The Real Presence[1]

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The final book of *The Imitation of Christ* is an 'exhortation to Holy Communion', and the last chapter begins: 'Beware of a persistent and useless intellectual examination of this most deep sacrament, if you do not wish to be immersed in deep doubt.' Useless, I am afraid, to warn philosophers. In what follows I distinguish two or three different ways of understanding the Real Presence in the Eucharist and, without rejecting any of them, say how far they are compatible and indicate some of their merits and drawbacks. But since this doctrine is sometimes confused with the doctrine of Transsubstantiation, I begin with a word about that.

1

In 1551 the Council of Trent declared that 'through the consecration of the bread and wine, there comes about a conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into his blood. And this conversion is appropriately and properly called "transsubstantiation"' (Denzinger/Schönmetzer 1642). The doctrine of transsubstantiation here endorsed is relatively clear. It states that when bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ, the matter of the bread and wine pass away into the matter of the body and blood of Christ. The purpose of the doctrine is to distinguish the Eucharistic change from natural changes such as occur when water evaporates into air or when bread and wine are consumed in the ordinary way. The Fathers of Trent and the mediaeval philosophers from whom they took the doctrine believed that these natural changes are, strictly speaking, only transformations, *conversiones formales* (Aquinas, *ST* 3.75.4). The matter of the water remains but takes on a new form, that of air; and the matter of the bread and wine remains but takes on new forms, those of flesh and blood. In the Eucharist, in contrast, the matter of the bread and wine do not remain, but turn into the matter of Christ's body and blood.

What is meant here by 'matter'? We today believe that bread and flesh are composed of atoms, perhaps chiefly carbon atoms, and that atoms are composed of protons and electrons or quarks. So for us the doctrine of Transsubstantiation should be that the atoms or particles composing the bread do not remain but turn into the atoms or particles composing Christ's body. The Tridentine Fathers did not have the modern conception of an

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atom. If they followed Aquinas they believed that all material objects are composed, ultimately, of a single, homogeneous substance called 'prime matter' which unlike carbon, hydrogen and subatomic particles has no properties, no power to affect anything, no mass. For them, therefore, the doctrine of Transsubstantiation was that the prime matter of which the bread is composed does not remain but is changed into the prime matter of which Christ's body is composed.

It will be seen that this is not the same as the doctrine of the Real Presence. That latter doctrine, according to Aquinas (*ST* 3.75.1), declares that in the Eucharist the body of Christ is present 'in truth, *secundum veritatem*, and not solely by way of figure or as in a sign, *secundum figuram vel sicut in signo*.' It is clear what this denies. It rules out any idea that the bread and wine merely represent or signify or recall to us Christ's body and blood. But its positive content calls for interpretation and clarification. Since, as the Tridentine Fathers put it, 'our Saviour himself is always seated in Heaven at the right hand of the Father', how, when and in what way are his flesh and blood present in the sacrament? The doctrine of Transsubstantiation does not answer that explicitly. At most it tells us how they *come to be present*, not what their presence consists in. The Eucharistic presence can be explained in several different ways, all of which leave it real rather than figurative or symbolic.

2

One is that when we receive the Eucharist we eat the flesh of the living Christ just as truly as, when when we eat an oyster on the half shell, we consume the flesh of a living oyster; and we drink the blood of Christ in the literal way in which a mosquito that bites us drinks the blood of a living human being. To give this a label, I shall call it the doctrine of 'Pre-Communion Presence'. There can be no doubt that the theologians who formulated the doctrine of Transsubstantiation understood the Real Presence in this way. Aquinas (*ST* 3.75 3 and 7) held that from the last moment of the priest's uttering of the words of consecration the chalice contains the blood of Christ and when he holds the host he is holding Christ's body in his hands. Since, to all appearances, the host is still bread and the chalice contains wine, on this understanding of the Real Presence Christ's body and blood are here 'under the *appearances, species*, of bread and wine' and, so to speak, in disguise. 'Sight, touch and taste' says Aquinas in his hymn *Adoro te devote*, are each 'deceived' *fallitur*; we see Jesus 'veiled', *velatum*.

The doctrine of Transsubstantiation was introduced to explain how Christ's body comes to be present in this way:

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> It is not there before the consecration. But nothing can be anywhere where formerly it was not, unless by change of place or by the conversion of something else into it; just as in a house fire makes a fresh beginning to be, either because it is carried thither or because it is generated there. It is plain that the body of Christ does not begin to be in this Sacrament through local motion..[i.e. by walking in or being carried in]. It remains, therefore, that the body of Christ cannot make a fresh beginning to be in this Sacrament except by the conversion of the substance of the bread into it. (Aquinas *ST* 3.7.5.2)

But while as a matter of history the doctrine of Transsubstantiation depends on the doctrine of Pre-Communion Presence, as a matter of logic the two are independent. The doctrine of Transsubstantiation depends logically on bread's changing somehow into Christ's body, but it does not require the change to take place at the moment the priest finishes saying the words of consecration, and we shall see that there is a way of understanding the Real Presence according to which the change occurs *in* Communion as distinct from before it. So the doctrine of Transsubstantiation could be true and that of Pre-Communion Presence false. Equally the doctrine of Pre-Communion Presence could be true and that of Transsubstantiation false. For transsubstantiation is supposed to be different from the kind of change which happens naturally when we digest food. But Christ's body and blood were really present during his lifetime as a result of the natural processes of digestion. So their real presence, whether before or in Communion, does not logically require transsubstantiation.

People have confused the two doctrines because that of Pre-Communion Presence is sometimes expressed in such words as 'After the Consecration there is present on the altar the substance of Christ's body under the accidents of bread.' This unfamiliar use of the words 'substance' and 'accident' makes non-philosophers think they are hearing the doctrine of Transsubstantiation. They may be assured that all that is meant is: 'Christ's body is present in truth, but appears to empirical investigation to be bread.' If that *is* the meaning it would be prudent to avoid using 'substance' and 'accident'. Otherwise we may seem to philosophers to be saying that what is present is the prime matter and substantial form of Christ's body (or of the complete person Christ), and thereby tying Eucharistic theology to some very obscure metaphysics.

When I give a blood-sample, the blood of a living man is contained in a syringe, and if while chopping meat I should accidentally sever a finger, the flesh of a living man might lie before me on the table. The doctrine of Pre-Communion Presence does not say that the blood of Christ is present in the chalice as my blood is present in a syringe when I give a blood-sample; it is present rather as my blood is present in my arteries; and the priest does

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not hold the flesh of Christ in his hands as I might hold a finger that has been accidentally severed, but more as I might clasp my thigh. This suggests that what is present in the Eucharist is not just Christ's body, not just his flesh and blood, but Christ himself, and the Fathers of Trent in fact declared: 'After the consecration of the bread and wine our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is really and substantially contained under the appearances of these perceptible things.' They probably believed, and Catholics today mostly believe, that Christ is really present in the church and on or at the altar in the way he was present in the house at Bethany or on the road to Emmaus. This way of understanding the Real Presence I call, for lack of a better name, the doctrine of 'Complete Person Presence'.[2]

There is some gain here in clarity, but also some loss. It is clear how the flesh and blood are present: if Christ is present in the way he was present in Palestine before his death or after his resurrection, obviously his flesh and blood are present. And he was present in Palestine in a perfectly straightforward way. On the other hand it is slightly easier to say that the bread and wine turn into Christ's flesh and blood than that they turn into Christ. That sounds like saying 'The ass turned into Lucius', but in that case Lucius was merely *restored* to human shape, having been present all along 'under the appearance of an ass'. Perhaps we do not have to say: 'The bread and wine turn into Christ'; it may be enough to say that 'He comes to be present through their turning into his flesh and blood.' But it is also slightly easier to say that each communicant consumes what is really Christ's flesh and blood, than that Christ is present in the way he was present in Palestine both in the chalice, and in the host on the paten, and in each of the hosts in the ciborium. The Tridentine Fathers declare bravely: 'The whole of Christ exists under the appearance of bread and any part you like of that appearance; and the whole also under the appearance of wine and its parts' (Denzinger/Schönmetzer 1641); but they also say (1636) 'by that manner of existing which, even if we can hardly express it in words, we can accept as possible for God by thought illuminated by faith (*possibilem tamen esse Deo cogitatione per fidem illustrata assequi possumus*).' The Eucharist is a mystery and at some point words are bound to fail us.

The doctrine of Complete Person Presence, whether or not it is really clearer and simpler, arose as a simplification of the doctrine of Pre-Communion Presence. The latter rests partly on the Words of Institution 'This is my body', but still more on Christ's words in John 6:

> 'I am the bread of life that has come down from Heaven; if anyone eats of this bread he will live for ever; and the bread that I shall give him is my flesh for the life of the cosmos . . . If you do not eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood, you will not have life in you. The person who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise him up

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> on the last day. For my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. The person biting into (*trogon*) my flesh and drinking my blood remains in me and I in him. As the living Father sent me, so I too live through the Father; and the person biting into me, he too will live through me.'

If, as is traditionally held and I shall here assume, these words relate to the Eucharist, the doctrine of Pre-Communion Presence is the simplest way of understanding them.

It might be thought that we also need the doctrine of Pre-Communion Presence to hold that the Mass is more than a mere commemoration of Christ's offering of himself to the Father on Calvary. If Christ is not really present at our altars immediately after the Consecration, how can he be really offered in sacrifice? But this argument is dubious. It depends on the idea that if the Mass is not a mere commemoration of the sacrifice of Calvary it must be a *repetition* of it. But what I take to be the orthodox Catholic position is that it is neither. There is only one perfect offering, the one made by Christ that began at the Last Supper and ended with his death on Good Friday. But the Mass enables all Christians, through their priests, to share in that offering. This is accomplished by the whole ritual that begins with the preparation of the offerings and ends with the communion. Christ is really offered to the Father in the Mass, not because he is really present today on our altars, but because we really participate in his actions in Palestine during the reign of Tiberius.

3

I said that the doctrine of Transsubstantiation is logically independent of the doctrine of Pre-Communion Presence. That is just as well, not only because nobody today believes that there is any such substance as prime matter, but also because it is in serious tension with another doctrine the Tridentine Fathers held. This is that the bread and wine are not annihilated but *changed into* the body and blood of Christ; they pass away not into nothing but into his flesh and blood. Any good philosophical account of change must show how one thing's turning into another differs from the first thing's passing away into nothing and the second's arising out of nothing in the same place without a time interval. The philosophers of the middle ages held, and the Fathers of Trent agreed, as do most philosophers today, that in a case of change there must be some subject that remains throughout. When a sick man turns into a healthy one, there is a man who is first sick and then healthy. When air turns to fire, a change supposed to occur in nature by Aquinas at *ST* 75.4.2, there is prime matter which had first the form of air and then that of fire. But in the case of transsubstantiation there is nothing that is first bread and then flesh. So what happens is not a change but an annihilation. The bread passes away

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into nothing, and the flesh of Christ arises out of nothing in the same place.

Aquinas was aware of this difficulty and says (*ST* 3.75.8) that though no matter remains there is still a change because the properties of the bread, its white colour and round shape, remain. By this he does not mean simply that before the consecration there is something white and round and afterwards there is something of exactly the same colour and shape; that would not distinguish the case from one of annihilation. He means that one and the same *instance* of white colour and round shape exists throughout. But this solution involves difficulties of its own. Aquinas has to conceive instances of colours and shapes as realities logically independent of material objects like loaves of bread, and inhering in them somewhat but not exactly as a dye inheres in cotton that has been dyed. This way of conceiving them is extremely dubious. It is preferable to say that instances of colours and shapes simply *are* the objects which have or instantiate those properties. But if that is right, when the bread passes away, as the Tridentine Fathers say it does, that particular instance of white colour and round shape must pass away too. So nothing remains.

We can jettison Transsubstantiation while retaining Pre-Communion Presence. But the doctrine of Pre-Communion Presence has certain disadvantages. Some people (among whom Aquinas himself might be included) have found the suggestion which it carries of cannibalism slightly disturbing. Some are worried by the violence it does to our natural powers of cognition. These difficulties are too well known for me to have to enlarge on them. But the Eucharist is supposed to be a valuable gift to us: what benefits are delivered by a Pre-Communion Presence?

The personal presence of Christ in Palestine was a benefit to his disciples in certain obvious ways. They could see how he looked, hear the sound of his voice, speak to face to face. He could act causally to help them, for instance cook fish for them; his weight was probably normal and would help to balance a boat so that it did not tip over when someone came on board. On the other hand he presumably depended on his eyes and ears like other people, and to communicate with him by word or gesture the disciples had to be audible or visible. The doctrine of Pre-Communion Presence, even combined with the doctrine of Complete Person Presence, does not give us either these advantages or this limitation. Catholics who accept these doctrines do not believe that their voices have to carry to the altar or that they have to visible from the altar if Christ is to know their thoughts and give them his attention. The penny catechism says 'God is everywhere', and it is this non-bodily presence everywhere on which believers rely for communicating with God and having his attention. They may find it easier to pray before the Blessed Sacrament, but they suppose that the Father sees all that is done in the secrecy of their home.

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If the Eucharist benefited us only by enabling us to speak to God directly, the Real Presence would be superfluous. But the passage in John which I quoted earlier says something quite different: that in eating Christ's flesh we receive eternal life, that we live through him as he lives through the Father. The life here referred to is not natural or human but supernatural and, indeed, divine. How does the Eucharist enable us to share in it? The doctrine of Pre-Communion Presence gives us no clue. It tells us that we literally eat Christ's flesh and drink his blood. But when we eat the flesh of raw oysters we do not become oysters, and when a mosquito drinks our blood it does not become human.

At John 15.1-5 Christ uses an image familiar to his hearers from Isaiah 5: 'I am the true vine, and my father is the cultivator. . . . Remain in me and I in you. Just as the branch (*klema*) cannot bear fruit from itself, if it does not remain in the vine, so neither can you if you do not remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who remains in me and I in him, he bears much fruit; since separately from me you can do nothing.' It is true that here he seems to be speaking of good works on earth rather than of eternity, and there is no explicit reference to the Eucharist or to eating. Still, the branches of a vine certainly share the life of the vine; will this serve as a model for how receiving the Eucharist enables us to share in divine life?

At first we may think not. A vine is a single organism. A branch, while it is part of a vine, is not an organism and does not have a life of its own, though a cutting when taken from it and planted (and the Greek word *klema* would be used for such a cutting) can have a life of its own and develop into an organism. But whereas a vine has interests as an individual organism, in that it takes in nourishment and produces seeds that germinate into offspring, an unsevered branch has no interests of its own. At best it contributes and at worst it may be sacrificed to the interests of the whole. Christians who receive the Eucharist are surely not related like that to Christ. They have individual lives and interests of their own, and while they may sacrifice these to the interests of their friends, they hardly expect to be sacrificed to the interests of a larger whole. It might seem that if they should be incorporated into Christ like grafts into a tree they would lose their identity.

For these reasons we may wish either to reject the model of the vine altogether or to use it in a different way. It will serve, up to a point, as a model for a society. The members of a society like a family or a state have complementary roles and depend upon one another rather as do the roots, branches, flowers etc., of a plant. And they need society even more in a further way. An exceptional adult may be able to live indefinitely without any social contacts with other human beings, but not only do most people fail to survive when separated from society;

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nobody could learn to speak or acquire the main characteristics we think distinctive of human beings without starting life in some society or other. The Church is a society. Paul often (Rm 12.4–5, 1 Cor 12.12–27 etc.,) speaks of members of the Church as making up one organic body, and speaks of this as the body of Christ. Do Christians, then, share in Christ's divine life through belonging to the Church and sharing its life?

A society is not an organism, it does not (whatever totalitarian political theories may say) have interests of its own as a whole, distinct from the interests of its members, and its life is different in character from the life of an organism. We share in the life of a society by discharging the roles we have in that society and by living with regard to its rules and customs. So we certainly share in the life of the Church in receiving the Eucharist. But that is not the only way we share in its life; we do that in receiving any sacrament, in doing anything the church prescribes, in refraining from anything it forbids, even in breaking its rules if we do so with misgivings. And though sharing in the life of the Church in this way may help us to be fruitful in good works, it hardly constitutes sharing in divine life.

Is it not sharing in Christ's life, at least? How could it be? Christ is a member of the Church. The roles of priest and king are social roles which he has within a society. And when we share in the life of a society, we do not share in the life of any of its members. France is a state headed by a President; Frenchmen share in the life of France in driving on the right, but they do not share in the life of the President.

The phrase 'the body of Christ' is ambivalent. We use the word 'body' in several different ways. It can mean a corpse, as when we say 'His body is in the mortuary'; or a torso, as when we speak of heads, bodies and tails. Scientists use the word for any material object, and call the sun and the moon 'bodies'. And philosophers use it for a human being considered simply as a material object, as when they ask 'How is my body related to my soul or mind? Could it be that I just *am* my body?' Now in what sense of 'body' is the Church the body of Christ? If Christ is the head of the Church, he is one member among others; the other members are at best the torso, and the torso does not share in the life of the head. If Christ is the whole organism of which his followers are parts, they are his body in the philosophical sense, and analogy does require them to live with his life. But then, as we have seen, the Church must be something more than a society, since the life of a society is simply one part or one dimension of the lives of the members. Paul seems to want the Church to have features both of an organism and of a society, but we have yet to see how that is possible.

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There is a way of understanding the Real Presence which enables us to do just that. When we receive communion what we eat and drink undergoes exactly the same change as what Christ ate and drank during his lifetime. It turns into flesh and blood. Whose flesh and blood? Ours, certainly, for it lives with human life, and what makes flesh mine is its being part of me, living with my life. But if besides living with the communicant's human life, it lives with Christ's divine life, it will also be Christ's flesh and the body of the communicant will be part of Christ's body. What I call the doctrine of 'In-Communion Presence' says that Christ's body and blood are really present in that when we receive the Eucharist what we eat and drink turn into his flesh and blood just as what he ate and drank before his death and after his resurrection.

It is obvious that this makes the sharing by communicants in Christ's divine life like the sharing by branches in the life of the vine. How is it like the sharing by society-members in social life? The parts of a biological organism do not share in the whole organism's life of their own free will, whereas members of a society share its life voluntarily. They may not choose to belong to a society—infants certainly do not—but we share in social life not by attaching ourselves to a society but by living with regard to its rules, and that is one way of acting of one's own free will. If the parts of an organism remained in it of their own free will, it would be a kind of society. Believers receive Communion of their own free will; they want to share in Christ's divine life and *eius divinitatis esse consortes*. If this desire is not an empty one, its fulfilment will have features both of sharing in the life of a superior whole, and of sharing in the life of a society.

The idea of a branch's choosing to live with the life of the vine is nonsensical because the life of a vine is exhausted by pursuing its interests as a single individual organism. Our life contains that, but is not exhausted by it. We also have social life and live with regard for the interests of other individuals, sometimes making their success and well-being our goal. It would not be incoherent for me to wish to share in another persons's life as a social being and an altruist while retaining my own life as an individual organism. That might be impossible, but it would involve no loss of identity. And that is what believers want at Mass. They do not wish to share in Christ's search for food and warmth, much less in his digestive processes. But they want to share in his social life, particularly as a priest: they want to address the Creator and worship him not just through Christ but *in* him. And they want to share his life as a disinterested benefactor in a slightly different way. They may wish that 'in him' they may benefit other human beings. But his benefaction consists primarily in communicating his

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divine life, so a desire to receive that life is also a desire to be one with him as a benefactor.

Saying that believers want to share in divine life may make them sound like Milton's Satan or the Giants of Greek myth who wanted to take over Olympus. It is important, therefore, to emphasise that the motive for receiving the sacraments should not be a selfish desire to live for ever and have divine power over nature. It should be a disinterested desire to gratify God by receiving what he offers. The Biblical model is that of the bride who welcomes the bridegroom not just for her sake but for his. Only if divine life is sought out of love for the donor is there any hope of receiving it.

But is it really possible to be grafted into Christ and share his life as part of an organism shares the life of the whole? Can this be more than a metaphor? It certainly can. Christ *was* a living organism. His arms and legs shared in the life of the whole. Or did they share only in his *human*, biological life? Do we really want to say that his bodily parts, his flesh, blood, skin etc., lived with the eternal life of God? To deny that is to deny precisely the doctrine of the Incarnation.

5

Is the doctrine of In-Communion Presence a bizarre new idea that I have just thought up? The earliest reference to the Eucharist in the New Testament is probably 1 Cor 10. 16–17:

> 'The blessing-cup that we bless, is it not a communion, *koinonia*, with the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a commmunion with the body of Christ? In that it is one bread, we many are one body.'

This is hardly a statement of Pre-Communion Personal Presence. Nobody would say that when Christ was present with Mary and Martha in Bethany they had communion with his blood and his body. It is usually interpreted as implying Pre-Communion Presence. The *koinonia* is understood as sharing in the way friends share a bottle of wine that is put before them. But the friends do not make up the bottle. When Paul speaks of Christ's body here, he is using the word not as in Romans 12, for a torso or trunk, but for the whole of which head, trunk etc., are parts. I think he is best understood as implying something stronger that Pre-Communion Presence: implying a real union of our blood and our bodies with Christ's.

An idea of In-Communion Presence is expressed in several of the most quoted patristic texts on the Eucharist. Cyril of Jerusalem says:

> In the figure [*tupos*] of bread, the body is given to you, and in the figure of wine, the blood, in order that, taking a share of the body and blood of Christ, you may become of one body and one blood with him [*sussomos*

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kai sunaimos]. For thus we become Christ-bearers, *Christophoroi*, his body and blood being distributed through our limbs. That is how, according to blessed Peter, we become sharers in the divine nature [cf 2 Peter 1.4]. (MG 33. 1100)

Similarly Chrysostom: having quoted Ephesians 5.29, ~We are limbs of his body,' comments:

> That we may become this not just in love [*kata ten agapen*] but in reality [*kat' auto to pragma*] we are mixed up [*anakerasthomen*] into his flesh, for this happens through the food he gave us. (MG 59. 260)

Gregory of Nyssa in his *Oratio Catechetica* ch 37 goes further:

> Just as what is destructive, when mixed with what is healthy, renders useless the whole mixture, so also the immortal body, coming to be in what takes it in, changes the whole to its own nature. But it is not possible for anything to come to be within the body otherwise than by being mixed with the bowels through eating and drinking. So it is necessary to receive the life-giving power of the Spirit according to the manner possible for nature. And since only that body which received God (the *theodokon soma*) received that grace, and it has been shown that our body cannot otherwise come to be immortal unless through communion (*koinonia*) it comes to share in indestructibility, it is proper to see how it becomes possible for that one body, divided for ever among so many myriads of believers throughout the world, to come to be as a whole in each part and remain a whole in itself. . . The body [sc. of Christ] was changed to divine dignity by being inhabited by the Word of God. Rightly, then, we believe that the bread, sanctified by the word of God, is changed into the body of the Word of God. For indeed, bread was that body in potentiality, but sanctified by the Word that made its dwelling [*skenosantos*, a reference to John 1.14, *eskenosen en hemin*] in the flesh. So by what it was that the bread in that body [the bread Christ ate] was changed and converted to divine power, by that an equal thing occurs now. [MG 45. 94 ff.]

Gregory here compares what happens at Mass with the Incarnation. Then the Second Person of the Trinity took flesh, that is, took organic material, from the Virgin Mary by the sanctifying power of the Spirit. The Spirit sanctified that material so that it became the body of the incarnate Son. At Mass the Spirit is invoked by the priest to sanctify the bread and wine so that when we receive them we are incorporated into the body of Christ. A similar idea appears in Justin Martyr's First Apology, ch. 66:

> We should not take these things as common bread and common drink. But in the way in which our Saviour Jesus Christ, incarnated [*sarkopoietheis*]

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> through the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so also, we are taught, the nourishment made a thank-offering [*eucharistetheisa*] by the prayer of his word, from which, by transformation [*metabole*] our flesh and blood are nourished, is the flesh and blood of the incarnated Jesus.

The early Fathers see creation, incarnation and salvation as a continuum. The Incarnation does not merely rectify but carries forward the work of creation In juxtaposing the Incarnation and the Eucharist, they suggest that Christ's presence in the Eucharist is a kind of extension of the Incarnation. Perhaps when the Son took flesh from the Virgin Mary he did not intend his incarnation to be limited to just one mortal human being; but neither did he intend it to be multiplied among many separate human beings; it was to start with one and extend to as many as were willing to engraft themselves into that one.

6

There may be a further justification for Paul's running together the ideas of an organism and a society, though I cannot claim patristic authority for it. If Christ is the incarnate Son, not the incarnate Father or Spirit, his divine life should be the life of the Son. How might that differ from the life of the other Persons? I have suggested elsewhere that we can obtain a model for the Trinity by considering three different ways in which human beings act. We pursue our own interests as individual organisms, we engage in social life, and we feel altruistic concern for other people and other animals, making their interests our own and their well-being an end in itself to us. My suggestion is that the creating Father is like a human being acting as an isolated individual, the Spirit is like someone making another person's goals his own, and the Son corresponds to the social element in the human psyche. The Son is that in God which communicates with other persons and enters into relations with them. If that is right, it is natural for the Son to be the divine person that becomes incarnate. And the divine life of Christ in which we hope to share will be God's life as a social being.

But God's life as a social being cannot be quite like ours. God does not depend on other people as we do. He cannot just be one member of a society among others. Other persons with whom he has relations are not outside him. They depend on him totally. If he is to have a social life he must be present in the whole of the society, or, to put it the other way round, the whole of the society must be immanent in him. As a social being, then, he must stand to creatures not as parent to children or ruler to subjects but in the intimate way in which an organism stands to its parts. In the natural, biological order that would be impossible. A biological organism can have social relations with other organisms but not with its parts, and their

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participation in its life is non-voluntary. But the Judaeo-Christian God (unlike Zeus) is not a biological organism, and as I said above, his communication of his life to creatures through the sacraments involves their conscious acceptance of it (as, according to Luke 1.38, the original incarnation in the flesh of the Virgin was with her free consent). If the life which is communicated is not God's life as an isolated individual but his life as a social being, the distinction between sharing it as a part of an organism and sharing it as a member of a society no longer has a place.

7

How are the doctrines of In-Communion and Pre-Communion Presence related? They are mutually independent. We can hold that Christ is present only before communion, that what communicants receive is his flesh and blood, but that when they digest it, it passes away into purely human flesh and blood. I think many Catholics believe this, though it leaves it unclear how receiving communion benefits us. Or we can hold that Christ is present only in communion, that what we receive is bread and wine, and this turns into the body and blood of Christ only when we digest it. This view might appeal to non-Catholics who want to believe that Christ is really present in the Eucharist, but are worried by the difficulties in the doctrine of PreCommunion presence which I mentioned earlier. Of course, the bread and wine will change into Christ's body and not simply into ours, only if properly consecrated. Or, thirdly, we may hold both doctrines. There is no contradiction is saying that the bread turns into Christ's flesh before we eat it, and that when we eat it this flesh passes away not just into our flesh but into his too. That sounds complicated, but it is rather like what happens if I bite my tongue and swallow the blood.

The Fathers I quoted earlier accepted, I think, both doctrines. But they do not distinguish them. Not having the modern Catholic practice of venerating consecrated hosts outside of the Mass, it may not have occurred to them to separate Christ's presence in the Eucharist from the taking and eating which he enjoins in the Words of Institution. It is possible also that they assumed they could share in Christ's life when receiving the Eucharist only if what they ate and drank was already his flesh and blood. When Captain Cook was eaten in the Sandwich Islands, the islanders believed that by consuming his body they would obtain a share in his psychological powers, his nautical skill etc., and Christ's immediate followers, with their inhibitions about consuming blood, the life-principle of animals (Acts 15.20, cf. Genesis 9.4), may have inclined to this way of thinking. But in any case, the early Fathers seem to think that what we receive at communion is already Christ's flesh and blood.

I argued that this doctrine is more or less idle. Christ is present to be

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addressed and to assist us (otherwise than by using his limbs) always and everywhere; and it is the doctrine of In-Communion Presence that explains how we can share his divine life. But it does not follow, even if the doctrine of Pre-Communion Presence is idle, that it is false.

Christians have adhered to it chiefly because of Christ's words at the Last Supper and in John 6. The Words of Institution can be understood quite naturally as promising only an In-Communion Presence. The apostles understood perfectly well that the bread and wine were about to turn into Christ's body and blood by ordinary digestion. They would not have used Gregory of Nyssa's words, that the bread is 'potentially' Christ's body, but that is how they would most easily have taken 'This is my body'. The point of giving it to the apostles and saying 'Take, eat, all of you' could well be that through taking and eating it they will have a real In-Communion Presence; they will be of one flesh and blood with him.

What Christ says in John 6 does certainly, as I observed earlier, support a Pre-Communion understanding of the Real Presence. But that is not the only possible interpretation. Transitive verbs work in two ways. When I say 'Attila destroyed a city' I say that there was a city, and Attila came along and destroyed it. There was a city before, but not after, his destructive work. When I say 'Balbus built a wall' it is the other way round. It is not the case that there was a wall, and Balbus came along and built it. There was a wall after but not before Balbus' constructive work. Now the verbs 'eat' and 'drink' are generally understood as verbs of destruction. If Adam eats an apple, there is an apple before but not after his meal. But in the very special case of the Eucharist we might take them as verbs of construction. Balbus built stones or bricks into a wall. When Christ says 'Eat my flesh' perhaps he is telling us to eat bread into his flesh.

But is it really credible that Christ should have used words for eating in this exceptional way? If so, why when his hearers understood them in the usual way did he not correct them? One thing is certain: if he had used the image of the bridegroom, and instead of being eaten, spoken of being received in sexual intercourse, his hearers would have been even more horrified and disgusted. But as Thomas a Kempis says, *Fides a te exigitur, et sincera vita; non altitudo intellectus, neque profunditas mysteriorum Dei.*

1 A draft of this paper was read to the Aquinas Society in Newcastle. I am grateful to Mr A. Everatt and others for observations made on that occasion. I am also grateful for more detailed comments from Dr P.J. FitzPatrick and from a friend who would not wish to be named but whose criticisms led me to rewrite the whole paper.

2 What P.J. FitzPatrick in *In Breaking of Bread* calls 'Galilean' or 'spatial' presence rather than the kind of concerned and interactive presence sometimes called 'personal', though of course that is not excluded.

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