a. 1.

<sup>45</sup> ST 3, q. 17, a. 2.

<sup>46</sup> See below, n. 52.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate* q. 29, a. 4. My approach here differs sharply from that proposed by David Power, O.M.I., in his otherwise insightful and confirming essay, “Representing Christ in Community and Sacrament,” in *Being a Priest Today*, ed. Donald J. Goergen, O.P. (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1992) 97–123. According to Power, “the glorified Christ is totally one with the body,” a oneness symbolized by the “one flesh” of the nuptial image, so that “the sanctifying and worshipful action of Christ in the Church is the action of the Church itself as a believing community, when it is united by the ordained ministry” (115). And again: “The actions of Christ in the Church are the actions of the body, or, there is only one action, which is that of the body, head and members, as though one person” (116). This oneness is even said to represent Thomas’s “deepest and most important intuition,” though one that he “subordinated . . . to a more hierarchical and instrumental view of the ordained” (105) in keeping with the medieval theology of *in persona Christi*, which “separated the descending act of God in Christ from the ascending act of Christ in the Church” (115). Power sees a fateful separation where Thomas and the medievals posited a fundamental distinction, namely, between God’s gratuitous and prior gift of grace in Christ (the downward movement) and the ecclesial response of faith and worship (the upward movement). It is in fact precisely this priority of God’s grace within the covenant—not, as both Power and *Inter insigniores* section 5 would have it, the union of love—which is the fundamental theological reality signified by the nuptial image of Scripture (see Ezekiel 16), making a clear and subordinating distinction between the Head and the members, the Bridegroom and the Bride, and hence between *in persona Christi* and *in persona Ecclesiae* not a medieval relic, but an abiding necessity.

*indicativa* and the *forma deprecativa*, the latter is perhaps more readily intelligible as the work of the Spirit. For it is the Spirit who prays within us with "unutterable groanings" (Romans 8:20), the Spirit "who knows the deep things of God" and who, given to us, "help[s] us to recognize the gifts he has given us" so that "we speak . . . in words not of human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit" (1 Corinthians 2:10–13), the Spirit by which the Church is joined to him and through which he rules over it as Lord. It is because the Church's prayer is uttered in the Spirit that it is prayer not in some general and undifferentiated sense, but quite precisely the prayer of the indefectible Bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:25–27), always united to him in the "one flesh" of the mystical body but as bride having a voice of its own, a voice of confident prayer and eschatological longing: "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come!'" (Revelation 22:18).

Specifying the role of the Spirit in the efficacy of the *forma indicativa* is more difficult and complex, but a beginning can be made when we draw out the trinitarian implications of Rahner's visionary thesis on the sacramental word as "the supreme realization of the efficacious word of God,"<sup>48</sup> a thesis which, by making the word formal for the efficacy and not merely the signification of the sacraments, goes beyond the unresolved duality of the two in the previous tradition<sup>49</sup> and provides a starting point for a unified sacramental theory. In this thesis, Rahner takes up the biblical notion of God's "mighty creative *dabar* (word)" to distinguish a word which is merely "*didachē* (teaching)" from "proclamation in which the arrival of the thing proclaimed itself takes place"<sup>50</sup> and so which "takes on the character of an event" in which "the word which speaks of grace and grace itself," while not identical, are "essentially related to one another and form a unity" as "moments of a total process," in such a way that the word "is the efficacious proclamation which brings about what it speaks of, the grace announced: it is truly a word of life, creative word of God."<sup>51</sup>

Here I propose refining Rahner's thesis by attributing the efficacy of

<sup>48</sup> Karl Rahner, "The Word and the Eucharist," in *Theological Investigations* 4 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966) 253–86, at 265.

<sup>49</sup> Thomas, for example, does not expressly extend the formality which the word possesses for sacramental signification to the sacrament's instrumental efficacy (see *ST* 3, q. 61, aa. 1 and 4), the result being that the relation between signification and efficacy lies unresolved in his thought. (Passing references such as *sacramenta significando causant* in *De veritate* q. 27, a. 4 ad 13 or *secundum vim significationis* of *ST* 3, q. 78, a. 2 ad 2 are assigned no clear causal or technical meaning by Thomas.) This irresolution was not removed by Trent (Sess. VII, *Decretum primum de sacramentis*, can. 6–8, *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta* 684–85). For the manifold and sometimes strained theories developed in post-Tridentine theology to explain sacramental efficacy, see Bernard Leeming, S.J., *Principles of Sacramental Theology* (Westminster: Newman, 1956) 314–44.

<sup>50</sup> Rahner, "The Word and the Eucharist" 261.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* 263. On the word of the priest as the word of God, see also Karl Rahner, "Priest and Poet," in *Theological Investigations* 3 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1967) 294–317, at 303.

the sacramental proclamation, its instrumental power to make present and bestow what is outwardly proclaimed, to the action of the life-giving Breath or Spirit of God (*ruah Yahweh*) poured out by the risen Christ. A remote basis for my proposal is provided by the many and sizable fragments in the scriptural, liturgical, and theological traditions about the relation between the Spirit and the Word—as the force empowering the word of the prophets; as the source of the inspiration of the Word of God in the Scriptures; as the power by which the Eternal Word was made flesh, lived and preached, delivered himself into the hands of his Father, and was raised up on the third day; as the fiery tongues descending upon the Apostles and bursting into the flame of the pentecostal proclamation. But to focus this diverse and at times ambiguous evidence into a clear and systematic principle, a more immediate and certain basis is needed. And this is provided, in my judgment, by the traditional doctrines of the Spirit of Christ as the “soul” of the Body of Christ and as the “sanctifier.”

To say that the Spirit is the “soul” of the Body of Christ is to affirm the Spirit as the dynamic and energizing principle of the Church’s visible and corporate structures and hence as the moving principle of the activities flowing from them, chief among which are the sacraments. But also—and given the confusion currently afflicting the theology of the Trinity, most particularly the doctrinal deviations parading openly in certain forms of “Spirit Christology,”<sup>52</sup> it is necessary to state this here explicitly—it is to insist that the Spirit who so animates the Church is precisely and only the Spirit of *Christ*: the “pneumato-

<sup>52</sup> Clear examples are provided by Roger Haight, S.J., “The Case for Spirit Christology,” *TS* 53 (1992) 257–87, and John McDade, S.J., “Jesus and the Spirit,” *The Month* 27 (1994) 498–503. The fundamental doctrinal error, as has already been pointed out in Haight’s regard by John Wright, S.J., “Roger Haight’s Spirit Christology,” *TS* 53 (1992) 729–35, is a denial of the hypostatic union between the Eternal Word and the assumed humanity (Haight, 276–80; McDade 502–3). In this, the authors seize on the ambiguity that lingers in Chalcedon’s duality of *natures* while completely bypassing the formal resolution of this ambiguity by the explicit affirmation of Christ’s divine *person* at Constantinople II (see G. L. C. Frank, “The Council of Constantinople II as a Model Reconciliation Council,” *TS* 52 [1991] 636–50, at 646–47). Theoretically, both authors suppress the divinity of Christ’s person as being a threat to his human integrity, agency, and historicity (Haight 276; McDade 501), thereby confusing the transcendental nature of the relation of the divinity to the humanity implied in the Greek doctrine of *enhyphostasis* with a categorial and hence “competing” relation. Inevitably, these positions result in neo-modalistic views of the Trinity, though McDade at least preserves trinitarian language (502–3), Haight’s initial identification of the Spirit with the economic God as such (268–70) leaving him unable to make any intelligible reference to the Trinity at all. Unruddered explorations such as these, which radically reverse the priorities of faith and thinking in theology, perforce remind us of the words of Bernard Lonergan: “the article[s] of the Apostles’ Creed . . . ha[ve] a clear meaning in the minds of all the faithful, including the theologians *qua fideles*. That clear meaning seems to me to exclude in rather peremptory fashion theories . . . that, instead of explaining what everyone believes . . . seem to be incapable of being reconciled with what everyone believes” (“Christ as Subject: A Reply,” in *Collection (I)* [New York: Herder, 1967] 164–97, at 197).

logical corrective," hardly in place, itself is today in dire need of a "christological recorrective." If, then, as I stated earlier, it is only possible in light of the animating action of the Spirit to grasp the Church as Christ's body and the identification with Christ that it betokens without fear of essential miscalculation, it is also only as forming the body of *Christ* that this action of the Spirit can be grasped in its proper nature. For the body image teaches that Christ, in and through his Spirit, is indeed himself the inner "form" of the Church, assimilating it to himself so that the life it lives is no longer its own but his (see Galatians 2:20), a life lived according to the pattern set by Christ, "made one with his sufferings as the body is one with the head" in the hope of the resurrection, and charged with carrying on his mission of "bringing all human beings to full union with Christ."<sup>53</sup> All this because the transcendently immanent principle of the Church's life, its "form" and "soul" is the Spirit precisely and only of Christ, as the council expressly states, the Spirit sent by him as the risen and exalted Kyrios from the right hand of the Father and not before (John 7:39; 15:26; 16:7), the Spirit whose animating function makes the Church Christ's Church, Christ's Body, and hence able to "serve him," as the council states, "as a living instrument of salvation." In sum, it is because the moving principle of the Church's sacramental word of authority—"I baptize you," "I absolve you"—is the Spirit by which the Church is united to Christ that the sacrament is an act which has Christ, the "author of the Covenant, the Bridegroom and Head of the Church,"<sup>54</sup> as its author, an act of the head working through the body.

If as "soul of the Church" the Spirit of Christ is the transcendent origin of the Church's sacramental word, the Spirit is also, as "sanctifier," the gift bestowed thereby and hence the efficacious and real arrival of the word in the addressee, more precisely, the arrival of the specific grace signified by the word. Such a view of the action of the Spirit, while not explicitly applied by Thomas to the sacraments, is nonetheless consonant with his theology of the Spirit as effecting the real union of grace between God and the world<sup>55</sup> and as the source of that graced interiority in which the essence of the New Testament consists.<sup>56</sup> Once again, however, the grace in question is always and only the grace of Christ, merited by his cross and bestowed in the power of his Resurrection, the grace, moreover, which has Christ as its "content," since by it we are conformed to him as to God's only Son (Romans 8:29), not, indeed, in literal imitation, but insofar as, led by his Spirit, we live the paschal mystery of his prototypical humanity in and through our own "ecclesial" humanity, before and unto the Father.

In sum, the word uttered by the Church in the sacraments is truly sacramental—a word of confident prayer, uttered in faith by the Bride of Christ, and a word of grace-bestowing power uttered by his Body in

<sup>53</sup> *Lumen gentium* no. 8.

<sup>56</sup> *ST* 1, q. 43, a. 3.

<sup>54</sup> *Inter insigniores* no. 5.

<sup>56</sup> *ST* 1-2, q. 106, a. 1.

his name—a two-fold word uttered in the one Spirit by which it is both united to and yet distinct from him. And yet there remains a final and supreme word, what Rahner calls “the sacrament of the word absolutely, the absolute case of the word anywhere”:<sup>57</sup> the Eucharist. And with it the present attempt at a “second naïveté” finds its most proper and most mysterious locus.

*The Sacramental Word Spoken In Persona Christi: The Eucharistic Word*

Everything that has been said to this point about the ecclesiality of the sacraments, the role of the ecclesial and priestly word, and the vivifying function of the Spirit seems to run aground in face of the supreme mystery of the Eucharist, where the sacramental word effects the presence not merely of Christ’s power and saving grace, but of his very person, and indeed precisely under the sign of his death: “Every time, then, you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes!” (1 Corinthians 11:26). We are faced then with an apparent dilemma: either the Eucharist exists within the general continuum of the sacraments, as outlined above, or it exists outside this continuum. If the former, then the Eucharist differs only in degree but not in kind from the other sacraments, which is contrary to the Catholic faith; if the latter, then its unique realism seems so to shatter the unity of the sacramental system as to constitute a sacrament only in some equivocal sense, which, though not strictly against the Catholic faith, is certainly against the entire thrust and tenor of Catholic theology and practice.

Not altogether surprisingly, we seem to face the same dilemma in regard to the meaning of *in persona Christi*, the ultimate but to this point latent subject of the present reflections. On the one hand, the stress laid in the foregoing account on the ecclesial function of the priest and the vivifying role of the Holy Spirit seems so to mediate the priest’s relation to Christ as to result in the view explicitly rejected by the magisterium that the priest utters the Eucharistic word “only through the effective power conferred on [the priest] by Christ,”<sup>58</sup> or “in the name of Christ,”<sup>59</sup> rather than *in persona Christi*. The representationalist view of the axiom, on the other hand, seems so to “identify” the priest with Christ as to separate him from the Church and “identify” him with Christ, so that he faces the Church as Christ does, as Head of the Body. But if a formally “ecclesial” view threatens the uniqueness of the Eucharist, the representationalist view, as I have argued previously, threatens the even more fundamental sovereignty of Christ as Lord of the Church by establishing a symbolic and oper-

<sup>57</sup> Rahner, “The Word and the Eucharist” 283.

<sup>58</sup> *Inter insigniores* no. 5.

<sup>59</sup> See n. 9 above.



ational *univocity* between the power of the hierarchy and that of Christ, thereby obscuring the fact that the priestly power is not something outside and above the Church's graced nature, but is an expression of that nature, is itself a grace and therefore something received and subordinate, a receptivity and subordination, moreover, which cannot remain merely interior and transcendental—and thus “accountable to God alone”—but must be made visible in the sacramental and social order of the Church.

This final section will attempt to move beyond this dilemma in the direction of the nuanced “second naïveté” promised at the outset. I preface it with the following three points.

1. The uniqueness of the priest's action *in persona Christi* is a function and expression of Catholic belief in the real presence and not vice versa. The Church does not believe in the real presence because it believes that the priest acts *in persona Christi*; it believes that the priest acts *in persona Christi* because it believes in the real presence. As I wrote in my original article, “*in persona Christi* in its pregnant theological sense is not first and foremost for Thomas an affirmation about the priest; it is an affirmation of the supreme and unique excellence of the Eucharist: ‘So great is the dignity of this sacrament that it is not confected except in the person of Christ.’”<sup>60</sup> For this, the representationalist interpretation of the axiom is not necessary: to affirm that the priest, in uttering the Eucharistic word, effects the real presence of Christ, not merely his “effective” presence, is to affirm the doctrinal substance of the *in persona Christi* axiom.

2. The eucharistic presence of Christ effected by the priestly consecration is not an isolated but an ecclesial presence, the presence of the Bridegroom to the Bride, of the Head to the Body. Here, assignation of a representational role to the priest is positively out of place, since, both symbolically and functionally, it interposes the priest between Christ and that Church which is, after all, Christ's and not the clergy's bride, the function of the priest being to serve as the official ecclesial instrument of their union, the “marriage-broker,” to borrow Paul's image (2 Corinthians 11:2). To say that the priest utters the consecratory words *in persona Christi* and to say that he also utters them *in persona Ecclesiae* must ultimately, then, be complementary rather than opposed assertions, either of which would be incomplete and inaccurate without the other. The problem is how to explain this complementarity in a way that is both doctrinally faithful and theoretically satisfying.

3. Above and beyond everything, it is essential to acknowledge the limits of what can be explained here. We are dealing with a supreme mystery of our faith, with the absolutely supernatural; recognition of this fact prevents us from mistaking theological theories for the truths on which they are intended to shed their very imperfect light. The

<sup>60</sup> TS 55 (1994) 206, citing ST 3, q. 82, a. 1.

theory of representation, for example, does not explain the priestly power, but presupposes it and leaves its mystery intact. And the same is true of the notion of instrumental causality, however helpful it may be in eliminating what I believe are, when taken technically and not merely metaphorically, false and dangerous understandings of the priesthood. In the end, we understand no more of the priestly power than we do of Christ's uniquely real presence of which it is the mysterious instrument. But we believe in both, and that belief is uppermost.

*The Eucharist: Word of Christ, Word of the Church*

The question before us is how to envision the word of Christ and the priestly word of the Church not as two separate words but as one word on two levels, the one the sacramental instrument of the other, the Eucharist as the word of Christ on the priestly lips of the Church. To make any headway at all, we must first note that the instrumentality of the priestly word in this sacrament is unique in the sacramental order. For in all the other sacraments, the proximate active subject uttering the word, the efficacious *forma indicativa* productive of the sacramental effect, is the Church itself, though in subordination to Christ: "I baptize you," "I absolve you." In these utterances, the priest, as Thomas says in a related connection, "speaks in the person of the Church, in whose unity he remains."<sup>61</sup> In the celebration of the Eucharist, the same active subjecthood is expressed in that act in which, after the consecration, the Church through the priest unites itself with Christ in offering his sacrifice to the Father, as is evident in the priest's prayer, which names the active subject of the sacrificial action: "In memory of his death and resurrection, we offer you, Father, this life-giving bread, this saving cup" (Eucharistic Prayer 2). In the foundational act of consecration, however, the priest does not speak "in the person of the Church" in this sense, i.e. as an active subject distinct from Christ, but in the very person of Christ: *in persona Christi*. And in this (not necessarily representational) sense, the priest, as the magisterial texts cited at the outset of this article state, does celebrate the Eucharist as representative of the Church (*in persona Ecclesiae*) only because he first celebrates it as representative and minister of Christ (*in persona Christi*).

And yet because the consecrating word of Christ is uttered through and in the Church, it is also the word of the Church, indeed its supreme word. This is evident first of all from the fact that consecration *in persona Christi* is the ultimate expression of the power of the sacrament of Order, which is precisely the sacrament by which the entire structure of the Church as a visible and sacramental entity is constituted and ordered hierarchically. To deny that the consecratory word is

<sup>61</sup> ST 3, q. 82, a. 7 ad 3.

a word of the Church would not only shatter the unity of the sacrament of Order, but imply that its utterance is not the culminating act of the Church's priesthood, but one in which the latter transcends its own nature by becoming not just a sacrament of Christ, but in some sense Christ himself. Here theology must draw a firm and unequivocal line and call the theology of the priesthood away from the danger of such an ideology and back to its doctrinal roots in the theology of grace so as to preserve its evangelical truth. And the most fundamental aspect of that truth is this: that to the ancient question which finds expression in the name Michael—Who is like God?—we can and must add another: Who is like Christ? And the answer in both cases is the same: No one. For "Jesus Christ is Lord" (Philippians 2:11) and Jesus Christ alone.

The precise sense in which the consecration is the act and word of the Church begins to appear when we analyze the eucharistic form as a complex whole which consists not simply in the recital of the words of Christ—"This is my body," "This is my blood"—but in their recital by way of anamnesis: "Who, the night before he died, took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying. . . ." That the priest consecrates *in persona Christi* pertains solely to his recital of the words of Christ. It does not pertain to the anamnestic form in which Christ's words are recited.<sup>62</sup> But it is precisely this anamnestic form which makes of the eucharistic recital the act of the Church's faith, both subjectively and objectively, and its ultimate proclamation of the gospel.

The anamnestic form expresses the subjective faith of the Church by showing that the word of Christ is uttered not at the Church's discretion, but in direct obedience to Christ's historical command and in faith in his promise to be with it always. As such it is a confession of Christ's lordship, more precisely, of the paschal mystery of his death, his Resurrection, and his coming again in glory, which three-fold mystery, not the death alone, is the comprehensive objective *significatum* and content of this sacrament, as the eucharistic acclamation in the revised liturgy explicitly proclaims. Recognition of this objective significance is, it seems to me, an essential first step in explaining the

<sup>62</sup> In my original article, I laid formal stress on "the anamnestic nature of the form of the Eucharist," i.e., on the fact that the priest recites Christ's words by way of anamnesis, in order to emphasize the priest's visible otherness from and thus his ministerial subordination to Christ, the principal speaker ("Representation or Self-Effacement?" 206-13). The chief inference I drew from this position is that action *in persona Christi* pertains to the order of faith and mystery and not to the order of visible representation (ibid. 211-12). At the same time, my argument could have been construed as formally identifying the anamnesis with the positive and effective meaning of *in persona Christi*; at the very least, it left a hiatus between the two, a lack of connection between the instrument and the principal cause, a situation which gave objective grounds to Sara Butler's charge of a "fundamental flaw" in my thesis, i.e. that I espoused an "apophatic" notion of sacrament ("A Response to Dennis M. Ferrara" esp. 75 n. 62). The present argument attempts to remove this imprecision, which was not apparent to me when I wrote either the original article or my response to Sara Butler's criticism.

meaning of *in persona Christi*, since it specifies the identity of the one in whose person the priest speaks and thus eliminates a historicist reading of the axiom. A scriptural warrant for this interpretation is provided by St. Paul's statement that in celebrating the Lord's Supper we "proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). For Paul, the Eucharist is neither a "representation" nor a mere recollection, but a proclamation (*kataggellete*), a kerygmatic announcement which has as its object "the death of the Lord": a proclamation, then, not simply of the historical death of Jesus of Nazareth on Calvary, but of the death of Jesus who is now the Christ, the death of him who by the obedience of his cross was given the name above every name: *Kyrios* (Philippians 2:11).

In explaining this further, two distinct issues must be borne in mind. The first concerns the sacrifice which is made present in the Eucharist, the second concerns the sacramental signification of this sacrifice. Discussion of the first issue inevitably encounters the "mystery presence" theology of Vonier and Casel, according to which "the sacrament is the representation of the natural sacrifice."<sup>63</sup> Here, what is made present in the Eucharist is the sacrifice of Christ in its historical actuality. As Schillebeeckx points out, however, such a view, if intended literally, is metaphysically impossible.<sup>64</sup> At the same time, efforts to refute mystery-presence theology founder, in my judgment, unless they abandon its historicist presuppositions<sup>65</sup> by embracing, as Schillebeeckx himself does, though not with complete clarity,<sup>66</sup> the scriptural notion, such as is detailed in chapters 7–10 of the Epistle to the Hebrews, of Christ's sacrifice as "once for all" (*ephapax*: Heb 7:26) precisely because and insofar as it is completed in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb 8:1–2) into which Christ entered with his own blood (Heb 9:11–12), entering the very presence of God (Heb 9:24). It was precisely this eternal sacrifice, and neither his historical dying nor yet simply his death considered as the end of his historical life, that was in fact signified "in anticipation" by Christ in instituting the Eucharist. That this is so is evident both from the meal form of the Eucharist, which reveals it as a sacrament of the eschatological banquet, as Jesus him-

<sup>63</sup> Kilmartin, "The Catholic Tradition" 408.

<sup>64</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Christ, the Sacrament of the Encounter* 55–56.

<sup>65</sup> Kilmartin, for example, rejects any "eternalizing" of the historical sacrifice ("The Catholic Tradition" 410, 452), arguing that the latter can be sacramentally present in virtue of the transhistorical agency of God as principal cause (ibid. 411). But this view, besides being based on what seems to me a strained interpretation of St. Thomas, fails to address the issue: for the transhistorical element that perforce exists in the Eucharist cannot be located in God as principal agent, but must be located precisely in the instrumental cause through which God acts, namely, the sacrifice of Christ *qua homo*.

<sup>66</sup> Basing himself on the Epistle to the Hebrews, Schillebeeckx argues that Christ's sacrifice exists eternally "in the mode of glory" (*Christ, the Sacrament of the Encounter* 58). Prior to this, he attempts to root the transhistorical element of the sacrifice in the eternity of Christ's divine person (ibid. 57) rather than in the assumed humanity as such, thereby exposing himself to the same ambiguity that attends Kilmartin's view.

self indicated (Matthew 26:29), and from his explicit characterization of the cup as the blood of the new covenant (Luke 22:20), which is concluded only insofar as Jesus' sacrifice is eternally accepted by God (Hebrews 9:15). As Trent itself states, at the Last Supper, Christ "instituted a new Passover, namely, himself, to be immolated under visible signs by the Church through the priests in memory of his own passage from this world to the Father."<sup>67</sup>

"Until he comes." The Christ proclaimed and made present in the Eucharist is, finally, not simply the Jesus who died, nor yet only the Christ who rose, but also the Lord who will come again in glory, the Lord, therefore, of the Church's hope. It is precisely in this hope that it celebrates Christ's real presence here and now, his personal presence in saving and redemptive love. The "sacrament of the Bridegroom and the Bride" is thus also the foretaste of the heavenly messianic banquet, what Alexander Schmemmann called "the sacrament of the Kingdom."<sup>68</sup>

It is Christ's sacrifice in this comprehensive sense that is signified by the *sacramentum tantum* of the Eucharist, of which the Church is, after all, the proximate author, and in which it expresses by way of anamnesis its faith in the eternal efficacy and present reality of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice. The entire mystery of Christ, or better yet, Christ in the totality of his saving mystery, is thus intended and proclaimed in the eucharistic anamnesis, precisely because it is uttered, as Thomas says, "in accordance with the sense of the words which is held by faith"<sup>69</sup> and so is a word of faith, the faith neither of this or that individual, nor of the priest, but of the Church itself, a faith which is operative, as already explained, by way of the intention by which the priest uses his power to do what the Church does and apart from which intention the sacrament would be invalid.

As the ultimate expression of the Church's faith and its supreme proclamation of the gospel, then, the eucharistic word, taken globally,

<sup>67</sup> H. Denzinger and A. Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 33rd ed. (Barcelona/New York: Herder, 1965) 1741. In this connection, Pius XII's view that "the Eucharistic species . . . symbolize the actual separation of [Christ's] Body and Blood," so that the "commemorative representation of His death, which actually took place on Calvary, is repeated in every sacrifice of the altar, seeing that Jesus Christ is symbolically shown by separate symbols to be in a state of victimhood" (*Mediator Dei* no. 70), must be interpreted in keeping with Hebrew thought, according to which the body given and the blood shed each signify, under diverse aspects, the totality of Christ's self-giving; see the commentary on Luke 22:19–20 by Robert Karris, O.F.M. in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. R. Brown, J. A. Fitzmyer, and R. E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice, 1990) 713–14. It must be interpreted also in conformity with the fundamental doctrine that the sacraments effect what they signify. For what is made *really* present in the Eucharist can only be what is real and actual at the present: the risen and ever-living Christ, our "high priest, who has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, minister of the sanctuary and of that true tabernacle set up, not by man, but by the Lord" (Hebrews 8:2).

<sup>68</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1988).

<sup>69</sup> *ST* 3, q. 60, a. 7 ad 1.

can be said to be uttered by the priest *in persona Ecclesiae*. But this brings us only to the threshold of the mystery. For at the heart of this priestly proclamation is the word of Christ himself: *sermo Christi hoc conficit sacramentum*.<sup>70</sup> This is the deepest center of the eucharistic mystery, the absolutely supernatural. For here, in the midst of the ecclesial proclamation, that which is recalled out of the past becomes actual in the present: the living word of Christ supervenes upon the priestly anamnesis to change the elements into his body and blood. This Christ does by the agency of his sovereign Spirit, the fire from heaven that transforms the gifts, as Eastern theology insists,<sup>71</sup> an agency exercised by the Spirit not "from below," as *anima Ecclesiae*, but "from above," as sent by the heavenly Christ from the Father of Lights, for, like the creation of the world, it is a strictly divine act.<sup>72</sup> And in this supervening word of Christ, this descending fire of the Spirit, lies the true meaning and the true mysteriousness of *in persona Christi*, for in virtue of this divine fire, the priestly word of the Church is transformed and sacramentally identified with the word of Christ.

Sacramentally identified. Does this attempt at a "second naïveté" end, then, by reaffirming the "sacramental identification" of the priest with Christ it set out to repudiate? It does not. For in my account, what is "sacramentally identified" with Christ is not the priest, but the priestly word. This is no mere linguistic subtlety, no dialectical sleight of hand; underlying it is a shift in the center of gravity of our understanding of the priestly power from what is "from below" to what is "from above," from the priest himself to Christ and his Spirit. In the representationalist view, the efficacy of the eucharistic word appears as embedded in and hence as deriving from a power "possessed" by the priest in virtue of the character by which he is assimilated to Christ as a sort of sacramental "double," enabled thereby to act in Christ's own person to effect the real presence of Christ. By contrast, my view, which is based on the traditional anti-Donatist doctrine that the priestly *power* is distinct from the priest's *person* and hence is an institutionalized charism bestowed for the good of the Church, depos-

<sup>70</sup> *ST* 3, q. 78, a. 1, *sed contra*.

<sup>71</sup> E. Schillebeeckx, *The Eucharist* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968) 68–69; Schmemmann, *The Eucharist, Sacrament of the Kingdom* 213–27. Schmemmann, unfortunately, expounds the Orthodox doctrine of the epiclesis via a sharply polemical contrast with the Western doctrine of anamnesis. It is my hope that the attention given in the present essay to the role of the Spirit in effecting the eucharistic conversion (a role which Thomas seems to take for granted [*ST* 3, q. 78, a. 4 ad 1] but does not develop) will help promote more fruitful interchanges between East and West on this controversial point. For a balanced discussion and a fine harvest of texts from both traditions, see Y. Congar, "The Eucharistic Epiclesis," in *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 3 vols. (New York: Seabury, 1983) 3. 228–57.

<sup>72</sup> *ST* 3, q. 78, a. 2 ad 2; q. 75, a. 4. See also Paul VI's encyclical *Mysterium Fidei* no. 46 (AAS 57 [1965] 753–74 at 776–67. Of this strictly divine power no created thing can be more than an instrument, not even the human soul of Christ (*ST* 3, q. 13, a. 2), and a fortiori not the priest acting in virtue of the sacerdotal character.

sesses the consecrating priestly word of any hint of autonomy by formally defining it in light of the sovereign word of Christ expressed in and through it, and hence, with St. Thomas, as essentially instrumental in nature. Nor does such a view destabilize the priestly character and the power flowing from it in the direction of some actualist or concomitant sense, but rather places it on the absolutely firm ground of Christ's fidelity to the sacramental word spoken over the priest at his ordination, leading to a view of the priest as one over whom the ordaining word of Christ has been permanently spoken, and the priestly character as that mysterious reality in virtue of which the priest, far from possessing Christ, is permanently possessed and appropriated by Christ<sup>73</sup> to accomplish those salvific ends of which Christ alone can be the author.

In the utterance of the eucharistic word *in persona Christi*, then, the Church's priesthood attains that *telos* towards which, as Rahner might put it, it always strives to attain by reason of its essence. For precisely because this word, the utterance of which constitutes the ultimate realization and manifestation of the priesthood, is in the end the word not of the priest, nor even of the Church, but is truly the word of Christ himself spoken in ecclesial form as his efficacious and present self-giving to us—it is precisely because this is so that we can and I think must look back from the eucharistic word to define all other priestly words as lesser participations of that word<sup>74</sup> which reaches and reveals its ultimate nature in the eucharistic word and thereby reveals the ultimate nature of the priesthood as the self-effacing ministry of the word and only on that basis the sacrament of its presence. Nor should anyone find such a view alarming or even new, since only on some such basis can it be affirmed that the word of Scripture, the Book of the Church, is in the end the very Word of God.

At the same time, the word of Christ in the Eucharist is not spoken into a void, but is supported by that bridal faith of the Church which is operative via the priestly intention. This underlying ecclesial faith is not the cause of Christ's presence, nor yet its effect, but rather the instrument, all disponibility, which, in a way analogous to Mary's *fiat*, welcomes Christ's word, allowing it to be spoken and heard in time, and thereby allows him to be present in the self-giving by which he fills the Church with the Spirit that is its true life and that makes it his sacrament in the time and place of this world, until he comes.

#### CONCLUSION

The more nuanced "second naïveté" of which I spoke at the outset of this article consists in viewing the priest as the official ecclesial in-

<sup>73</sup> Thomas's military metaphor expresses much the same idea; see n. 21 above.

<sup>74</sup> On the degrees of the efficacious word, see Rahner, "The Word and the Eucharist" 279–80.

strument of Christ's presence through the preaching of the gospel—as the one who, within the Church, is charged and empowered by office to recall and proclaim the gospel and make it present in saving power to and for the faith of the Church, and hence as the holder of a ministerial office which reaches its transcendent apogee in the proclamation of the eucharistic word *in persona Christi*,<sup>75</sup> where Christ, who is in his person the substance of the gospel, becomes present in his person as saving Lord. To fulfill this office, the priest must be transparent of Christ, his individual person disappearing as it were behind the Word of God so that he may present this Word rather than anything of his own to the Church and the world. In the Spirit: the power of the priesthood, as of the Church which it represents, is the power of Christ's own Spirit, who is specially invoked at the ordination rite in that “anthem of the Catholic priesthood,” the *Veni, Creator Spiritus*, by whose anointing the Lord Jesus himself proclaimed the gospel of salvation to the poor (Luke 4:18). The “second naïveté” is thus at the same time a horizon shift, in line with *Lumen gentium* no. 8, from a baroque to a more evangelical understanding of the Church's hierarchical structure, which can be the saving sacrament of Christ in and for the Church only as the instrument of Christ, who works through it both to will and to accomplish (Philippians 2:13), “that in all things he may hold the primacy” (Colossians 1:18).

<sup>75</sup> Given the uniqueness of the eucharistic conversion and of the priest's role therein, as expounded above, terminological clarity seems best served if we follow the traditional and Thomist usage and restrict the term *in persona Christi* to the priest's utterance of the *ipsa verba Christi* at the supreme moment of consecration and group all “preparatory” ministerial acts, acts in which the priest, though indeed in the power of the Spirit, exercises a proper, intra-ecclesial act of his own to “teach, rule, and sanctify” the faithful *in loco Christi* and “as minister of Christ the Head and co-worker of the episcopal order” (*Presbyterorum ordinis* no. 12), under the general rubric of *in persona Christi capitis*. Such a terminological distinction would reflect the doctrinal distinction between the ministerial nature of the priestly office in general and the uniquely apophatic exercise thereof in the ineffable mystery of the Eucharist: “So great is the dignity of this sacrament that it is not conformed except *in persona Christi*” (*ST* 3, q. 82, a. 1).