

## THE PASCHAL MYSTERY OF CHRIST AND THE EUCHARIST

### General Theses

1. The mystery of the Eucharist is objectively grounded in the Paschal mystery of Christ which gives it its meaning. Therefore the Eucharist is to be understood not by looking *at* it, but by looking *from* it and *through* it to the paschal Mystery of Christ. Serious problems arise with a shift in the focus of attention to the rite itself as a means of saving grace, for this involves a detachment of the rite from its objective ground, when its meaning is inevitably sought either in the rite itself and its performance, or in the moral and spiritual response of the communicant. A proper understanding of the Eucharist requires attention to be directed to *the inner relations of the Incarnate Son* and the saving work which he fulfilled in his relation to the Father, and therefore is reached not in terms of external relations between Christ and the Eucharist or the Eucharist and ourselves, but in terms of our participation in Christ and what he has done for us, through the Spirit he has sent us.

2. The immediate key to the understanding of the Eucharist is to be sought in *the vicarious humanity of Jesus Christ, the priesthood of the Incarnate Son* Cf. Athanasius: 'He became Minister between God and man in order that he might minister the things of God to us and the things of ours to God.' While the Eucharist is to be understood from within that double movement, God-manward, and man-Godward, it is the self-giving of God to man in Christ that lies behind the real presence, and the self-offering of Christ to the Father that lies behind the eucharistic sacrifice. From our side, it is union with Christ in his vicarious humanity and participation in his vicarious self-offering, both through the Spirit, that are the determinants in our interpretation of the real presence and the eucharistic sacrifice. When we look at the Eucharist in this dimension of depth, the teaching of St. John's Gospel, chapters 6 and 13-17, and the teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews are of signal importance, although that may not appear to be the case when the Eucharist is regarded 'in the flat' merely or mainly as a liturgical event.

3. If the vicarious humanity or the human priesthood of Christ is to be taken in its full seriousness, nothing must be allowed to detract from *the perfection, fulness and integrity of Christ's human nature*. Thus Eutychian and monophysite tendencies in Christology and the liturgy leave no room for the human priesthood of Christ, while Apollinarian tendencies which replace the human mind and soul of

Jesus with the divine mind of the eternal Son or Word, make Jesus only a bodily instrument in the hands of God, and detract from the integrity of his human agency in the whole man-Godward movement of the Incarnation. That could only destroy understanding of Christ as he who unites himself to us in worship, adoration and service to God that we may worship, adore and serve God within, and through Jesus Christ our High Priest and Mediator. These tendencies, together with a Nestorian separation of the divine and human natures in the one Person of the Mediator, have the effect of throwing us back upon ourselves, to be our own priests and to make our own responsive offerings before the Father, in which our understanding of the real presence becomes twisted in a physicalist sense and our understanding of the eucharistic sacrifice becomes twisted in a 'Pelagian' sense.

4. Since the Eucharist is to be understood in a proper and profound co-ordination with the whole paschal mystery of Christ, it must be allowed to exhibit as its *essential pattern* one which corresponds to and participates in the pattern of the whole movement of God's saving love in Jesus Christ, the *katabasis* of the Son of God through the Incarnation, in whom God communicates himself to us, and the *anabasis* of the Incarnate Son through his resurrection and ascension to the Father in which he consummates his vicarious self-offering for us. Hence the Eucharist involves a movement of *reception and communion* grounded in the self-giving of God to us in Christ – the real presence; and a movement of *thanksgiving, worship and offering* grounded in the vicarious self-consecration and self-offering of Christ to the Father which he fulfils in our human nature and on our behalf – the eucharistic sacrifice. That understanding tends to be overthrown when the liturgical pattern in the celebration of the Eucharist begins with a movement of impetratory ascent leading to the descent of Christ in the real presence, where the focus of attention becomes truncated at the communion of the body and blood of Christ, that is, in his passion, and the distinctively *eucharistic* aspect of the Lord's Supper, corresponding to the ascension and self-offering of the risen Christ to the Father tends to fall away. This concentration on the *corpus Christi*, which characterizes the Western approach to the Eucharist, damages the relation between the eucharistic celebration on earth and the heavenly worship that surrounds the throne of the Father, and cuts short the eschatological perspective of the whole eucharistic movement.

5. The *eucharistic memorial* or *anamnesis* is not just a recollection of the historical passion of Christ, nor is it to be regarded as a 'making present' of past historical events which we 'do' in the Eucharist. Rather is it the memorial before God which we make at Christ's command and which is filled with the real presence of the crucified,



risen and glorified Lord, by himself. At the celebration of the Eucharist the whole Jesus Christ is present in the reality of his body, mind and will, taking up the eucharistic memorial we make of him as the concrete form and appointed expression of his own self-offering in the identity of himself as Offerer and Offering. The eucharistic *anamnesis* is thus to be understood in the same dimension of depth as the whole mystery of the Eucharist, in which Jesus Christ constitutes himself in his paschal mystery its objective reality, conferring his own *parousia* upon it, so that the *anamnesis* of the Redeemer which we make in his name becomes the effective form of participation which he grants to us in his self-offering through the eternal Spirit to the Father.

6. The *eucharistic parousia* takes place in the midst of the one *parousia* which stretches from his Advent in humiliation to his Advent in glory, but it is that *parousia* in the form determined by the Ascension of Christ in which he has withdrawn himself from visible and tangible contact with us in our ongoing history only to be present with us through His Spirit whom he shares with us. Until Christ comes, therefore, the form instituted by Christ in the Eucharist which he takes to himself as the form of his actual and active presence among us, is the form of his humiliation, the breaking of his body and the shedding of his blood, the form in which he sacrificed himself on the Cross, for it is there that the risen and glorified Christ, in accordance with his specific appointment in the Eucharist, comes to meet us in his Spirit in his identity as Gift and Giver. *How he is present is only explicable from the side of God*, in terms of his creative activity which by its very nature, as we see in the Virgin birth and in the resurrection of Jesus, transcends any kind of explanation which *we* can offer. That is what is meant by saying that he is really present *through the Spirit*; it is the kind of presence in divine power over which we have no control, ecclesiastical, liturgical, or intellectual. As such, however, it is not empty but filled with the objective content of all that Jesus Christ did and taught and was in the whole course of his historical existence in the flesh, for all that he has done once and for all in history has the power of permanent presence in him.

7. In the Western Church the understanding of the Eucharist has been deeply affected by *dualism* and *phenomenalism* deriving from Augustinian and medieval theology. The Augustinian notion of a sacrament as outward and visible sign of inward and invisible grace threatened to give rise to a wholly symbolist interpretation of the Eucharist, but in the Medieval Church the Latin concept of *the means of grace* and the *assimilation of grace to causality*, which were more and more developed through an Aristotelian philosophy of nature, inhibited this symbolist development by containing the dualism, but

only at the expense of creating serious problems which have decisively affected the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist up to and beyond the Council of Trent. (a) The causal connection introduced into the sacramental relation gave rise to a physicalist notion of 'conversion' of the consecrated elements, resulting in *transubstantiation*. (b) This causal connection also gave rise to an *ex opere operato* concept of the causal instrumentality of sacramental grace, which though formulated in the interest of salvation by grace alone had the effect of depersonalizing the real presence. (c) Causal connection further affected the relation between the officiating priest and the Eucharist, leading to the idea that *something is done to Christ* in the Eucharist, and even to the notion of a sacramental re-enacting of the immolation or propitiatory sacrifice of Christ. (d) The difficulties thus raised were considerably increased by the adoption of *Aristotle's container view of space*, accepted by the Council of Trent, for it led to further objectivization of the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the sacrament in such a way that the *corpus Christi* tended to become a centre of attention and devotion interposing between the suppliant and Christ himself. While these ideas only belong to the mediaeval and Tridentine interpretation of the *fact* of the real presence and the *reality* of the eucharistic sacrifice, and do not belong to the original datum of revelation or the permanent substance of the faith, their perpetuation serves to obscure and distort understanding and to hinder ecumenical agreement.

8. Although the Reformation operated in its basis with an Augustinian understanding of the sacraments, it was an Augustinianism cut loose from Aristotelian physics and metaphysics. It diverged from the mediaeval and Tridentine teaching in several ways. (a) It sought to interpret biblical teaching about the Lord's Supper in accordance with the direct rather than an oblique sense of Holy Scripture. Thus in moving away from mediaeval allegorism it tried to adopt a historical approach to the Eucharist in terms of '*the Last Supper*'. (b) In its change from mainly ontic to mainly dynamic modes of thought, it laid greater emphasis upon the saving acts of God through the Spirit, without giving up classical Catholic Christology, which affected its understanding of the real presence and the eucharistic sacrifice. (c) It identified grace with the self-giving of God in Christ, *tota gratia*, and rejected the Latin notion of grace as a realm of intermediate causality between God and the world. That is to say, Reformation theology sought to detach the original datum of revelation or the permanent substance of the faith from the interpretative formulations in which it had become encased through recourse to alien frames of thought, and concentrated attention on understanding the Eucharist in light of the question *who* is really present, rather than the question as to *how* he is present,



and thus interpreted the real presence of Christ and the eucharistic sacrifice in terms of *Christ as their real Agent*.

9. Nevertheless, the Churches of the Reformation have never been able to overcome the Augustinian dualism embedded in their foundations, so that in spite of the Reformation stress on the reality of Christ's presence (i.e. the real presence of the whole Christ including his body and blood) in the Eucharist, the ontological relation gave way to a symbolical or to a phenomenological relation so that symbolist and existentialist notions of the sacraments have been widespread in Protestant theology. Classical Reformation doctrines of the Eucharist, with their Augustinian foundation, saw development within the framework of Newtonian science and Cartesian-Kantian philosophy which had the effect of reintroducing the notions of causal and instrumental grace while reinforcing the dualism latent in the Protestant approach to the sacraments. This resulted, on the one hand, in a powerful scholastic theology, within Reformed and Lutheran Churches particularly, in which the old medieval problems and their proposed solutions recur, but on the other hand, in a secularizing detachment of the world from God and in a moral reinterpretation of Catholic Christian doctrine which is so characteristic of Neo-Protestant or Liberal Christianity.

10. When we consider the whole history of the Eucharist in the Western Church, in Roman Catholic and Evangelical Churches alike, we find the same basic problems recurring whenever the Eucharist is set within a dualist context, whether it be Augustinian-Neoplatonic, Augustinian-Aristotelian, Augustinian-Newtonian, or Augustinian-Kantian. The two chief points at which problems persistently arise are whenever refraction is introduced (a) into the self-giving of God in Christ, detaching in varying degrees the Gift from the Giver, and (b) into the self-offering of Christ to the Father, detaching in varying degrees the Offering from the Offerer. So far as the *real presence* is concerned, the result of this bifurcation is a situation where the grace-gift in the Eucharist becomes a created intermediary between man and God, a sort of 'substitute Christ', or a 'substitute centre of devotion', and/or to throw us back upon ourselves as receivers over against the Giver. The former is the Catholic tendency, an objectifying concentration on 'the real presence', and the latter is the Protestant tendency, a personalist concentration on religious self-awareness. So far as *the eucharistic sacrifice* is concerned, the result of this bifurcation is a situation where the offering is something which we make in order to make present to us the once and for all sacrifice of Christ, or a response which we make in order to make Christ real for ourselves in our own experience. The former is the Catholic tendency and the latter the Protestant tendency, but in both cases the Church is thrown back

upon itself to find a substitute priesthood to replace the effectual loss of the priestly mediation of the *Man* Christ Jesus. This involves a change in the basic notion of priesthood (from *pontifex* to *sacerdos*), which in Catholicism takes the form of an *instrumentalist sacerdotalism* and in Protestantism takes the form of a *psychological sacerdotalism*.

11. In the *ecumenical situation* of today, however, lines of thought are converging on all sides in which the Eucharist is being rethought in terms of *the inherent oneness of Christ both as Gift and Giver and as Offering and Offerer*. This is being brought about mainly through the convergence of the two movements of thought: (a) The recovery of a non-dualist Christology, in which the focus of attention is on the *vicarious humanity* of the Incarnate Son, that is, upon *God as Man* rather than on God in Man; (b) The recovery of the *eucharistic pattern of worship and life* within and through the human priesthood of Jesus, behind which lies a non-dualist soteriology in which the incarnation and the atonement are regarded as constituting one continuous indivisible movement of the redeeming love of God, and in which the saving life and passion of Christ as Mediator are understood in the mutual involution of his God-manward and his man-Godward activity. The effect of this is to cut behind the historical problems arising out of damaged relations between God and the world and to restore a truly Apostolic and Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist including the fact of the real presence and the reality of the eucharistic sacrifice.

12. This rethinking of Christology and soteriology, and therefore of the Eucharist, has been taking place at the same time as a *vast change in the foundations of Western thought and culture*, in which modern science has been rejecting the persistent structures of cosmological and epistemological dualism that predominated in the Ptolemaic and the Newtonian eras. Thus for the first time in the long history of Christian theology, it confronts a situation where some form of dualism is not already built into its fabric and axiomatically taken for granted. Thus it is able to develop its own distinctive doctrines on its own proper ground, without attack upon the interaction between God and the world which is so fundamental for Christian doctrines of creation and incarnation. The fruit of this is both emancipating and constructive. It serves to liberate and purify theology from alien frameworks of thought derived from some obsolete philosophy of nature which have distorted its interpretation of the Eucharist, and helps to indicate how Christian theology on its own scientific foundations can develop an interpretation of the real presence and of the eucharistic sacrifice, by operating with a unity of form and being, structure and substance, dynamic and ontic modes of thought, as determined by the continuous indivisible field of connection established between God and the Church within the space-time

track of this world. This opens the way for positive ecumenical agreement of a depth and breadth hardly possible since the end of the great Ecumenical Councils, but it does depend on the courage of the Churches in being ready to cut away or set aside time-conditioned and culture-conditioned modes of thought which may once have served a useful purpose, but which are now irrelevant to the understanding of the original datum of revelation and the permanent substance of the Christian faith.

T. F. TORRANCE, University of Edinburgh