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Traveller's Fare

Nicholas Lash

Introduction

> 'O happy Pyx! O happy Pyx!
> Where Jesus doth his dwelling fix.
> O little palace! Dear and bright,
> Where He, who is the world's true light,
> Spends all the day, and stays all night'.[1]

The title of my paper is, of course, a rendering of *'esca viatorum'*. I was tempted to spell 'fayre' with a 'y'. with the dreadful food available, at some railway stations, under that description, serving as a reminder of how bizarre our eucharistic habits have sometimes been. In Father Faber's poem ('imitated', he tells us, 'from St Alphonso', of whom more later on) the Prisoner in the Tabernacle seems quite contented with his lot, but the world evoked is dangerously far from that of the upper room and the garden of Gethsemane.

In this paper I want to do two things. First, drawing on P. J. FitzPatrick's *In Breaking of Bread*, I want to urge the importance of remembering that sacraments are signs and not disguises; that the kind of signs they are are gestures, ritual actions, and that actions take time. Then, in the second part, I shall take article 7 of the Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* as a framework for setting our understanding of the presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament in the context of other modes of Christ's presence in the people God is gathering homeward.

Signs and Disguises

The time it took

In the spring of 1969, Herbert McCabe, in a paper entitled 'Transubstantiation and the real presence', argued that 'a Catholic view of the

[1] Frederick William Faber, 'Holy Communion [imitated from St Alphonso]', *Hymns* (London: Burns and Oates, 1861), pp. 258–260.

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Eucharist' must steer a course between the view that to speak of the food and drink as the body of Christ is to speak 'merely metaphorically' and 'the view that a chemical change has come over the food and drink so that now it is food and drink no longer . . . On this view, in the Eucharist the body of Christ is *disguised* as food and drink'.[2] Christ, said Herbert, 'has a better right to appear as food and drink than bread and wine have. The doctrine of transubstantiation, as I see it, is that the bread and wine suffer a revolutionary change, not that they change into something else, they become more radically food and drink, but this food and drink which is the body of Christ, appears to us still in its traditional dress, so that we will recognise it'.[3] (My interest in the paper was heightened by the fact that, a few months earlier, I had published a study of the eucharist, entitled *His Presence in the World.*)[4]

Three years later, *New Blackfriars* published two essays by P. J. FitzPatrick entitled 'Some thoughts on the eucharistic presence' and 'More thoughts on the Eucharistic presence', interspersed by Herbert's 'Transubstantiation. A reply to G. Egner'.[5] (When all three were reprinted in *God Matters*, in 1987, FitzPatrick added a note explaining why, at the earlier period, he had written under the pseudonym 'G. Egner' – *Gegner* in German, the adversary, or devil's advocate.)

'I am', said FitzPatrick, in 1972, 'nearing the end of a book, *In the Breaking of the Bread*, about the eucharistic presence', and, in the note in *God Matters*, he looks forward to the appearance 'at long last' of 'an avatar of my book'.[6] It would, however, be another seven years before *In Breaking of Bread* was published, in 1993.[7] For FitzPatrick, priest of the diocese of Hexham and Newcastle and for many years Reader in Philosophy at Durham University, this fresh and intelligent study of issues at the very heart of Catholic Christianity (it has, incidentally, the most hilarious footnotes of any learned work

[2] Herbert McCabe, 'Transubstantiation and the real presence', *God Matters* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1987), pp. 116–129. In this collection, the paper is the first of several essays in Eucharistic theology which attempt 'to present "Transignification" in a way that will safeguard the truths expressed in the doctrine of transubstantiation as it is found in St Thomas' (p. 115).

[3] *Ibid,* p. 126.

[4] London: Sheed and Ward, 1968 (reprinted by Wipf and Stock, 2005).

[5] G. Egner, 'Some thoughts on the Eucharistic presence', *New Blackfriars*, August 1972, pp. 354–359; 'More thoughts on the Eucharistic presence', *New Blackfriars*, April 1973, pp. 171–180; 'Transubstantiation. A reply to G.Egner', *New Blackfriars*, December 1972, pp. 546–554.

[6] G. Egner, 'Some thoughts', p. 354; P.J. FitzPatrick, *God Matters*, p. 164.

[7] P.J. FitzPatrick, *In Breaking of Bread. The Eucharist and Ritual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Admirably, the remote origins of the book can be traced to reflections stimulated by a request to prepare a child for her First Communion: see *Breaking*, p. 342.

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I know) was the fruit of a lifetime's labour, and I am most grateful to Dr Kate Brett and her colleagues at Cambridge University Press for making it available, in time for our conference, at a price affordable by normal human beings.

Before turning to it, however, I would like to stay with the articles in *New Blackfriars*, because what was at issue between FitzPatrick and McCabe would be central to the argument of the book.

The danger inherent in Aristotle's account of change as the actualisation of possibilities is (as Aquinas was well aware) that it may mislead us into supposing terms such as "possibility" and "actuality", "form" and "matter", "accident" and "substance", to be names of things.

FitzPatrick and McCabe agreed that it is no longer possible to say, with the Council of Trent, that transubstantiation 'most fittingly', *aptissime*, describes the change undergone by bread and wine (McCabe called it a 'dangerous and misleading name'[8]), but whereas he wished to argue that, however dangerous the term, the theory of transubstantiation, at least in Aquinas's hands, was coherent, FitzPatrick would have none of this.

'To make the eucharistic change substantial is tantamount to making Christ out of bread', but the damage done by calling it 'Transubstantial' derives from 'the impression of content misleadingly conveyed by words that have lost their bearings'.[9] Herbert pounces: 'important theological ideas are invariably expressed through the breakdown of philosophical concepts'.[10] For the heart of his argument he drew an analogy (as Aquinas had done) between creation and transubstantiation: 'creation names an Aristotelianly impossible kind of making, just as transubstantiation names an Aristotelianly impossible kind of change'.[11] One way of putting the first point would be to say that creation is not, strictly speaking, 'making': God does not, strictly speaking, 'make' the world. To express the matter thus, however, might have required Herbert to admit that, in the eucharist, the bread and wine are not, strictly speaking, 'changed'.[12]

FitzPatrick, accordingly, questioned the appropriateness of the analogy: 'With creation, I would say, we kick away the ladder we have climbed, as good philosophers should when striving to express the transcendent; with transubstantiation, we stand firmly on its rungs and try to hoist ourselves up by our own boot-laces'.[13]

[8] H. McCabe, 'Transubstantiation. A reply', p. 151.
[9] P.J. FitzPatrick, 'Some thoughts'. p. 133.
[10] H. McCabe, 'Transubstantiation. A reply', p. 146.
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 147.
[12] I would argue that, in fact, it would only required Herbert to admit that, in the Eucharist, bread and wine are not *physically* changed.
[13] P.J. FitzPatrick, 'More thoughts', p. 156.

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'I am suggesting', said McCabe, 'that the consecrated host exists at a level of reality at which questions of whether it is bread cannot relevantly be asked'.[14] He here falls into the trap of what FitzPatrick calls 'the Fallacy of Replacement', the fallacy of supposing that 'the introduction of a new set of questions' means that questions 'of a former set are unaskable'.[15] There are, he suggests, two questions one might ask about a bank-note: '"What is this?" and "Is this a piece of paper?"... I agree that if the first question be asked of a consecrated host, the answer must be "the body of Christ". But I also assert that to the question "Is this bread?" asked of a consecrated host we must answer "Yes", just as we should have to answer "Yes" if we were asked of a bank-note "Is this paper?"'.[16]

For FitzPatrick, the 'whole setting of the theory of transubstantiation is "physics", even if abused physics: ritual and ritual significance are only adjuncts to what it displays as the heart of the matter'.[17] And the big book, when it appears, will be an argument for 'letting ritual communicate as ritual – a programme that is a good deal more arduous than it sounds'.[18]

Against the background of those early exchanges, I now propose to comment on three issues that are central to the argument of *In Breaking of Bread*: the relations between signs and disguises; the phenomenon of 'insulation'; and the recovery of ritual.

'Beneath this veil'

'O Pane del cielo,
Che tutto il mio Dio nascondi in quel velo'
'O Bread of Heaven, beneath this veil, Thou dost my very God conceal.'

Here we have 'Alphonso' himself, Doctor of the Church, treating the Blessed Sacrament as God's hiding-place. And, five hundred years earlier: *'Adoro te devote, latens deitas',* made even worse in Hopkins'

[14] H. McCabe, 'Transubstantiation. A reply', p. 152.
[15] P.J. FitzPatrick, 'Some thoughts', p. 138.
[16] *Ibid*, pp. 160, 161. The title of FitzPatrick's book reminds us that St Paul did not fall for the Fallacy of Replacement: 'The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?' (1 Cor.10, 16). The second Canon of the thirteenth session of the Council of Trent (the Canon that concludes by describing the Eucharistic change as '*aptissime*' called 'transubstantiation') anathematizes those who say that '*in sacrosancto Eucharistiae sacramento remanere substantiam panis et vini una cum corpore et sanguine Domini nostri Jesu Christi*'. '*Una cum*', 'together with'; that is the point. With Luther in mind, the Council rejects the view that consecrated bread and wine are, as it were, a kind of *compound*. But a five pound note is not a compound of paper and currency. It is a piece of paper which has been changed into money.
[17] P.J. FitzPatrick, 'More thoughts', p. 159.
[18] *Ibid*., p. 162.

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translation: 'Godhead here in hiding, whom I do adore'. 'In hiding' – why would God want to *lurk*?

We take for granted, these days, that sacraments are signs, and yet when Aquinas considers *'utrum sacramentum sit in genere signi',* while not denying that this is the case, his chief interest lies elsewhere, in sacraments as 'sacred secrets', things which have in themselves, *'in se',* a hidden holiness, *'sanctitatem occultam'*.[19]

What could God's creatures be, but deity displayed? *'Caeli enarrant gloriam Dei'*. God's glory is variously shown forth in creatures and in sacraments. Signs, we might say, *disclose* – they show, announce, or indicate. Disguises, on the other hand, obscure or 'veil' the underlying reality. If we wanted a slogan, we might say that, where appearances *show* the truth, we are dealing with signs, and where they *obscure* it, we are dealing with disguises. Scholastic theology dealt in disguises.[20]

Moreover, its conceptual framework was closer to 'natural philosophy' or 'primitive natural science'[21] than to semiotics. Among the danger signals are words like 'beneath' and 'contains'. An embrace may signify affection, but the affection does not lie 'beneath' the gesture, nor does a handshake 'contain' friendship.

'Trent spoke of Christ being truly, really and substantially *contained under* the appearances'.[22] 'Is the eucharist a sacrament?', asks Aquinas. His answer is that it is, because a sacrament is that which contains something sacred (*'continet aliquid sacrum')* and the Eucharist contains Christ himself (*'continet . . . ipsum Christum'*).[23] Bread and wine have been transformed so that, 'beneath' their enduring appearance, Christ is contained. But why should the appearances endure? Because, says Thomas, 'it is not usual for human beings, but horrible, to eat a man's flesh and drink his blood'.[24] 'The appearances', comments FitzPatrick, 'are camouflage. . . . But what is being camouflaged here if it is not cannibalism?'.[25]

I well remember the urgency with which, as students at Oscott in the 1950s, we were enjoined (by the Rector, who taught Scripture) to avoid, so far as possible, biting or chewing the host. Curiously, the same nervousness did not attend the drinking of the precious blood. This whole dark distortion of the sacramental

[19] *Summa Theologiae*, IIIa, 60, 1, c.

[20] I am not, of course, questioning the importance of the theme of God's hiddenness, of the '*Deus absconditus'*. But sacramental theology, as a theology of signs, pertains to the theme of God's appearance.

[21] P.J. FitzPatrick, *Breaking*, pp. 161, 317.

[22] P.J. FitzPatrick, *Breaking*, p. 119 (his italics), with reference to the first Chapter and Canon of Session XIII of the Council.

[23] *S.Th.* IIIa, 73, 1, ad 1.

[24] *S.Th.* IIIa, 75, 5, c, cited in *Breaking*, p. 170.

[25] P.J. FitzPatrick, *Breaking*, p. 172.

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maintained its grip on the imagination through the *reification* of Christ's presence.

For Aquinas, eating and drinking are not essential to the sacrament, which is 'completed' (*'perficitur')* by the consecration of the matter – and the matter is not a rite, a meal, but only *things*: bread and wine. And the form? 'This is my body. This is my blood'. The words 'Take, and eat' (*'Accipite, et comedite')* are not essential, because eating and drinking pertain to the 'use of the consecrated matter', which is not necessary: *'non est de necessitate hujus sacramenti'*.[26]

The 'primacy of transformation over distribution' which, for centuries, characterised Catholic theologies of the eucharist was, as FitzPatrick shows, evident in every detail of the *Ritus Servandus* for the celebration of Mass before the recent Council.[27]

The theme of 'insulation' runs right through the book. We come across it early on with Carlo Colombo's removal of 'the notion of substance from anything which experience and investigation can discover about things', thereby isolating it 'from its original setting of change and continuity'. Central to FitzPatrick's critique both of scholastic accounts of eucharistic presence and those offered, in recent decades, by Dutch and Flemish phenomenologists, is the extent to which they are 'far closer than they are usually held to be', having in common 'a divorce between appearance and reality . . . prompted by a desire to preserve what is precious'. The tragedy, however, is that the attempted insulation of the things we value from the 'rough ground' of the familiar world of time and place and circumstance and change, ends up, not with their protection, but with the evacuation of their sense and content. 'Scepticism is the unwelcome destination to which tend both the old and newer theories'.[28] Which may go some way to explain our present predicament.

The Way of Ritual

'The older account', says FitzPatrick, 'interpreted eucharistic ritual in terms of natural philosophy. The newer account interprets eucharistic ritual in terms of human relationships. . . . I am trying to interpret eucharistic ritual in terms of ritual. There, in three sentences, is the thesis of this book'.[29]

'Whatever else the Eucharist is', he says at the end of his opening chapter "Against transubstantiation", 'it is a *rite* of some kind; and yet there has been no word on ritual' in the sources he has so far examined. (He concedes that there are texts in Aquinas which show

[26] See *S.Th.* IIIa, 73, 1, ad 3; 74, 7, c.; 78, 1, ad 2.
[27] See *Breaking*, pp. 167, 211–215, 218.
[28] *Breaking*, pp. 24, 104, 100.
[29] *Ibid*., p. 161; cf. p.247.

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'an awareness of ritual and of what goes with it',[30] and he discusses a number of them; unfortunately, those which explicitly consider the change of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ are not amongst them.)

Rituals are *actions*, patterns of behaviour, and although the rituals that we perform exhibit both our memory and our hope, 'Ritual itself is not primarily linguistic'. FitzPatrick speaks of 'the need in eucharistic ritual for a *journey*, a journey from what is everyday to what is not'; a journey in which the everyday is enhanced, hallowed, but not superseded. 'Whatever else the Eucharist is' (the phrase occurs again) 'it is a rite of immense antiquity, with roots that go back beyond Christianity to the earliest things in human history'.[31]

And if, throughout the book, he is severely critical of those who seek to keep the sacred safe by insulating it from time, and place, and circumstance, attributing to it an illusory immunity, he is no less critical of those who suppose that the past is now dispensable: 'Our own age', he says, 'has taught us all too much about the willingness of autocracies to demolish the past and to reshape their present as they please'. Both to our joy and to our pain, 'The past is not only revered and unsatisfactory' (a refrain that runs right through the book), 'it is inescapable':[32] part of who and what we are.

There is 'no escaping the process by which an inheritance is modified in its transmission'. Our inheritance from the past 'is modified in retrospect by what we do in the present and by the distinctions we draw there'. And FitzPatrick has a name for this phenomenon. In the eponymous dialogue, Socrates is asked whether *he* can be said 'to have changed if the young Theaetetus . . . who was previously shorter than he, should have grown up and have now become taller'. In the relations between past and present, there is no escaping 'the Theaetetus Effect'.[33]

The sharing of a meal 'is at the heart of a shared human life' and it is with 'the human activity of eating and its ritual employment' that the 'Way of Ritual', which is 'an approach towards the eucharistic presence through ritual's successive stages',[34] must begin.

During the 1972 exchange with Herbert McCabe, FitzPatrick had spoken of 'the concentric analogies of meal, ritual, and Passover', as providing the context which Christ and his friends inherited and which, at the Last Supper, he goes beyond 'in a way that only he can'.[35]

[30] *Ibid*., pp. 47–48, 243.
[31] *Ibid*., pp. 175–6, 344.
[32] *Ibid*., pp. 271, 285.
[33] *Ibid*., pp. 48, 42, 41.
[34] *Ibid*., pp. 201, 199.
[35] 'Some thoughts', p. 142; *Breaking*, p. 202.

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'We must accept', says FitzPatrick, that the Eucharist 'is a rite of eating and drinking, that it is bread that is eaten and wine that is drunk; and that this rite has . . . been made by Christ into an eating and drinking of his body and blood'. 'We must approach the eucharistic presence, not as a concealed presence of Christ . . . but as a ritually achieved sign of his presence among those with whom he already shares his risen life'.[36]

Rituals, I have emphasised, are actions. But actions, gestures we perform in time, are, by their very temporality, evanescent. The washing in baptism, exchange of promises in matrimony, imposition of hands in ordination – although in each case the action has lasting consequences, once it is performed the act is over, the ritual complete.

In the case of the Eucharist, however, the relative perdurance of bread and wine renders us vulnerable to what I earlier called the distortion of imagination through *reification* of Christ's presence.[37]

A whole cluster of practices, grouped under the description "devotion to the Blessed Sacrament", has become so central to Catholic spirituality that even to issue *warnings* in this area is to invite reproof. In theory some balance has been restored, in recent years, with the insistence that 'the primary purpose of reserving the Eucharist is to ensure its administration to the sick and dying'.[38] In practice, I suspect that, if a cross-section of Catholics were asked why the Blessed Sacrament is reserved in our churches, one would get a rather different answer.[39]

A final word on "reification". By one of those admirable quirks of inconsistency which prevents Chesterton's careering chariot of orthodoxy from falling into the ditch, it has always been insisted that Christ is not *locally* present in the Blessed Sacrament: move a host, and you do not move Christ. In practice, of course, reification dictates a rather different understanding. Let's go back to Father Faber, and

[36] *Breaking*, pp. 205, 204–5.

[37] '*Relative* perdurance' because, of course, consecration does not render the elements immune from corruption and decay.

[38] 1967 Instruction from the Congregation of Rites, *Instructio de cultu mysterii Eucharistii,* cited in *Breaking* p. 339. In spite of which, a bizarre paragraph in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* implies that this 'primary purpose' has been supplanted: 'The tabernacle was first intended for the reservation of the Eucharist in a worthy place so that it could be brought to the sick and those absent, outside of Mass. As faith in the real presence of Christ in his Eucharist deepened, the Church became conscious of the meaning of silent adoration of the Lord present under the Eucharistic species. It is for this reason that the tabernacle should be located in an especially worthy place in the church, and should be constructed in such a way that it emphasizes and manifests the truth of the real presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament' (1379). Quite apart from anything else, where are the warrants for the preposterous claim that our faith, today, is 'deeper' than the faith of the Church of Ambrose and Augustine, Anselm and Aquinas?

[39] Have you ever considered how dotty it is that the verses of the *Verbum Supernum Prodiens* sung at Benediction are the only two verses of the hymn to make no mention of the Eucharist?

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the first verse of his hymn on the death of St Philip Neri. The scene is that of a procession of the Blessed Sacrament in Rome.

> 'Day set on Rome: its golden morn
> Had seen the world's Creator borne
> Around St Peter's square;
> Trembling and weeping all the way,
> God's Vicar with his God that day
> Made pageant brave and rare'.[40]

What does the Mass look like?

Shortly after the Council, the Catholic Truth Society asked me to write a pamphlet on the Mass to replace the one then in use, which was entitled: *What is he doing at the altar?* I did so, and entitled mine: *What are we doing at Mass?* I still think that those two titles quite neatly capture the contrast between what FitzPatrick calls the 'cultic pictures' of the pre- and post-conciliar liturgies.[41]

If sacraments are 'of the order of signs', *'in genere signi',* then the cultic picture that ritual presents – what Gregory Dix, in his classic study, called the 'shape' of the liturgy – is of paramount importance.[42] 'Liturgy', says FitzPatrick, 'is meant to communicate ritually, not to provide liturgists (or anthropologists, come to that) with obscured patterns of significance to decipher'.[43]

What the ritual *signifies* (the *"res sacramenti'),* what men and women are up to when they perform these rites, is quite another matter. Thus, for example, the straightforward answer to the question: "What does the Mass look like?" is (or should be): a reading party followed by a shared meal. Casual observers will, of course, have no idea why these people read these particular texts, or why they treat them with such reverence. Nor will the uninitiated have any idea of the weight of significance which this meal bears. And yet, however baffling they find the whole affair, they should be in no doubt that they are witnessing some kind of reading party followed by some kind of meal.

With Eamon Duffy's denunciation of the misplaced 'primitivism' (as he sees it) of Jungmann and others in mind, I should perhaps emphasise that I am not privileging simplicity over complexity in matters of ritual.[44] But I am urging the indispensability, if signs are

[40] F.W. Faber, 'St Philip's Death', *Hymns*, p. 242.
[41] See *Breaking*, pp. 209–216, 232–234.
[42] See Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London, 1945).
[43] P.J. FitzPatrick, *Breaking*, pp. 216–7.
[44] See Eamon Duffy, 'Worship', *Fields of Faith. Theology and Religious Studies for the Twenty-first Century*, edited by David F. Ford, Ben Quash, Janet Martin Soskice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 119–134; see p. 134.

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to signify, of *legibility*. There are non-trivial differences between the splendour of a Cambridge college feast and a family picnic by the river. In each case, however, there is little doubt that what is going on is that people are sharing in a meal.

'The sharing of a meal is at the heart of a shared human life';[45] language and feasting, communication and communion, are so fundamental to human being that one might say that the "legibility" of the sign is not merely a doctrinal, but also an anthropological requirement.

(Incidentally, in the same essay, Eamon Duffy suggested that 'the evolution of Christian worship and Christian doctrine' should be viewed 'tranquilly as a legitimate process of acculturation'. This disturbingly complacent perspective on our 'revered but unsatisfactory' past reminds me of de Lubac's assessment, at the end of *Corpus Mysticum*, of the shift of reference from Eucharist to Church, which he had charted so magisterially: '*elle était normale, donc bonne*', an assessment which FitzPatrick dismisses as a 'piece of ambiguous optimism'. It would surely be more appropriate, and more fruitful, to develop – as Eamon once urged his Cambridge colleagues in a University Sermon – 'a sense of the complexity of our own past'.)[46]

Shortly before migrating to Bologna, in March 1547 (on account of an outbreak of typhus), the Council of Trent decided 'to separate the treatment of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist from its treatment of the sacrificial character of that rite'.[47] Thus it came about that the Council saw itself as tackling, as two *different* issues, matters that would have been better understood in terms of the relations between sign and signified.

What does the Mass look like? A reading-party followed by a meal. What does the Mass mean? What is going on when people perform this ritual? Gathered into community by the Spirit of the risen Christ, we celebrate Christ's death and resurrection, share in the sacrifice on Calvary which saves the world.[48]

It took Catholic theology four hundred years to re-integrate sign and signified into a single coherent account, a fact which exasperated Louis Bouyer: 'In antiquity the Eucharist was seen as the sacrifice of the Christians *because* it was the sacred meal of the Christian community. The texts of the Fathers are so clear and

[45] P.J. FitzPatrick, *Breaking*, p. 201.

[46] E. Duffy, 'Worship', p. 133; Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum* (Paris: Aubier, 1949), p. 291; E. Duffy, 'Let us now praise famous men', *Walking to Emmaus* (London: Burns and Oates, 2006), p. 27.

[47] P.J. FitzPatrick, *Breaking*, p. 318; see p. 314.

[48] I said something like this over forty years ago: see Nicholas Lash, 'The Eucharist: sacrifice or meal?', *His Presence in the World*, pp. 42–63; this essay first appeared in *The Clergy Review* in December 1965.

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consistent on this point that it can only be denied by a kind of wilful blindness'.[49]

Forms of Christ's Presence

Constitution on the Liturgy, article 7

Article 7 of the Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* has been described as 'probably the most important statement in the constitution and the key to a rethinking of the liturgy'.[50]

To accomplish the work of our redemption, 'Christ is always present in His Church, especially [*praesertim*] in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of His minister, "the same one now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the cross" [a quotation from Trent], but especially [*maxime*] under the Eucharistic species. By His power He is present in the sacraments, so that when a man baptizes it is really Christ Himself who baptizes. He is present in His word, since it is He Himself who speaks when the holy Scriptures are read in the church. He is present, finally, when the Church prays and sings, for He promised: 'Where two or three are gathered together for my sake, there am I in the midst of them' (Mt. 18.20)'.

I have one small regret. It is a pity that Christ's presence in the gathered people is mentioned 'finally' because, of course, as the opening clause implies, it is the precondition of the rest: without the Church, no sacraments! I rather suspect that if the Constitution, the first to be completed, had been debated later on, when the Council's ecclesiology had deepened, things might have been different.

It is, I think, worth noting that, while the sense of Christ's presence in the other sacraments is qualified as 'by His power' – and, in the case of the Blessed Sacrament, given an intensifier: *'maxime'* – for the rest it is simply said that Christ is present: in the celebrant, in the proclaimed Scriptures, in the assembly.

We do not need to dwell on the phrases referring to Christ's presence in the Blessed Sacrament or in the celebrant, because neither aspect has, shall we say, been understated in Catholic Christianity! The real breakthrough comes with the insistence on Christ's presence 'in His word', on which there are three points that I would like to make.

[49] Louis Bouyer, *Rite and Man. The Sense of the Sacred and Christian Liturgy* (London: Burns and Oates, 1963), p. 83. To my surprise, FitzPatrick seems unaware of Bouyer's study, which appeared in French in 1962.

[50] Reiner Kaczynski, 'Toward the reform of the liturgy', *History of Vatican II. Volume III*, edited by Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), pp. 189–256; p. 223.

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In the first place, in the Abbott and Gallagher edition, the lower case initial letter for 'church', in the phrase 'when the holy Scriptures are read in the church',[51] might give the impression that the reference is to the building. In the Latin, the initial capital makes it clear that the reference is to the people.

In the second place, the reason why there is no mention of Christ's presence in the *preached* word is that, at this early stage in the Council's history, there was not yet a majority in favour. Two years later, however, the idea had won general acceptance, and so the Decree *Ad Gentes*, on the Church's missionary activity, says that 'by the preaching of the word and by the celebration of the sacraments . . . missionary activity brings about the presence of Christ, the Author of salvation'.[52]

In the third place, the final chapter of *Dei Verbum* contains an extremely important expression of 'the sacramental conception of revelation that is at the center of the first chapter'. The final chapter begins: 'The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since from the table of both the word of God and the body of Christ she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life'.[53] One table; two forms of one food.

It is not, I think, just old age which accounts for my alarm at what I see as quite widespread diminution of reverence towards the Blessed Sacrament. But, in the light of the teaching of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (glossed by that of the other two documents which I have mentioned) surely the appropriate strategy to counteract this would be through the inculcation of appropriate reverence for *each* of the forms of Christ's presence in the liturgy. What a difference it would make, for example, if readers, on the one hand, and preachers, on the other, really believed that, through what they read and said, Christ was as truly present as he is in the consecrated bread and wine.

The strange new world of Abbot Cameron-Brown

Dom Aldhelm Cameron-Brown, sometime Abbot of Prinknash, might not agree. In a letter to *The Tablet*, in April 2006, the Abbot said that it is 'good that nowadays we recognize' that 'Christ is indeed present

[51] *The Documents of Vatican II*, edited by Walter Abbott and Joseph Gallagher (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966), p. 141.

[52] *'Per verbum praedicationis et per celebrationem sacramentorum, quorum centrum et culmen est Sanctissima Eucharistia, Christum salutis auctorem praesentem reddit', Ad Gentes*, art.9 (*Documents of Vatican II*, p. 595). The Decree was promulgated on 7 December 1965 after a final vote with 2394 in favour and 5 against.

[53] Christophe Theobald, 'The Church under the Word of God', *History of Vatican II, Volume V* (2006), pp. 275–362; p. 345.

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in the worshipping assembly and in the celebrant at Mass' (he made no mention of the reading of Scripture). He is also present, Cameron-Brown went on, 'within my own heart, which is where I normally converse with him. But his presence in my heart, in the celebrant and in the assembly is not a presence 'body, blood, soul and divinity', as in the Blessed Sacrament'.[54]

Let's pause here for a christological health check. 'Body, blood and soul' is what human beings are. Truly human and truly divine is what Christ is (forgive the baldness of expression, but the Abbot's text seems to need a nutcracker rather than a scalpel). If, in the gathered community, the celebrant, the proclaimed and the expounded Word, Christ is not present 'body, blood, soul and divinity', then Christ is absent. It really is as simple as that.

'If', the Abbot goes on helpfully to explain, 'I jumped up and sat on the altar, no one would stare at me, to worship Christ present in my heart, as they stare at the monstrance'. No prizes for guessing what comes next: 'the Blessed Sacrament is a Thingly form of Christ's presence'.

Thingness is all. Reification rules! It would be difficult to imagine a more succinct expression of those clusters of confusion which *In Breaking of Bread* was written to unravel.

Nothing is said here about sacraments as signs, as ritual gestures; nothing about God coming among us as the Word, the truth that sets us free; nothing about God's self-gift as food. All that *really* matters, it seems, is the inert presence of a 'thing' – a thing to be displayed, 'stared at', and then locked away.

What this whole account cries out to say, but cannot (for that would give the game away) is that, in the Blessed Sacrament alone, Christ is *physically* present, although his presence is disguised, having the appearance of being bread and wine.

A final sentence in the Abbot's letter reinforces this suspicion. Having said that 'the Blessed Sacrament is a Thingly form of Christ's presence', the letter ended: 'In my heart, in the celebrant, his presence is real but spiritual'. Whatever 'spiritual' here connotes, it seems to have little or nothing to do with the doctrine of God's creative and enlivening self-gift, God's Holy Spirit. It makes better sense, I suggest, as a pious paraphrase of "mental" – in the mind, in contradistinction from the physicality of the 'Thingly form'. At the end of the day, it seems, it is the ghost of Descartes that is presiding at the feast.

[54] *The Tablet*, 29 April 2006, p. 22. The first of the canons to Trent's Decree on the Eucharist, of 11 October 1551, anathematises anyone who denies that '*in sanctissimae Eucharistiae sacramento contineri vere, realiter et substantialiter, corpus et sanguinem una cum anima et divinitate Domini nostri Jesu Christi ac proinde totum Christum*'.

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Conclusion

'The consumption of food', says FitzPatrick, 'displays the incomplete nature of our lives, which need regular replenishment, and yet which will eventually perish, despite all their replenishing'.[55] The food we need is travellers' fare, because we are *in via*, living between the times. Easter, from the memory of which, and in the light of which, we live, still lies *ahead* of us. It is no coincidence that the recovery, during the twentieth century, of a sense of contingency, of temporality, of the *bodiliness* of faith and worship,[56] went hand-in-hand with a rediscovery of the eschatological. It seems appropriate, therefore, to end with a piece of poetry more theologically distinguished than that with which I began.

'O sacrum convivium,
in quo Christus sumitur:
recolitur memoria passionis ejus;
mens impletur gratia
et futurae gloriae nobis pignus datur'.

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[55] P.J. FitzPatrick, *Breaking*, p. 201.

[56] See J.D. Crichton, *Christian Celebration: The Mass* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1971), p. 5.

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