

THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN THE EUCHARIST
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Prefatory Note

For a number of reasons the North American members of the Commission did not hold a meeting during the academic year 1970-71. Fr. J.M.R. Tillard and I spent a morning together in May 1971 and produced a tentative sketch of a working paper, but circumstances prevented us from completing the work together. Consequently, while I am greatly indebted to Fr. Tillard for his help (including an advance copy of a substantial study prepared by him for the Nouvelle revue théologique), I have thought it proper to take full responsibility for these brief notes as they stand.

E.R.F.

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Introduction

Any attempt to read the mind of our two communions on the doctrine of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, with a view to identifying and evaluating agreements and disagreements and proposing realistic goals for future dialogue, suffers from two obvious handicaps:

(a) In both communions much important work, on the Eucharist as on many other topics, remains on the level of theological research and reflection and has yet to find expression in official texts, doctrinal or liturgical. It seems likely that a substantial consensus could now be formulated by responsible theologians from both sides, but the ecclesial weight that could be claimed for such a consensus remains doubtful at the present stage of doctrinal development.

(b) The eucharistic formulations officially accepted by the two communions are hardly commensurable. The Anglican formularies are designed to express certain truths, regarded as absolutely essential, about the nature and purpose of the Eucharist; to exclude a limited number of ideas which are seen as denials or corruptions of those truths; and otherwise to avoid binding consciences. Thus, while Anglican theology is rich in reflection on the eucharistic sacrifice and presence, the official documents are strikingly limited in their range (1). Moreover, apart from modern liturgical texts which themselves (at any rate, for the most part) scrupulously reflect traditional Anglican caution regarding positive statements of eucharistic doctrine, the authoritative formularies date exclusively from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Modern statements-- e.g. the Responsio of the English Archbishops (1897) to Apostolicae Curiae, the report on Doctrine in the Church of England (1938), and the utterances of Lambeth Conferences-- may well command respect, but can claim no formal authority. The Roman Catholic formularies, on the other hand, include a number of detailed statements on eucharistic

faith and practice, which provide much more explicit teaching than the Anglican formularies and are evidently intended (to state the position as mildly as possible) to close at least some of the questions which these leave open. Furthermore, among Roman Catholic documents possessing a high degree of formal authority, some-- e.g. the constitution De Sacra Liturgia of the Second Vatican Council, the encyclical Mysterium Fidei of Pope Paul VI, and the instruction Eucharisticum Mysterium of the Sacred Congregation of Rites-- are of recent date and speak more or less directly to the present situation.

Under the circumstances, theologians must surely proceed tentatively and experimentally in their search for consensus. The following notes do not pretend to be anything more than a pointer to potentially fruitful explorations.

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Basic Proposals

The lines of exploration here proposed can be briefly sketched as follows:

(a) A comprehensive consideration of the various modes of Christ's presence with his people. There are several good reasons for thinking that the question of the sacramental presence of Christ in the Eucharist-- in other words, of the sacramental identification of the consecrated elements with the Body and Blood of Christ-- which has long been debated both between Anglicans and Roman Catholics and among Anglicans themselves, can best be approached in this wider context.

(b) A study of the dynamic character of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. In the light of the comprehensive consideration suggested above, it will be readily apparent that Christ's presence in its sacramental mode, as in its other modes, must be understood dynamically-- in other words, in terms of God's active purpose of bringing salvation to men by uniting them to Christ in his life, death and resurrection. If this line of thought is accepted and pursued, it should help us to establish a clear order of priorities in eucharistic doctrine and devotion and so to envisage more accurately the shape of "essential agreement" on the Eucharist.

(c) An extended reflection on the proposition: In the Sacrament of the Eucharist Christ truly gives himself to his people. This proposition is fundamental for the eucharistic piety of both communions. It is amply expressed in their doctrinal definitions, in their authoritative lex orandi, and in their popular hymns and prayers. Surely, then, our joint consideration of the mode of Christ's presence as our renewing and sanctifying food should be based on the undisputed truth that God "hath given his Son our Saviour Jesus Christ, not only to die for us, but also to be our spiritual food and sustenance in that holy Sacrament" (Book of Common Prayer).

(d) Finally-- but only finally-- a consideration of the doctrine of Christ's sacramental presence in the Eucharist as a "substantial" presence. Our view of the relation between the sacramental signs of bread and wine and the Body and Blood of Christ must be faithful, alike in what it affirms and in what it denies, to the results of our earlier

explorations. In other words, what we can learn of Christ's purpose and action in the Eucharist will provide the perspective in which we can best approach such questions as these: the significance and status of the doctrine of Christ's "substantial" presence; the terms in which that doctrine can legitimately be affirmed; the relation between substantial presence and a "conversion" of the sacramental elements; the necessity and/or propriety of the interpretation of such a conversion in terms of "transubstantiation."

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Some Suggested Developments

The following paragraphs indicate some major concerns which should be kept in mind in the studies proposed above. (Some useful working materials are added in appended notes.)

(a) The consideration of the various modes of Christ's presence should take into account, for example, his presence in the community gathered for prayer or engaged in service (and also in those whom it serves); in the hearts of believers; in the proclamation of the word of God; in the exercise of pastoral care (2).

(b) The study of the dynamic character of Christ's eucharistic presence should consider such questions as the role of the Eucharist in God's purpose of salvation through Christ; the meaning of the Eucharist as "memorial" of Christ's unique self-offering; the relation between sacrifice, presence, worship and communion in eucharistic doctrine and devotion (3).

(c) Reflection on Christ's self-giving to his people in the Eucharist should explore and exploit the truths and values held in common by our two communions and expressed in their eucharistic practice (4).

(d) The study of the question of Christ's "substantial" presence should pay particular attention to the legitimate concerns expressed both in past affirmations and in past denials, with a view to the removal of misunderstandings and in the hope of a possible reduction of the area of disagreement (5).

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Note 1

The constants of Anglican eucharistic doctrine and worship are well summarized in the following questions and answers from the Prayer Book Catechism (quoted from the Canadian Prayer Book of 1962):

- Q. Why was the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper ordained?
A. For the continual remembrance of the sacrifice of the death of Christ, and of the benefits which we receive thereby.
- Q. What is the outward part or sign of the Lord's Supper?
A. Bread and Wine, which the Lord has commanded to be received.
- Q. What is the inward part, or thing signified?
A. The Body and Blood of Christ, which are verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in the Lord's Supper.
- Q. What benefits do we receive thereby?

- A. The strengthening and refreshing of our souls and bodies unto eternal life by the Body and Blood of Christ.

Note 2

The following passage from the encyclical Mysterium Fidei is suggestive and helpful:

Omnes compertum habemus non unam esse rationem, qua Christus praesens adsit Ecclesiae suae. ... Praesens adest Christus Ecclesiae suae oranti, cum ipse sit qui "et oret pro nobis, et oret in nobis, et oretur a nobis: orat pro nobis ut sacerdos noster, orat in nobis ut caput nostrum, oratur a nobis ut Deus noster," quique ipse promiserit: ubi sunt duo vel tres congregati in nomine meo, ibi sum in medio eorum (cfr. Mt. 18, 20). Praesens adest Ecclesiae suae opera misericordiae exercenti, non solum quia, dum aliquid boni facimus uni ex fratribus eius minimis id ipsi Christo facimus, verum etiam quia Christus est, qui per Ecclesiam haec opera facit, continenter hominibus divina caritate subveniens. Praesens adest Ecclesiae suae peregrinanti et ad portum aeternae vitae cupienti, cum Ipse habitet per fidem in cordibus nostris et in ea caritatem diffundat per Spiritum Sanctum, quem dat nobis.

Alia quidem ratione, verissime tamen, praesens adest Ecclesiae suae praedicanti, cum Evangelium, quod annuntiatur, verbum Dei sit, et nonnisi nomine et auctoritate Christi, Verbi Dei incarnati, ipsoque adsistente, praedicetur, ut sit "unus grex de uno pastore securus."

Praesens adest Ecclesiae suae populum Dei regenti et gubernanti, cum sacra potestas a Christo sit et pastoribus eam exercentibus Christus adsit, "Pastor pastorum," secundum promissionem Apostolis factam.

Insuper, et sublimiore quidem modo, praesens adest Christus Ecclesiae suae Sacrificium Missae nomine ipsius immolanti; adest Sacramenta administranti. ... Sacramenta vero actiones esse Christi, qui eadem per homines administrat, nemo est qui ignoret. ... Hae praesentiae rationes stupore mentem replent et mysterium Ecclesiae contemplandum praebent. Sed alia est ratio, praestantissima quidem, qua Christus praesens adest Ecclesiae suae in sacramento Eucharistiae, quod est propterea inter cetera Sacramenta "devotione suavius, intelligentia pulchrius, continentia sanctius"; continet enim ipsum Christum et est "quasi consummatio spiritualis vitae et omnium sacramentorum finis."

Quae quidem praesentia "realis" dicitur non per exclusionem, quasi aliae "reales" non sint, sed per excellentiam, quia est substantialis, qua nimirum totus atque integer Christus, Deus et homo, fit praesens.

Note 3

The following passages are commended for reflection:

(a) The end of Christ's offering of Himself for us, as our propitiation and our representative, is that humanity as a whole-- all men, so far as they will allow it to be so-- may finally in Him be brought back into union with God and with one another. What He does first for us, He must ultimately do in us. ... And the way in which we are

brought to share Christ's acceptance with God is, not merely by an external imputation of His merits, but by a real incorporation into His life by His Spirit. ... Thus our Lord cannot be our representative priest and sacrifice in an effective sense unless we go on to share His life. His sacrifice for us can only be "consummated in" us. We must share it both actually and morally. Actually we must become "of His body," and morally we must share in the life of His Spirit. And this participation can come about through no effort of ours. It must be purely a gift of the divine grace. And it is this gift which in fact is communicated in "the breaking of the bread." There we eat His flesh and drink His blood, and so are admitted to share in fullest measure the fruit of His sacrifice, which is nothing less than the fellowship in His life. Thus only by communion can we in any effective sense share the eucharistic sacrifice, so far as that sacrifice is not a merely human effort, but is identified with Christ's offering, and attains thereby its spiritual validity. Only in Christ can we offer and plead Christ. We have an altar whereof we are to eat (Charles Gore, The Body of Christ, 4th ed., pp. 199-201).

(b) In Missa ergo sacrificium et sacrum convivium ita ad idem mysterium pertinent, ut arctissimo vinculo alterum cum altero cohaereat. Nam Dominus in ipso sacrificio Missae immolatur cum "sacramentaliter incipit praesens adesse tanquam spiritualis fidelium alimonia sub speciebus panis et vini." Et eo fine Christus sacrificium hoc Ecclesiae concedidit ut fideles illud et spiritualiter, per fidem et caritatem, et sacramentaliter, per sacrae communionis convivium, participant. Participatio vero Cenae dominicae semper est communicio cum Christo sese Patri pro nobis in sacrificium offerente (Eucharisticum Mysterium, no. 3).

Note 4

The following passages from the report on Doctrine in the Church of England may be helpful in this connexion:

(a) Wherever the Eucharist is offered, Christ is the agent uniting us with Himself; and the elements become, through their consecration, effectual signs whereby as our sacrifice He is given to be our food. ...

Since ... God is the living God, able and willing to take specific action, there is no conflict between the belief that He is always and everywhere present (i.e., accessible and active towards His creatures) and the belief that He has made special provision to meet the needs of sinful mankind through (a) the Incarnation and the Atonement, (b) the life of the Church and our incorporation into it, and (c) the Eucharist as the central act of the Church's worship and as Christ's act of perpetual self-communication to His people. Having regard, therefore, to the special purpose with which Christ is both active and accessible in the Eucharist, we may appropriately speak of a special presence of Christ both as giving Himself and as thus given (p. 166).

(b) Differences concerning Eucharistic doctrine have been accentuated by different uses of language, and especially of the phrase "Real Presence." This was originally used with specialised reference to the Presence of the Body and Blood of Christ under the forms of bread and wine. But the phrase has been constantly used in Anglican theology (as, for

example, by the Caroline divines) with a wider reference, and it would be quite impossible now to confine its use to the specialised reference. Nor should we think this desirable; for in practice if the Real Presence is denied wherever Presence in the narrower sense is not intended, many will be led to suppose that Christ is not believed to be present at all in any special manner unless His Presence is thus specially associated with the elements. Much misunderstanding has in fact arisen from the ambiguity of the phrase "Real Presence." And it is therefore the more important to make it clear that what causes division of theological opinion in the Church of England is not any question concerning the real and spiritual presence of the living Christ at every Eucharist (for this is acknowledged by all), but only the questions whether and in what way that presence is to be specially associated with the consecrated bread and wine (pp. 167f.).

(c) At this point we emphasise once more the agreement of all these schools of thought in holding that in the Eucharist Christ is active and accessible in a special manner as Giver and as Gift, and accordingly that the Eucharist affords a natural and appropriate occasion for the Church's thankful adoration of Him as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (p. 171).

Note 5

The following passages provide pertinent illustrations of the problems to be considered here:

(a) On this point, whether there is a conversion in substance, not long before the Lateran Council the Master of the Sentences himself says "I am not able to define." But all his witnesses speak of some kind of change (pro mutatione, immutatione, transmutatione). But there is no mention there of a change in substance, or of the substance. But neither do we deny in this matter the preposition trans; and we allow that the elements are changed (transmutari). But a change in substance we look for, and we find it nowhere. ...

At the coming of the almighty power of the Word, the nature is changed so that what was before the mere element now becomes a Divine Sacrament, the substance nevertheless remaining what it was before. ... There is that kind of union between the visible Sacrament and the invisible reality (rem) of the Sacrament which there is between the manhood and the Godhead of Christ, where unless you want to smack of Eutyches, the Manhood is not transubstantiated into the Godhead. ... (Lancelot Andrewes, in More and Cross, Anglicanism, p. 464).

(b) A careful examination of the theory of Transubstantiation, as stated by St. Thomas Aquinas and defined by the Council of Trent, vindicates it from any charge of superstitious grossness or materialism. St. Thomas is careful to insist that the Lord's Body and Blood are present in the sacrament only invisibly and after a spiritual manner, so that they are not at all perceptible by the bodily senses, but by faith alone. But the criticism of the Article* is not thus invalidated. Its meaning may be stated thus: Granted that the essence of a sacrament is the use of material things as effectual signs of spiritual grace,

the proper nature of a sacrament is destroyed if the reality of the material thing as such is removed by its sacramental use (Doctrine in the Church of England, pp. 173f.).

* XXXIX Articles, 28.

(c) The most essential category is that of "sacramental being." The real and true presence of the Lord in the memorial must thus not be confused with a presence of a "physicalist" type. It belongs to a quite specific order of reality which cannot be confused with that of natural realities: a reality of the new world opened by the resurrection, whose agent is the Holy Spirit. ...

The believer must affirm equally that this presence, true and real as it is, is realized in a special and mysterious mode. It has not been sufficiently noted how, this time on the level of properly technical reflection, the medieval and scholastic effort to translate what tradition had expressed in other ways into terms of substantia and transsubstantiatio expresses not only the intention of safeguarding the reality and densité of the presence, but equally that of avoiding heavily materialist or physicalist conceptions of this presence. ...

The truth which the Roman Catholic tradition wishes to preserve, defend and clarify is that of the conversio mirabilis and not directly that of the mode of this conversion. Moreover, if one thus insists on the conversio, the sole purpose is to take account of the realism of the presence. Conversion is secondary with respect to the latter (translated from a typescript of J.M.R. Tillard, O.P.).

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