

## EUCCHARISTIC PRESENCE: AN INVITATION TO DIALOGUE

JOHN H. MCKENNA, C.M.

*[The author sets the context for discussing eucharistic presence by examining our understanding of symbols, Christ's Resurrection, his living among us through grace, and how Christian attitudes toward celebrating the Eucharist changed over the centuries. He gives a historical overview of theories of eucharistic presence with the modern critique of transubstantiation, and an analysis of an alternate approach using a personal analogy. He also examines various post-modern positions to promote ecumenical dialogue.]*

IN THE INTRODUCTION to his book *The Eucharist*, Schillebeeckx apologized for dealing exclusively with the topic of eucharistic or real presence.<sup>1</sup> Self-limitation, however, is useful and necessary at times. I feel under a similar constraint in this article, which also concentrates on the question of eucharistic presence.<sup>2</sup> My purpose will be to help provide a basis for ecumenical dialogue. I am also convinced that the way we view eucharistic presence has implications for our understanding of the Eucharist and sacrifice.

First, I shall briefly place the topic in the context of other crucial theological and historical questions that lie at the heart of the discussion of eucharistic presence.<sup>3</sup> Then I shall give an overview of ways in which eucharistic presence has been understood in the course of Christian history, including transubstantiation. Finally, I shall discuss another model by which some theologians are attempting to understand the Eucharist, the model of interpersonal encounter.

JOHN H. MCKENNA is a Vincentian priest who received his S.T.D. from the University of Trier, Germany. He is professor of theology at St. John's University, N.Y., and former president of the North American Academy of Liturgy. His publications include *Eucharist and Holy Spirit* (Mayhew-McCrimmon, 1975), an article "The Eucharistic Epiclesis" in *TS* 36 (1975) 265–84, and several articles in *Worship* in 1991 and 1996.

<sup>1</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Eucharist*, trans. N. D. Smith (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968) 21.

<sup>2</sup> Our study treats various views of eucharistic presence in general. For a recent study that focuses on Christ's manifold presence in particular and thus provides a fine basis for some of our considerations, see Michael Witczak, "The Manifold Presence of Christ in the Liturgy," *Theological Studies* 59 (1998) 680–702.

<sup>3</sup> See John H. McKenna, "Setting the Context for Eucharistic Presence," *Proceedings of the North American Academy of Liturgy* (1998) 81–88.

## KEY CONTEXTUAL QUESTIONS

## Symbol and Reality

Symbols are an intimate part of our existence as human beings. If we have deep feelings or experiences, either we must express them or they atrophy and die. Symbols enable us to express both ourselves and our profound human experiences, such as the birth of a baby, the death of a loved one, falling in love, the sense of our own sinfulness. We sense God's presence and the need to express the faith that inspires; we improvise, or more commonly, turn to already existing symbols to express the experience. This, I think, is what Jesus did. This is what the first Christians did and what we do.<sup>4</sup>

We use symbolic actions which have a language and a meaning of their own prior to and independent of any word proclaimed over them. We embrace, share a meal. In themselves, these actions move us deeply. They are crucial to the experience. We also use words. We sing hymns, recite a poem, say a prayer, proclaim a blessing, or tell a story about ourselves and our experience. Our words proclaim and give the deeper meaning of the symbolic actions. Words make that action less ambiguous.<sup>5</sup> Finally, theological reflection attempts to explain and illuminate the experience our symbolic actions and words sought to express. These are all ways of expressing the initial experience and thus deepening it.

Paul Tillich, while eschewing the notion of a mere symbol, reminded us how imperative it is to define our terms in dealing with symbol.<sup>6</sup> Karl Rahner did just that.<sup>7</sup> For him symbol was described in the highest, most primordial fundamental sense as one reality rendering another present. Symbol embodies or expresses the person or thing so strongly that it renders the other reality present, it "allows the other to be there." This is what

<sup>4</sup> See John H. McKenna, "Symbol and Reality: Some Anthropological Considerations." *Worship* 65 (1991) 2–27, which offers more complete documentation for my treatment of symbols in this section.

<sup>5</sup> See Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, trans. Susanne K. Langer (New York: Dover, 1946).

<sup>6</sup> Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957) 41.

<sup>7</sup> Karl Rahner, "The Theology of Symbol," in *Theological Investigations* 4, trans. Kevin Smyth (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966) 221–52. Rahner acknowledges that "the thought of the mystery of the Trinity was the constant background of the ontological considerations" on symbol (235) and sees this as quite legitimate (226); see also his treatment of the Trinity (*ibid.* 77–102). For examples of theologians who have applied Rahner's trinitarian basis to sacramental theology, see Regis A. Duffy, Kevin W. Irwin, and David N. Power, "Sacramental Theology: A Review of Literature," *TS* 55 (1994) 657–705, at 665–67.

Rahner calls a symbolic reality (*Realsymbol*).<sup>8</sup> Moreover, it is the symbolizer, not the recipient, who determines whether or not this is a symbolic reality. This means that a symbol, be it a wedding ring or sexual intercourse, can lose its closeness to the symbolizer and sink to the level of mere sign or “symbolic representation” if one’s heart is no longer in it.<sup>9</sup>

A symbolic representation is not the self-realization of one being in another. It does not express or embody the person or thing so fully that it allows the other reality to be present in it. One example of that would be bells, which point to something else, notifying us that “it is time for church,” or that “somebody is at the door.” Symbolic representations are not close to the person or thing signified; they are more arbitrary (for instance, red means “stop,” green means “go”). But arbitrariness, for Rahner, is not the key norm. Closeness to the symbolizer or the presence of the symbolizer is.<sup>10</sup>

Since the symbolizer, not the recipient, determines whether or not something is a symbolic reality, the margin between sign (symbolic representation) and symbol (symbolic reality) is fluid. A symbol can become a mere sign if it loses its closeness to the symbolizer. So too an arbitrary or conventional sign, for example, a wedding ring, can become a symbol, if it is so charged with, so embodies the other reality as to make it present. Again the key factor is whether or not the symbolizer has one’s heart in it.<sup>11</sup>

Strictly speaking, the symbol (the symbolic reality) does not represent or point to an absent reality. The symbol has been formed or transformed by this reality. The symbol thus renders present what it reveals or symbolizes.<sup>12</sup> Symbols are not simply things; they are things or actions involving relationships.<sup>13</sup>

### Christ’s Resurrection

Perhaps the most crucial context for understanding eucharistic presence is Christ’s Resurrection, which is more than a quantum leap beyond our dreams and expectations. Yet some effort to articulate the Christian com-

<sup>8</sup> Rahner, “The Theology of Symbol” 225. It is interesting to compare the similarities to Rahner’s approach in the work of postmodern theologian Louis Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, trans. Patrick Madigan and Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1995) 112–24. Of course there are also great differences to which we shall refer below, such as the emphasis on the relational quality of symbolic language and the aspect of absence as well as presence.

<sup>9</sup> Rahner, “The Theology of Symbolic Language” 225. See also John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (New York: Scribner’s, 1966) 123.

<sup>10</sup> Rahner, “The Theology of Symbol” 225, 240–41.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 240, 251–52.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 235, 231–34.

<sup>13</sup> See Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament* 120–21. Chauvet prefers to speak of the symbolic rather than of symbol in order to avoid taking any symbol as adequate to express the divine or fixing on the symbol rather than on the one who comes to us through the symbol. See Power, “Sacramental Theology” 684–85.

munity's experience of the Resurrection is necessary,<sup>14</sup> however brief.<sup>15</sup> Jesus lived a fully human life, he was like us in all things but sin (Hebrews 4:15); and Jesus' fully human life affects humanity in its totality.<sup>16</sup> Although one may not be able to write his detailed biography, the starting point of any reflection on the Resurrection is the way Jesus lived.<sup>17</sup> As the Scriptures portray him, his words and actions rang out with the authority of one who could speak of God in intimate terms, who could heal others and free them from demons.<sup>18</sup> He invited people to openness to God, to freedom, to love, to self-giving for their neighbor, and to experience self-giving as a movement toward salvation.<sup>19</sup> He died as he lived, true to the covenant relationship between "Abba" and himself<sup>20</sup> and trusting that the relationship would endure.<sup>21</sup> This despite the intent of others that he henceforth be identified with the dead.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>14</sup> As Xavier Léon-Dufour rightly puts it, "All language is interpretation as the function of an experience and all language is conditioned by a particular environment. Interpretation is not a luxury, but a duty which is still incumbent on us today" (*Resurrection and the Message of Easter*, trans. R. N. Wilson [New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974] 228). For a fine treatment of the dynamic interplay between text and interpreters, see Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as a Sacred Scripture* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991); see also Marianne Sawicki, *Seeing the Lord: Resurrection and Early Christian Practices* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994).

<sup>15</sup> For further elucidation of my reflections on the Resurrection, see John McKenna, "The Eucharist, the Resurrection and the Future," *Anglican Theological Review* 60 (April 1978) 144–65.

<sup>16</sup> See Piet Smulders, *The Fathers on Christology: The Development of Christological Dogma from the Bible to the Great Councils*, trans. Lucien Roy (De Pere, Wis.: St. Norbert Abbey, 1968) 15, 41, 67.

<sup>17</sup> Some attempt to grasp the character and deeds of Jesus, however difficult, is basic to the understanding of his Resurrection. See James M. Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (London: SCM, 1959); Raymond Brown, "After Bultmann, What?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 26 (1964) 1–30; Xavier Léon-Dufour, *Resurrection and the Message of Easter* 11–12; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus, God and Man*, trans. Lewis Wilkins and Duane Priebe (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968) chaps. 6–7 and 334–37; Marianne Sawicki, *Seeing the Lord*.

<sup>18</sup> See Pannenberg, *Jesus, God and Man* 53–65.

<sup>19</sup> See Willi Marxsen, *The Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970) 147–48.

<sup>20</sup> On the question of Jesus' consciousness, see Piet Schoonenberg, *The Christ*, trans. Della Couling (New York: Herder, 1971) 123–34 and the references given there; Pannenberg, *Jesus, God and Man* 325–34; and Rahner, *Foundations* 246–49.

<sup>21</sup> As Edouard Poussset puts it, "The death of the particular being is the most brilliant manifestation of his life" ("Croire en la Résurrection," *Nouvelle revue théologique* 96 [1974] 378). See also Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Death*, trans. Charles H. Henkey and William J. O'Hara, 2nd ed. (New York: Herder, 1965) 27–31, 39–44; Pannenberg, *Jesus, God and Man* 65–66; Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel (London: SCM, 1952) 1.9–15.

<sup>22</sup> See Léon-Dufour, *Resurrection and the Message of Easter* 11; Ulrich Wilckens, *Auferstehung* (Stuttgart: Kreuz, 1970) 18, 20–22; Franz Mussner, *Die Auferstehung*

Christ has been raised. Jesus' confidence that his relationship with "Abba" would endure has borne fruit. His Resurrection implies first of all a relationship with "Abba." Jesus in a sense already stands in the future.<sup>23</sup> His whole personality lives on—the totality of what formed the center of expression and enabled him to enter into relationships with the world and its people, his individuality and uniqueness, that underwent a radical transformation. This in turn involved a bodiliness that is an essential part of being human.<sup>24</sup>

Describing what this entails is another matter. There is no question here of a resuscitation or revivification. With all the stress on the continuity between the historical Jesus and the risen Lord, witnesses leave no doubt that a radical transformation had taken place.<sup>25</sup> Filled with God's Spirit, the risen Jesus had a new-found freedom. This freedom is not a freedom from the body but rather freedom in the body, in the "Spiritized" body of which Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians 15:44. Jesus' body has been transformed through the Spirit into the perfect vehicle of his self-expression and communication. No longer did it impose the limits that it once did. He is free to give himself with absolute freedom. The narratives of his Resurrection appearances witness to this facet of his new life.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, the risen body of Christ somehow embraces the whole universe, which has become the center of his self-expression and communication, namely his body. Teilhard de Chardin grasped this point as if by intuition: "By virtue of Christ's rising again, nothing any longer kills inevitably but everything is capable of becoming the blessed touch of the divine

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*Jesu* (Munich: Kösel, 1969) 60–63. Chauvet puts it in postmodern terms: "The me-ontology indicated here is not of the same order as negative onto-(theo)logy but of the order of *symbolism*: it is in disfiguring Jesus to the point of removing from him all otherness, in reducing him to a non-face, a non-subject, an 'object' of derision (see Isaiah 52:14) that humans have made him a *me-on* ('non-being,' see 1 Corinthians 1:28), which is what Paul expresses culturally under the figure of the slave. That the non-face of the crucified One be the 'paradoxical' trace of Divine Glory, that the face of God show itself only by erasing itself, that we think of God less in the metaphysical order of the unknowable than in the symbolic and historical order of the unrecognizable—quite clearly this is the 'folly' which theologians attempt to express through their discourse" (*Symbol and Sacrament* 74–75).

<sup>23</sup> See Pannenberg, *Jesus, God and Man* 69, 82–84.

<sup>24</sup> See McKenna, "The Eucharist" 150; and Karl Rahner, "The Resurrection of the Body," *Theological Investigations* 2, trans. Karl Heinrich Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon, 1963) 203–16.

<sup>25</sup> See McKenna, "The Eucharist" 151.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 151–52. This also raises the question of the "absence" of the risen One, a theme that runs through much of recent writing on Resurrection and on the Eucharist and one that we shall return to below. See Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament* 48–62; Jean Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1991).

hands, the blessed influence of the will of God upon our lives.”<sup>27</sup> Karl Rahner spoke of a relationship in which the universe is swept up to its fulfillment in and through the fulfillment of Christ.<sup>28</sup> Léon-Dufour spoke in similar terms.<sup>29</sup> It is Christ’s historic body, distinguishing him from others and transformed by the Resurrection, that plays an active, vital role in the transformation of the universe.<sup>30</sup>

Christ’s risen or “Spiritized” body enables him to use individual elements of the universe as extensions of his presence. He is now free to use words, especially those of Scripture, for a personal encounter with others. Natural symbols such as water, bread, and wine suddenly become willing instruments in his free, total self-giving. People, too, are invited to enter into this process. They can become more or less willing extensions of his presence in the world. One can speak in realistic terms of people as members of Christ’s body. Because Christ’s Resurrection involves the universe and its people, what took place in him is still taking place in the persons and universe which he has swept up into his new life, his new freedom.<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, Christ, the embodiment of God’s gift of self, lives on in a tangible community that is meant to provide a context for individuals who mutually support, challenge, encourage, forgive, suffer, and pray for one another. It is also a community that should resist evil and individual and institutional sin. This is grace, the embodiment of God’s saving presence in Christ and his community. This is what the Eucharist seeks to celebrate in words and symbols and in celebrating to deepen. In this context I discuss eucharistic presence.<sup>32</sup>

### Changing Attitudes toward the Eucharist

Another part of the context is the changing attitudes toward the Eucharist over the centuries. Initially, the celebration was clearly a communal experience in which the meal character was prominent. The presence of Christ was presumed.<sup>33</sup> The accent was on the symbols of bread and wine, the action of eating and drinking, and the purpose was to nourish the Christ-life within believers, to unite them with one another in Christ,<sup>34</sup> and

<sup>27</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu* (New York: Fontana, 1964) 82–83.

<sup>28</sup> Rahner, “The Resurrection” 210–15.

<sup>29</sup> Léon-Dufour, *Resurrection and the Message of Easter* 241.

<sup>30</sup> See McKenna, “The Eucharist” 152.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 152–53.

<sup>32</sup> See Wilhelm Breuning, “Die Kindertaufe im Licht der Dogmengeschichte,” in *Christsein ohne Entscheidung*, ed. Walter Kaspar (Mainz: Grünewald, 1970) 83.

<sup>33</sup> See Paul Jones, *Christ’s Eucharistic Presence: A History of the Doctrine* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994) 15.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 14 n. 27, where Jones lists an impressive array of authors attesting to this.

to lead them toward eternal life by deepening their share in Christ's Resurrection begun in baptism. Believers' experience of the risen Lord, living in their midst and freeing them from death in all its forms, gave them great hope in the world to come.<sup>35</sup> They experienced a keen sense of the dynamism of the Eucharist, an action meant to nourish, gladden, transform, and unify the community. Many of Augustine's statements reveal the awareness of the transforming effect of the Eucharist which pervaded this period: "If you receive well, you are what you have received." "Since you are the body of Christ and his members, it is your mystery that is placed on the Lord's table; it is your mystery that you receive . . . You hear the words: 'The body of Christ,' and you answer 'Amen.' Be therefore members of Christ, that your 'Amen' may be true." "Be what you see, and receive what you are."<sup>36</sup> Leo the Great is no less clear: "The partaking of the body and blood of Christ has no other effect than to make us pass over into what we receive."<sup>37</sup>

But attitudes began to shift. The christological controversies led to losing sight of the humanity of the glorified, risen Christ. The risen Jesus was becoming a distant God.<sup>38</sup> Social and economic factors, religious movements of dissent and reform,<sup>39</sup> a shift in liturgical genre from meal to ritual drama, from symbolic action to dramatic allegory also played a role.<sup>40</sup> The lingering effects of the christological controversies, however, seem to have taken the heaviest toll. In any event, a shift was in progress in which the Eucharist was becoming more an object than an action that transformed the community, more an awesome miracle than a joyful sharing. The debates over Christ's presence would only accelerate this movement.

### EUCCHARISTIC PRESENCE: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

During apostolic times the reality of Christ's presence in the Eucharist was presumed. There may have been a growing focus on the elements, as Marxsen has attempted to demonstrate,<sup>41</sup> but emphasis continued to be on

<sup>35</sup> Josef A. Jungmann, *Pastoral Liturgy* (Westminster: Challoner, 1962) 4-9, 57, 78, 359-62.

<sup>36</sup> See James J. Megivern, *Concomitance and Communion: A Study in Eucharistic Doctrine and Practice* (New York: Herder, 1963) 68.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 72.

<sup>38</sup> See Jungmann, *Pastoral Liturgy* 9-19; Megivern, *Concomitance and Communion* 63.

<sup>39</sup> David Power, *The Eucharistic Mystery: Revitalizing the Tradition* (New York: Crossroad, 1994) 186-87, 243-45.

<sup>40</sup> Nathan Mitchell, *Cult and Controversy: The Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass* (New York: Pueblo, 1982) 4-6.

<sup>41</sup> Willi Marxsen, *The Lord's Supper as a Christological Problem*, trans. Lorenz Nieting (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970) 13-33.

the action of eating and drinking and especially on the purpose of this action. Clearly this is no ordinary activity nor are the elements ordinary: "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 NAB).

The dynamic, transforming aspect of this action continued to be stressed. Christians seemed at home with a notion of symbol that made present the reality it symbolized (a symbolic reality in Rahner's sense).<sup>42</sup> The words they use, e.g. *meta-stoicheiosis*, (*trans-elementatio*) speak of radical change.<sup>43</sup> The ancient liturgies did the same. Eastern Christians employed the terms *metapoeiethai*, *metaballesthai*, *metastoiceiousthai*, and in the West we find the terms *transformare*, *transfigurare*, *transfundere*, *transmutare*. Somewhat like the Incarnation, the eucharistic change is seen as a change by appropriating a reality to oneself, taking possession of it in that sense. In this setting, *substantia panis* would mean the reality of the bread as opposed to the appearance or something abstract.<sup>44</sup>

In his study of eucharistic presence, Jones asks if Catholics need insist on an "ontological" change.<sup>45</sup> The response of theologians such as Schillebeeckx would be affirmative. The basis would be a tradition reflected in texts such as those just mentioned. However, they must be seen in a context that stresses the transformation of the community more than that of the elements.<sup>46</sup>

Augustine would be a prime example of this. But he is also at the root of the problem. His spatial conception of glorification and his "reified" notion of the body became the legacy of the West. Augustine lacked a suitable anthropology of the body, and that led to a dilemma: either Christ has a glorified body localized in heaven or he possesses a divine ubiquity. Since Augustine was rightly convinced that Christ remains forever incarnate, he opted for a glorified body localized in heaven, which made it difficult for him to explain how Christ can be present in the Eucharist. His successors such as Ratramnus, Berengar, and Calvin, followed his theory more unrelentingly than he did. Augustine, basing his position on Christian tradition, clearly (although perhaps somewhat illogically) affirmed Christ's eucharistic presence.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>42</sup> See McKenna, "Symbol and Reality" 8-11.

<sup>43</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Eucharist* 65-70.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* 64-76; and John McKenna, *Eucharist and Holy Spirit: the Eucharistic Epiciclesis in 20th Century Theology* (Great Wakening: Mayhew-McCrimmon, 1975) 19-70.

<sup>45</sup> Jones, *Christ's Eucharistic Presence* 235.

<sup>46</sup> See Schillebeeckx, *Eucharist* 76-86; Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament* 385-93.

<sup>47</sup> See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977) 446-49. See also J. Ratzinger, "Das Problem der Transsubstantiation und der Frage nach dem Sinne der Eucharistie," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 147 (1967)



Up to the ninth century, Christian writers generally shared the view that a symbol made present the reality it symbolized, that sacraments were “symbolic realities.” Augustine took a spiritualistic-symbolic approach that tended to be more speculative and intellectual. Ambrose took an approach that was more concrete, down to earth, more suited to the ordinary persons. But they differed only in emphasis; both approaches agreed on the reality present in the symbols. This probably accounts for the remarkable fact that there was no dispute over Christ’s presence for the first eight centuries.<sup>48</sup>

### The Ninth Century

A shift occurred in the ninth century. Perhaps it was the lingering effects of iconoclasm or a more literal, earthy attitude that the barbarian invasion brought with it. In any case, symbol and reality drifted apart for many. Amalar of Metz (d. 853), one of the key agents in that shift, combined in his preaching an overly physical approach to the Eucharist and an “inveterate tendency toward allegory.”<sup>49</sup> Whereas earlier writers viewed symbols as rendering present the reality symbolized, Amalar regarded them more as dramatic reminders of past events.<sup>50</sup>

Another key figure in the shift was Paschasius Radbertus (d. ca. 860). In the first scientific monograph on the Eucharist, he focused on the contents of the sacrament rather than its purpose. In his desire to underline the reality of Christ’s presence, he downplayed symbolism to the point that his materialism “shocked the consciences even of his contemporaries, who were no strangers to a grossly realistic notion of the Eucharist.”<sup>51</sup> For Paschasius *veritas* or reality seemed to mean physical reality.<sup>52</sup>

That put his opponent in the debate, Ratramnus (d. after 868), in the curious position of having to say that Christ’s body is really present *in figura*, that is in a symbolic manner, and not *in veritate*, not as a physical or material reality. Taken out of context these words seem to indicate that

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129–58; and especially, Gustave Martelet, *The Risen Christ and the Eucharistic World*, trans. René Hague (New York: Seabury, 1976) 124–28.

<sup>48</sup> See J. P. de Jong, *Die Eucharistie als Symbolwirklichkeit* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1969) 28, 32–33; David Power, *Unsearchable Riches: The Symbolic Nature of the Liturgy* (New York: Pueblo, 1984) 46–47; Alasdair I. C. Heron, *Table and Tradition* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983) 70–74. Megivern rightly and repeatedly notes that the emphasis throughout this period is not on the reality of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist but on the purpose of that presence, the transformation of the community (*Concomitance and Communion* 51–78).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* 81.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* 79–81; Power, *Unsearchable Riches* 56.

<sup>51</sup> Megivern, *Concomitance and Communion* 83.

<sup>52</sup> De Jong, *Die Eucharistie als Symbolwirklichkeit* 33.

Ratramnus denied the reality of Christ's presence in the Eucharist; and he was in fact condemned by a Synod in Vercelli (1050). Today, however, most would agree that the issue between Paschasius and Ratramnus was not that one believed Christ to be present in the Eucharist and the other did not. The real problem was that the notions of symbol and reality were coming apart in the minds of many. That forced them to look elsewhere than to symbol in order to account for the reality of the Eucharist.<sup>53</sup>

Berengar of Tours (d. 1088) is a case in point. Reacting to an overly physical approach to the Eucharist, he taunted his opponents by claiming they taught that we receive "little pieces of Christ's flesh." Embracing what he believed to be the position of Augustine and Ratramnus, he rightly returned to viewing sacraments as symbols. But the possibility of a symbol that actually makes present the reality symbolized never seems to have crossed his mind. He ended up viewing the sacraments as representations without real content and thus denied the reality of Christ's presence in the Eucharist.<sup>54</sup>

His opponents, unable to appeal to a notion of symbolic reality, emphasized an overly physical approach. An instance of this is the often cited oath demanded of Berengar by the Council of Rome (1059): "I, Berengar . . . believe in my heart and confess with my mouth that the bread and wine which are placed upon the altar, are, after the consecration, not only the symbol [*sacramentum*] but also the real body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and physically [*sensualiter*], not only in symbol [*in sacramento*], but in truth [*in veritate*], are passed through the hands of the priest, broken and chewed by the teeth of the faithful. . . ."<sup>55</sup> This embarrassingly physical interpretation was quietly left aside, benignly interpreted, or attacked by later writers. Thomas Aquinas, for example, stated: "We do not chew Christ with our teeth; Christ is not eaten in his own bodiliness, nor is he chewed with the teeth—what is eaten and broken is the sacramental species."<sup>56</sup> On the popular level, the numerous stories about bleeding hosts were seen as bolstering belief in the reality of Christ's presence. Aquinas was equally forceful in rejecting this interpretation as overly physical, one that failed to do justice to the manner of Christ's presence.<sup>57</sup> The absence

<sup>53</sup> See Megivern, *Concomitance and Communion* 85–86; Heron, *Table and Tradition* 93–94; de Jong, *Die Eucharistie als Symbolwirklichkeit* 33–34; McKenna, "Symbol and Reality" 13–14.

<sup>54</sup> See Megivern, *Concomitance and Communion* 89–90; de Jong, *Die Eucharistie als Symbolwirklichkeit* 34.

<sup>55</sup> H. Denzinger and A. Schönmetzer, ed., *Enchiridion Symbolorum* [DS] (New York: Herder, 1965) 690.

<sup>56</sup> *Summa theologiae* 3, q. 77, a. 7, ad 3.

<sup>57</sup> See Megivern, *Concomitance and Communion* 40–45, esp. 43 n. 2. See also Joseph Powers, *Eucharistic Theology* (New York: Herder, 1967) 109–10. In addi-

of a healthy sense of symbolic reality led to a search for alternate ways of explaining this presence. In an attempt to counteract crass materialism, Scholastic theology drew upon Aristotelian categories and put forward a change that did not take place in the physical structure of the bread and wine but in their metaphysical reality.

This theology reinterpreted (“transubstantiated”) Aristotle by appealing to a real distinction between substance and accidents (they could therefore be separated from one another). That led to the teaching on transubstantiation, in which the substance of the body and blood of Christ replaces the substance of bread and wine. According to this view, the appearances or accidents of the bread and wine remain and are supported by the substance of Christ’s body and blood. In this context, substance is the being which underlies (*substat*) any feature that may be added to it; it has to do with what a thing is. Accident is any feature added to that (*accidit*, lies next to it); it has to do with how a thing is.<sup>58</sup>

Ironically, in trying to oppose materialistic notions with a metaphysical approach, the Scholastics, including Aquinas, appealed to a physical analogy that lent itself to a physical understanding.<sup>59</sup> The focus is also on the elements, the bread and the wine, and their change.<sup>60</sup> This change took on an increasing, if not supreme, importance. Moreover, when one maintained that the change is instantaneous,<sup>61</sup> the tendency was to focus on the moment of consecration. That in turn led to a debate over the role of the epiclesis and the institution narrative which had pastoral implications.<sup>62</sup> In that respect, Thomas Aquinas was a product of his time. But he did see Christ’s bodily presence as a means to a fuller presence of Christ in his faithful and, in that sense, a transformation of the faithful. Nicholas Cabasilas, Aquinas’s counterpart in the East, also saw eucharistic presence as a means to deepening Christ’s presence in the faithful.<sup>63</sup>

John Wycliffe, an Aristotelian at Oxford, rejected the Thomistic distinction between substance and accidents and thus remained closer to the

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tion to the question of symbolism, this raises the question of Christ’s glorified body, which is a key to understanding Christ’s presence in the Eucharist or anywhere else, for that matter. De Jong sees Berengar as a victim of a shift regarding symbol and reality from a Platonic-Augustinian approach to an Aristotelian approach (*Die Eucharistie als Symbolwirklichkeit* 35–36).

<sup>58</sup> See Schillebeeckx, *Eucharist* 57–58.

<sup>59</sup> See Jones, *Christ’s Eucharistic Presence* 103. Even today for many, if not most, “substance” implies “material.” For example, the Protestant reaction to Paul VI’s encyclical *Mysterium fidei* led to the following headline in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*: “Pope maintains material presence of Christ in Eucharist.”

<sup>60</sup> See DS 1642, 1652.

<sup>61</sup> *ST* 3, q. 75, a. 7.

<sup>62</sup> See McKenna, *Eucharist and Holy Spirit* 71–77; Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament* 525.

<sup>63</sup> McKenna, *Eucharist and Holy Spirit* 190–91.

original Aristotle. He concluded that the accidents of bread and wine do not continue to exist without their subject or substance; that the substance of the bread and wine remains; and that there is no corporeal presence of Christ in the Eucharist. In adhering to a strictly Aristotelian framework, Wycliffe had to interpret Christ's eucharistic presence as "purely symbolic."<sup>64</sup> This earned a condemnation in 1415 by the Council of Constance. The council Fathers were convinced that they had to maintain a real distinction in order to maintain belief in real presence. Unfortunately they went still further. As John Macquarrie has noted in contrasting the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) with the Council of Constance (1414–1418), the eucharistic species became a veil, the agent of the consecration became the priest, and substance was identified with physical matter. Aquinas would have been as uncomfortable with the last as were a number of the reformers. Again, such an overly physical approach ignores the sacramental, even the incarnational, principle that material realities or symbols, without ceasing to be material, can become another form of God's ontological presence.<sup>65</sup>

### The Reformation

Martin Luther reacted to what he considered to be philosophy's ascendancy over theology and argued for a return to basics, namely, the Bible. He also reacted to such practices as adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, focus on the elevation of the host, benedictions, and processions of the Blessed Sacrament. While rejecting Zwingli's reduction of Christ's eucharistic presence to the merely spiritual, he opposed the view that transubstantiation was an article of faith. Without using the word, he proposed a form of consubstantiation. He urged a return to Christ's words at the institution, "Take and eat," which permitted reservation for the sick but would discourage practices such as those just enumerated. He focused on the parallel between the Incarnation (hypostatic union) and the Eucharist. By appealing to the body of Christ and a share in the divine ubiquity he restored eucharistic presence to its rightful christological basis. But hypostatic union and consubstantiation are not really parallel.<sup>66</sup>

John Calvin opposed both adoration of the Eucharist as too static and overemphasis on Christ's divinity in eucharistic doctrine. In stressing the humanity of Jesus Christ, he sided with Zwingli's view that Christ's body was localized in heaven and therefore not in the Eucharist. Instead, the

<sup>64</sup> See Schillebeeckx, *Eucharist* 58–59; Jones, *Christ's Eucharistic Presence* 101–2.

<sup>65</sup> See John Macquarrie, *Christian Unity and Christian Diversity* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975) 74–76; McKenna, "Symbol and Reality" 15.

<sup>66</sup> See Jones, *Christ's Eucharistic Presence* 117–34; Ratzinger, "Das Problem der Transubstantiation" 137–45.

Holy Spirit was seen as transporting us to heaven and thereby enabling our union with Christ. Calvin brought out the dynamism of the Eucharist and the role of the Holy Spirit. He left us, however, with a notion of Christ's risen body as localized.<sup>67</sup>

All this contributed to the context in which Trent's teaching on transubstantiation became, as Schillebeeckx has emphasized, highly polemical.<sup>68</sup> Schillebeeckx also demonstrated the legitimacy and value of exegeting the texts and examining their genesis. The following comparison indicates the core reality those at the council were trying to express.

The first draft stated: "If anyone should maintain that the sacrament of the Eucharist does not *truly* [*vere*] contain the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, but (that these) are only there as in a sign or a symbolic form, let him be excommunicated" (canon 1).<sup>69</sup> The second draft read: "If anyone . . . *truly* and *really* [*vere et realiter*]. . . ."<sup>70</sup> The third draft read: "If anyone . . . *truly, really, and substantially* [*vere, realiter et substantialiter*]. . . ."<sup>71</sup> That is the formulation adopted in the fourth and definitive text.<sup>72</sup> The adverbs have grown from "truly" to "truly and really" to "truly, really, and substantially." The effort to eliminate any possibility of watering down the meaning is clear. Likewise, the first two drafts of canon 2 stated that there was a "unique and wonderful changing"; and the last two drafts mentioned a "wonderful and unique changing."<sup>73</sup>

The texts also relativized the Church's use of transubstantiation. The first two drafts spoke of the change which "was very suitably called transubstantiation by our fathers."<sup>74</sup> The third draft spoke of the change which "our fathers and the universal Catholic Church have very suitably called transubstantiation."<sup>75</sup> The final definitive text, however, no longer claims that "our fathers" or the "universal" Church used the term, but simply states that it is very suitable (*aptissime*).<sup>76</sup>

Schillebeeckx has correctly argued that the genesis of these canons reveals three different levels in Trent's definition. The first level is the core of the dogma. It lies in the affirmation of a specific and distinctive eucharistic presence, namely, the real presence of Christ's body and blood under the sacramental species of bread and wine (canon 1). The insistence on the lasting character of this presence underlines its special and distinctive qual-

<sup>67</sup> See Jones, *Christ's Eucharistic Presence* 127, 134–46; Ratzinger, "Das Problem der Transubstantiation" 133–37.

<sup>68</sup> DS 1632, 1642; see also *ST* 3, qq. 75–77.

<sup>69</sup> See Schillebeeckx, *Eucharist* 31 (emphasis mine).

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* 33 (emphasis mine).

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* 36 (emphasis mine).

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* 37.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* 31, 33, 36, 38.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* 31, 34.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* 36.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* 38.

ity and thus distinguishes it from the presence in the other sacraments.<sup>77</sup> The second level is an immediate theological reasoning that, if there is a distinctive mode of presence here, then there must be some real, ontological change in the bread and wine. Schillebeeckx contends that it is necessary to hold these two levels to be faithful to the Church's teaching. Given the framework in which they were operating, he maintains, the participants of the council could not establish this unless they insisted on the change of the substance of bread and wine into the substance of Christ's body and blood (canon 2).<sup>78</sup> The third level makes use of the terminology, the way of explaining the other two levels. This was "very suitably" called "transubstantiation." This level is the most relative of the three.<sup>79</sup>

Both Aquinas and Bonaventure had reasoned that way. They began with an indisputable "fact of faith," namely, a distinctive, real presence in the Eucharist. They concluded, on the basis of theological reasoning, to a change in the substance of the bread and wine. To explain this change Thomas appealed to the Aristotelian categories of substance and accidents.<sup>80</sup>

Schillebeeckx contended that within the current framework the council members *had* to affirm a change in substance. Within the prevailing Aristotelian framework it was impossible to safeguard the distinctive character of Christ's eucharistic presence without affirming transubstantiation. One can raise the question today whether or not it is possible to have real, ontological change without having to appeal to transubstantiation. But to expect the Council of Trent to have done so, he argues, is to expect too much.<sup>81</sup> In any event, transubstantiation became the Roman Catholic position for centuries to come.

The Reformation period failed to look to the ancient notion of a symbolic reality, a notion that has been lost sight of. Zwingli acknowledged that the Eucharist was a fitting symbol but "merely" a symbol. On the other hand, the Counter Reformation approach looked outside the symbol to establish the reality of the Eucharist. Numerous theories appeared on how the sacraments "caused," as did a hardening emphasis on the words of the institution as the moment of consecration. No matter that Aquinas had combined the Augustinian notion of symbol with the Aristotelian concept of causality ("sacraments cause by signifying").<sup>82</sup>

The late-18th and early-19th centuries saw a renewed interest in the realm of symbol. A painful clash within the Roman Catholic Church forced

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 43–46.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. 44.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 44, 40–42.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 49–51, 63.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 51–53; Chauvet concurs (*Symbol and Sacrament* 7–8, 44).

<sup>82</sup> See de Jong, 36; McKenna, *Eucharist and Holy Spirit* 71–90; Stephen Happel, "Symbol," in Joseph Komonchak et al., ed., *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1987) 999; Power, *Unsearchable Riches* 180–81.

the theologians of renewal back to biblical, patristic, and liturgical sources. This, together with the contributions of the Catholic Tübingen School, especially J. A. Möhler's *Symbolik* (1832), sowed the seeds nurtured by later theologians and reaped in the Second Vatican Council.<sup>83</sup> In the 20th century, the Benedictine scholar Odo Casel (d. 1948), a Reform theologian Gerardus van der Leeuw (d. 1950), and a monk from Buckfast Abbey, Anscar Vonier, helped to reappropriate the ancient notion of symbol. Opponents often had to be reminded that although the eucharistic change was ontological it was not on the physical level.<sup>84</sup> But a revised reading of Aquinas and rediscovery of the ancient understanding of the relationship between symbol and reality led to rehabilitation of the notion of symbol in theology. Bernard Lonergan, John Macquarrie, Karl Rahner, Edward Schillebeeckx, and Paul Tillich made extensive use of this notion in their theology.

### Transubstantiation Today

As an explanation, transubstantiation has come under increasingly heavy fire. Some within the Roman Catholic Church maintain that this is the ("only" implied) Catholic understanding of the eucharistic presence. They stress continuity with tradition. Without this formula, they argue, the Catholic understanding cannot remain intact. They appeal to the encyclical *Mysterium fidei* no. 24, with its emphasis on Trent. Others claim that transubstantiation once expressed a realistic understanding of the eucharistic presence but no longer does so. They seek other explanations that bring out the ecclesial dimension of this presence, that respect the communal celebration and reception of the Eucharist with its intended goals, and that take into account the mentality of modern people, for example, with a stress on personalism. They appeal to *Mysterium fidei* no. 25, with its openness to other more understandable explanations of the same reality.

The criticisms of transubstantiation are varied. It is not a question, within Roman Catholic circles at least, of denying a distinctive, objective eucharistic presence. Nor is it a question of denying that a real, ontological change takes place. What is criticized are perceived weaknesses in the explanation. There has been and continues to be the danger of viewing the change in an overly physical way. Aquinas and others tried to avoid a materialistic interpretation and placed the issue on the metaphysical, sacramental level rather than on the physical level. But the use of a physical

<sup>83</sup> Happel, "Symbol" 1000, For an extensive treatment of the interactions of this period, see Mark Schoof, *A Survey of Catholic Theology (1800–1970)*, trans. N. D. Smith (New York: Paulist, 1970) 14–156.

<sup>84</sup> See de Jong, *Die Eucharistie als Symbolwirklichkeit* 37–41; Power, *Unsearchable Riches* 181–84; Jones, *Christ's Eucharistic Presence* 203–4.

analogy from Aristotelian natural philosophy (one physical substance changing into another) runs the risk of having nonspecialists or even theologians think in physical terms. Substance in the minds of many and in science textbooks implies something material, physical.<sup>85</sup> There is also the danger of focusing on the elements and their change rather than on the purpose of the change, namely real presence in the faithful, an encounter with Christ.<sup>86</sup>

### A PERSONALIST APPROACH

These criticisms have led theologians to explain eucharistic presence through another analogy, that of an interpersonal encounter. The basic image is the presence of one person as a person to another person as a person. Interpersonal encounter allows for types of presence and accords a significant role to bodily presence.<sup>87</sup>

First, there are different types of presence. There is a purely physical, spatial, or local presence, as in a crowded bus or subway car in which people are oblivious to one another despite the physical juxtaposition. Even when one person jostles another, awareness may only be of a thing, namely, an elbow in the ribs. The presence may become more personal if one says, for instance, "Excuse me but could you move your elbow," or if one smiles and gives a friendly greeting. Communication has begun, but one still does not have an experience of presence in its fullest sense.

Full personal presence involves the response of the other. Presence in the deepest sense is mutual, interpersonal presence. It is not enough for one to offer; the other must reciprocate by accepting the offer and offering herself or himself. This kind of presence involves knowledge of the other as a person. On the deepest level this kind of presence involves love, because only in a climate of love can people reveal themselves as they are. This level of presence is the fullest and most real.

Second, the personal analogy accords a significant role to bodily presence. Purely physical presence is secondary to full, interpersonal presence. But it is absolutely necessary. This corresponds to human nature. Every attempt of one person to communicate with another inevitably takes place in and through that person's bodiliness. Relationships start, for example, with a smile or a friendly greeting. They find expression through words and bodily gestures and this expression often intensifies the relationship. A wife

<sup>85</sup> For this and other criticisms, see Jones, *Christ's Eucharistic Presence* 203–4; McKenna, *Eucharist and Holy Spirit* 174–76.

<sup>86</sup> See Macquarrie, *Christian Unity and Christian Diversity* 77–78; McKenna, *Eucharist and Holy Spirit* 176; Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament* 392, 526.

<sup>87</sup> For what follows on the basic analogy, see McKenna, *Eucharist and Holy Spirit* 177–80.



who complains "You never say you love me anymore" may not be nagging; she may sense that what is not expressed is beginning to fade. A husband who responds "I may not say it, but I show it in many ways" may have a point; we do not always need words, we can use other symbols or symbolic actions. But the fact remains that we must express deep realities in some way or risk their loss. And our bodies enable us to do that.<sup>88</sup>

Moreover, this approach to presence situates bodily presence in an anthropology of symbolic actions that is not dualistic. A symbolic reality does not point to something absent. Rather, a person's bodiliness and its modes of expression make present what they express. A kiss, for instance, is not a sign of something else, of a person hidden behind it. It is, or should be, that person himself expressing love for the other person. People also extend their bodily presence by using material objects as expressions of themselves. A material gift *is* the person expressing in a concrete way the gift of self to the person loved. And it is the symbolizer, the giver, who first and foremost determines the reality of the symbol.

Thus the personal analogy denies neither the necessity nor the importance of bodily presence. It simply seeks to put it in perspective, as always subordinate to the deeper personal presence to which it can lead and which it expresses. Conversely, our bodiliness can even hinder deeper, personal presence. At times bodily limitations make it difficult, if not impossible, to express our free gift of self to another. A change in facial expression may force us to reveal ourselves in a way we prefer not to. Others can "pin us down," treat us as an objectifiable "thing" to be gazed at or pitied against our will. At these times our bodiliness deprives us of a freedom crucial to the self-giving needed for a fully personal presence.

### **Application to the Eucharist**

Obviously every analogy limps. It is difficult to describe the mystery of human relationships. And it will be even more difficult to describe the complexity and mysteriousness of God's dealing with us. The personal analogy also needs to be seen in the context of a number of related issues we mentioned earlier, such as the nature of symbols and our understanding of Jesus Christ's risen, glorified body, which retains a continuity with his body before death, yet has been radically transformed, "Spiritized." The risen body no longer has the limitations that can hinder the deepest personal presence to people and the universe. It is the perfect vehicle of Christ's self-expression and allows a sovereign, absolute freedom that enables an intimacy and intensity impossible before his death. Closely related to this is Christ's presence in the Church, which has become the embodi-

<sup>88</sup> McKenna, "Symbol and Reality" 2.

ment of his ongoing presence in the world. The Eucharist in general and eucharistic presence in particular are meant to express and thereby intensify that presence.

Also crucial is the issue of the manifold presence of Christ in the Eucharist, namely, in the whole believing community and especially when the faithful gather together in his name, in the presider and ministers of the assembly, and in the proclamation of the Scriptures in the assembly. Christ is really, personally present and active in all of these, although according to different modes. To understand Christ's presence in the bread and wine we must situate this presence in the context of these other modes of presence.<sup>89</sup> Finally, there is the issue of the incompleteness of Christ's presence or his absence that makes us long for the parousia. Only in the context of these related issues does the presence, often referred to as real presence, have its place and meaning.

In this setting Roman Catholic theologians try to maintain the distinctive character of this presence. It is substantial in the sense that it lasts as long as the bread and wine are still recognizable as food and drink. Calling it substantial does not mean to deny the reality of the other modes of presence but simply affirms the distinctive character of Christ's presence in the elements.<sup>90</sup>

Christ offers himself in the Eucharist. He takes hold of the bread and the wine (the meal) and makes use of their bodiliness to offer himself in a bodily presence. The bread and wine are not merely tokens or signs of Christ, pointing to him and reminding us of him. Rather, with a sovereignty and freedom that now belong to his glorified body, he identifies himself with the bread and wine. He uses them to embody and express his eternal giving of himself to the Father and to us. Christ will always "have his heart in it."<sup>91</sup>

In this personal approach, what is the effect on the bread and the wine? While remaining unchanged on the physical level, the bread and wine undergo a substantial change, a change that does not depend on the faith of the individual Christian. On the sacramental, ontological level they are no longer simply bread and wine; they are Jesus Christ offering to unite us to himself in his sacrifice and thus to unite us with the Father and with each other in the Holy Spirit.<sup>92</sup>

The change in the bread and wine is then a real, substantial change—no less real than if it had taken place on the merely physical level. In fact, this

<sup>89</sup> See *Instruction on Eucharistic Worship* (May 25, 1967) (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1967) articles 9 and 55; also Witczak, "The Manifold Presence of Christ in the Liturgy."

<sup>90</sup> McKenna, *Eucharist and Holy Spirit* 181.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* 182.

change is more real, more substantial, than a merely physical change. The bodily presence of Christ in the bread and wine is also real—but no more real than the mutual presence of Christ and his faithful in the life of grace. In fact, it is this mutual, personal presence, this unity between Christ and his faithful and their unity with each other in Christ that the bodily presence of Christ in the gifts embodies, expresses, and intensifies. This personal unity of the faithful with Christ, and through Christ with the Father and with each other in the Holy Spirit, is the real presence. This presence is the *raison d'être* of Christ's bodily presence in the Eucharist and of the change in the bread and wine. This presence is personal, and therefore reciprocal or mutual.<sup>93</sup>

Two points thus emerge. First, the bodily presence of Christ and the change that accompanies it, while important and even necessary, are always subordinate to the deeper, personal presence that they are to express and intensify. Second, even the personal presence of Christ offering himself to his Father and to us does not constitute presence in the fullest sense, since presence to be fully personal must be reciprocal. The Church must also respond by opening up to Christ's gift of himself. Otherwise we do not have presence in its fullest sense. The sacramental sign becomes simultaneously an embodiment of the mutual, personal presence of Christ and his Church and an invitation to every believer to participate personally in this presence. As Schillebeeckx states,

The presence offered by Christ in the Eucharist naturally precedes the individual's acceptance of this presence and is not the result of it. It therefore remains an offered *reality*, even if I do not respond to it. My disbelief cannot nullify the reality of Christ's real offer and the reality of the Church's remaining in Christ. But . . . the eucharistic real presence also includes, in its sacramentality itself, reciprocity and is therefore completely realized only when consent is given in faith to the eucharistic event.<sup>94</sup>

Once again it is on the sacramental, symbolic, metaphysical level that a change takes place. This involves the human mind, intention, and heart. We frequently act in this way. We take food and drink and make them into a meal to express life, joy, agreement, forgiveness, welcome, friendship, interest, love—human self-giving. Is it any wonder that the self-giving of God in the Exodus event would find expression in a meal? Is it any wonder that the self-giving of God in the Christ event would also find expression in a meal? By taking the bread and wine and making them a symbolic reality of himself and his own self-giving, Christ gives them new meaning in the Christian community. By doing this he gives them new being. They can no longer be called, they no longer are what they were before. The food and

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Eucharist* 141.

drink (meal) are now symbol in its fullest, most primordial sense (symbolic reality). They embody Christ in his act of self-giving, allowing him to be present bodily.

The real, ontological meaning of the bread, that is, the bread itself, is thus radically changed—it is no longer orientated towards man as bread . . . even though nothing is changed physically. . . . A new object comes into being—the sacrament in which the reality of Christ is the *formally* constitutive element (“the substance as it were”) together with the other elements which, subordinated to this new reality of Christ, are the *sign* of this reality and the *medium* by which it becomes accessible to us. The “new object” is thus the sacrament of Christ’s body and blood.<sup>95</sup>

To describe the effect on bread and wine we need terminology of some sort. Unfortunately, terminology in this area is fluid and ambiguous. The change is real, i.e., in the person or thing itself; its reality is independent of the viewer’s subjective attitude, independent of the *individual* Christian’s faith. We call this change “ontological” (or “ontic” for Rahner).<sup>96</sup> The change is distinct from the other sacraments in that it is lasting (as long as humanly intelligible as food and drink)<sup>97</sup> and radical. A new reality comes into being (not alongside the bread and wine as in companionship). “Substantial” is meant to express this distinctive character (others use the terms “metaphysical” or “essential”). As Schillebeeckx observed,

An animal’s eating is *essentially* different from a man’s eating, even though the biological process is the same. A thing can become essentially different without being physically or biologically changed. . . . Remaining physically what it is, bread can be included in a sphere of meaning that is quite different from the purely biological. . . . [T]he bread *is* different, because the definite relationship to man at the same time defines the reality under discussion. . . . And such changes of meaning are more radical than purely physical changes, which are at a lower level and, in this sense, at a less real level.<sup>98</sup>

### Reactions and Qualifications

In offering an alternative to transubstantiation, Schillebeeckx and others have sought to preserve the traditional Roman Catholic values while bringing out values that seem to have been neglected in that framework. In effect they are trying to combine the ontological component of transubstantiation with notions such as “transfinalization” (a change in the purpose or finality of the elements and their reception) and “transsignification” (a change in the meaning or sign value of these realities).<sup>99</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. 116–17.

<sup>96</sup> See Karl Rahner, “Christ in the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper,” *Theological Investigations* 4, trans. Kevin Smyth (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966) 301.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. 315.

<sup>98</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Eucharist* 131.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. 116–17.

Naturally they are not without their critics. On the Catholic side, some question the ability of the analogy of personal encounter to express the ontological change which seems so crucial. On the Protestant side, some question the insistence on an ontological or metaphysical change.<sup>100</sup> Others see the analogy as too individualistic. They claim it fails to stress what Augustine called the whole Christ, head and members, with the individual swept up into the personal encounter between Christ and the Church, and also the social justice dimensions of the Eucharist.<sup>101</sup> Jones sees a need for “a social phenomenology of ecclesial presence” which brings out the presence of Christ to the community of believers prior to the eucharistic presence.<sup>102</sup> Still others, like myself, see challenges in the analogy but also positive implications for questions like the moment of consecration, which in Roman Catholic circles has dominated our thinking and piety for centuries.<sup>103</sup>

From a framework conventionally called postmodernity, which questions the metaphysical determination of God on the basis of the analogy of being,<sup>104</sup> a possibly more radical questioning has arisen. For example, Louis Marie Chauvet acknowledges that the sacraments are not the sum total of Christian life and should not be allowed to “elbow aside” Scripture or ethical involvement. He insists, however, that they occupy their rightful place as neither the unique center nor a mere appendage.<sup>105</sup> He challenges the ability of a metaphysics that views God in terms of “Being” to do justice to the sacraments, much less to the mystery and Otherness of God. He quotes Heidegger: “To overcome metaphysics is nothing more than to reflect that ‘perhaps part of the essential destiny of metaphysics is that its own foundation eludes it.’ ”<sup>106</sup> In fact Chauvet is not trying to do away with

<sup>100</sup> See Jones, *Christ's Eucharistic Presence* 234–35.

<sup>101</sup> On Schillebeeckx's attempt, in his later writings, to apply his earlier view on symbol to the realm of human suffering and the “political” sphere, see for instance, Sawicki, *Seeing the Lord* 323–24. The critique of Rahner and Schillebeeckx seems to drive us back to the “Easter experience” and resists an image of a God “positioned outside creation and who reached into our reality to do something to us,” a “divine intrusion” or “incursion” (ibid. 323–25). See also John D. Laurance, “The Assembly as Liturgical Symbol,” *Louvain Studies* 22 (1997) 127–52.

<sup>102</sup> Jones, *Christ's Eucharistic Presence* 236–37.

<sup>103</sup> See McKenna, *Eucharist and Holy Spirit* 183–89; Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament* 472.

<sup>104</sup> Marion proposes that we begin our approach to God not with the metaphysical notion of Being but rather with love or *agape*: “If to begin with ‘God is love,’ then God loves before being. He only is as He embodies himself—in order to love more closely that which and those who themselves have first to be” (*God Without Being* xx–xxi). See Power, “Sacramental Theology” 684–93.

<sup>105</sup> Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament* 1.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. 51–52.

metaphysics but rather to recognize its limits and limiting quality:

If we are going to free ourselves from a 'productionist scheme' in regard to the sacraments we have to 'overcome' the metaphysical view of the world (characterized by instrumentality and causality) and move into the symbolic (characterized by the mediation through language and symbol, where 'revealer' and 'operator' are indissolubly linked insofar as they are homogeneous). In this symbolic perspective, the relation of God and humankind is conceived according to the scheme of otherness which transcends the dualistic scheme of nature and grace undergirding classic onto-theology.<sup>107</sup>

This approach leads Chauvet to the ongoing, never fully achieved task of consenting (echoing Heidegger) to the presence of the absence of God: "[I]t is precisely in the act of respecting his radical absence or otherness that the risen one can be recognized symbolically."<sup>108</sup> The believer has to consent to the mediation of the Church as both the presence and absence of the Risen One. This requires a balance between forgetting that the Church is only a sacrament and denying that it is a sacrament.<sup>109</sup>

Chauvet's emphasis on absence (as well as presence) is in the service of God's mystery and otherness. He cites Heidegger: "'... this absence is not nothing; it is the presence of the hidden plenitude of what . . . is' and what the Greeks, the Hebrew prophets, and Jesus named 'the divine.'"<sup>110</sup> Thus we are not talking about a deficiency but a fullness, a mystery far beyond our ability to grasp or describe. The sacraments and the Church become "traces" of the God who is never finished with coming, and therefore we are on a "transitive" way, or journeying, rather than in possession.<sup>111</sup>

Chauvet proposes an approach to eucharistic presence by way of symbolism that "is the exemplary expression of the resistance of God's mystery to every attempt by the subject to appropriate it."<sup>112</sup> The sacramental presence of Christ stands in relation to a twofold memorial: of the past in thanksgiving and of the future in supplication. This reminds us that we are not dealing here with full presence but with a certain absence. Christ's eucharistic presence "proclaims the irreducibility of God, of Christ, and of the gospel to our concepts, discourses, ideologies, and experiences."<sup>113</sup> It discloses, even as it reveals, God's otherness. Our task is to live with this absence in a presence that, like creation, is a gift, therefore absolutely gratuitous and gracious and "always in excess."<sup>114</sup>

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. 544; see also 84–88, 95–105, 128–40, esp. 139–40, 266–68, 444–46.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. 178.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. 178, 182–89.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. 62; see also 48–62.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. 54, 71, 75, 555.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. 383.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. 391, 403.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. 549; see 108–9, 445–46, 550. See Marion's strong remarks on transubstantiation: "... the substantial presence therefore fixes and freezes the person in

Chauvet's criticism of transubstantiation is that it speaks of presence in terms of a subsistent entity that simply is, like a thing, rather than being relational. He rightly notes that epiclesis, even from the fourth century on when the Spirit's action on the elements was accented, always aimed at the transformation of the people through their participation in the "consecrated elements." It is for the Church, the believing subjects, that the Spirit transforms the gifts, never for the gifts themselves. "We cannot be content here, under the pretext of 'realism' to imagine the reality at issue as the simple *esse* of a subsistent entity; the relation must be conceived precisely as 'presence,' that is, as *being-for, being-toward . . . the esse is constitutively ad-esse.*"<sup>115</sup>

Chauvet vehemently opposes losing sight of the rich symbolism of bread. "[N]ot only can one no longer say but one must no longer say, 'This bread is no longer bread.'"<sup>116</sup> Such a statement had to be made when one remained on a metaphysical level, since that was the only way to express the "necessary implication of the *conversio totius substantiae*" of Trent. But when you move to a symbolic terrain, saying that "This bread is the body of Christ" requires you to stress all the more that it is still bread, "but now *essential* bread, bread which is never so much bread as it is in this mystery. . . . The Eucharistic body of Christ at this level of thought, is indeed bread par excellence, 'the bread of life,' the *panis substantialis et supersubstantialis*, as the Church Fathers called it."<sup>117</sup> Chauvet argues that his symbolic approach preserves the Church's faith in "real presence," which he shares. It takes into account all aspects of eucharistic presence. But it "does not necessarily require that one conceive [eucharistic presence] in the mode of metaphysical substance."<sup>118</sup> He concludes with a summary of his key themes: "Sacraments are the bearers of the joy of the 'already' and the distress of the 'not yet.' They are the *witnesses of a God who is never finished with coming*: the amazed witnesses of a God who comes continually; the patient witnesses, patient unto weariness at times, of a God who

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an available, permanent, handy, and delimited thing. Hence, the imposture of an idolatry that imagines itself to honor 'God' when it heaps praises on his pathetic 'canned' substitute (the reservation of the Eucharist), exhibited as an attraction (display of the Holy Sacrament), brandished like a banner (processions) and so on" (*God Without Being* 164). "Presence is no longer measured by the excessiveness of an irreducibly other gift. . ." (ibid. 166).

<sup>115</sup> Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament* 392; see 387–89, 526. See also David Power, "Sacrament: Event Eventing," in *A Promise of Presence* (Washington: Pastoral, 1992) 271–97; McKenna, *Eucharist and Holy Spirit* 190–92.

<sup>116</sup> Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament* 400.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. 401, 387.

'is' not here except by mode of passage. And of this mode the sacraments are a trace . . ." <sup>119</sup>

Chauvet and others remind us of the otherness, the mystery of the God we try to explain, a God in whom love, *agape*, precedes even "being," a "crucified God" who continues coming to us with a "corporality" that was scandalous in Jesus and still is in the Church and the sacraments. <sup>120</sup> Their stress on "absence" as well as "presence" serves as a healthy balance in dealing with eucharistic presence. <sup>121</sup> People in love will understand the difference between "face to face" and other forms of presence. But those other forms of presence are important and those in love know they are real. The emphasis on balancing the importance of the sacraments with the Scriptures and "ethical" witness, on bread as symbol continuing to be bread, on the presence of Christ in the Scriptures and in the people, <sup>122</sup> on our need constantly to "co-respond" to God's continuing coming are helpful, though not entirely novel. They are stated, however, with a freshness that draws notice. There are, nevertheless, still theologians who have not given up on the attempt to correlate reason and revelation. <sup>123</sup> Others question Chauvet's interpretation that Aquinas's metaphysics and view on causality are instrumental as opposed to relational. <sup>124</sup>

Thus we may look forward to ongoing dialogue.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. 555.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. 82–83, 151–55. Marion, after criticizing an excessive focus on the present, suggests that the notion of *gift* would help: "the present must be understood first as a gift that is given" (*God Without Being* 171). We need to view "eucharistic presence less in the way of an available permanence than as a new sort of advent" (ibid. 172). Each instant of the present, like manna, must be accepted as a gift which we cannot cling to but for which we can only pray and be thankful. This gift of presence and of the present, is rooted in God's gift in the past (memorial) and "strains" toward God's gift in the future [*epektasis*]. All this in turn is anchored in God's "excessive" love for us shown on the cross and in the Eucharist and enabling us really to be transformed into Christ's body (ibid. 172–82).

<sup>121</sup> See Jones, *Christ's Eucharistic Presence* 18–19 and passim. Even G. O'Collins, who proposes a Christology based on the analogy of presence, acknowledges the absence dimension (*Christology* [New York: Oxford University, 1995] 312–13).

<sup>122</sup> Marion is critical of explanations such as transignification which attempt to go "beyond, with real presence, the idolatrous reduction of 'God' to a mute thing," nevertheless look to transubstantiation to "ballast" themselves with reality. They thus constitute no real break with transubstantiation (*God Without Being* 165). Moreover, even shifting the focus of presence from a "thing" to the community draws his criticism since that seems to rely on a "collective consciousness" in the present. This effectively relegates the divine presence to the past. This, according to Marion, is another form of idolatry. At least transubstantiation did not rely on the limited attention span of the community for the presence of "the Other par excellence" (ibid. 165–69). See Power, "Sacramental Theology" 692.

<sup>123</sup> See David Tracy's Foreword to Marion, *God Without Being* ix–xv.

<sup>124</sup> See Power, "Sacrament: Event Eventing" 279–84.