

The Church's theological responses to the main heresies concerning the Eucharist

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Introduction

On 9 June 1996, His Eminence Cardinal Etchegaray, legate of His Holiness Pope John Paul II, celebrated a solemn Mass in the Basilica of Saint Martin in Liège, on the occasion of the 750th anniversary of the institution of Corpus Christi. It was in 1246 that the bishop of this city, Robert de Thourotte, celebrated it for the first time, inspired by two nuns: Saint Julienne de Cornillon and Blessed Eve de Saint-Martin. After the bishop's death, the decree was no longer applied, and it was Pope Urban IV who re-established the feast in 1264, giving it a universal character². This anniversary is therefore a very good omen for introducing this conference, as a significant witness to the development of Eucharistic dogma over the centuries. My remarks can only be limited, given the time allotted to me. I would like to stick to the essentials without falling into simplism or caricature.

The major heresies of the early Church were primarily Christological and Trinitarian, concerning the mystery of God and Christ, the Son of God, *the incarnate image of the invisible God*, which constituted a major departure from the religions of Antiquity. The Eucharistic dogma therefore remained undisputed for many centuries, expressed mainly in the liturgy and in sermons preparing the faithful for the sacraments (mystagogical homilies). After the Constantinian peace and the great invasions, the Church established itself visibly in time and space in both the East and the West. It was therefore natural that a theology of the Church and the sacraments should develop, as visible means of salvation that translate and transmit invisible grace. Theological difficulties would soon focus on these two realities, the visible extension of the Incarnation, which is and will always remain the most distinctive feature of Christianity.

It seems to me that the moments when these difficulties arose can be broadly divided into two critical periods; they also share common features, like a kind of lineage. For there is nothing older or more repetitive than heresy. These are mainly the Eucharistic controversies that culminated in Berengar of Tours, and the theories developed by the reformers. Far from threatening the faith of the Church, the objections raised and the controversies advanced theological thought. The Church's

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² Bull *Transiturus de hoc mundo* of 11 August 1264, DH 846-847.

response can be considered threefold and interdependent, according to the adage *lex orandi, lex credendi*: on the one hand, vocabulary was refined, evolved and became more precise; on the other hand, theology was enriched – particularly during the Carolingian and Berengarian controversies, then those resulting from the Reformation – and finally, the liturgy translated this into the prayers of the Christian people. We can therefore anticipate that language and philosophy will be of paramount importance in this matter.

The mystery of the Eucharist poses problems for the believing mind, and it is up to theology to seek the solution. Faith does not depend on this effort, nor especially on its result; but it gives rise to this effort and judges its result. These questions can be grouped under four headings: How is the Eucharist a sacrifice? How can we conceive of Christ's presence in the Eucharist? How can we conceive of the action by which the oblates "become" (*fiunt*) the body and blood of Christ? Finally, how does the mystery of the Eucharist ensure the continuous and active presence of Christ in his Church³ ?

1. Vocabulary, its patristic origin and its evolution

Traditionally, the Fathers, following mainly St Augustine, spoke of three bodies: first, the body of the Church; second, the body of Christ in his historical reality; and third, his sacramental body made visible under the Eucharistic species⁴. Amalric of Metz, in his *De ecclesiasticis Officiis*, speaks of *primus corpus* (i.e. the Church), *alterum corpus* (i.e. Christ in the flesh), *tertium corpus* (i.e. the Eucharistic Christ)⁵. Consequently, when we speak of the unity of the body, we think first of the Church, and only then of the Eucharist, especially after Berengar. Until then, the expression *sacramentum Dominici corporis* was equivalent to *corpus mysticum* and referred mainly to the Church. In continuity with the patristic period, a kind of ambiguity is deliberately maintained with regard to the word *corpus*, with a preference for epithets such as *unum corpus* to refer to the Church⁶, and *corpus Christi* for the Eucharist⁷. The Eucharist is therefore the mystical principle that brings about the wonder of the unity of the ecclesial body. The qualifier "*mystical*" is thus gradually removed from the sacramental body, and other epithets come to define the ecclesial body.

³ J.H. Nicolas, *Synthèse dogmatique*, p. 921.

⁴ For example, Candide of Fulda: *Panis ergo corpus est Christi quod assumpsit ex corpore Ecclesia sua* (PL 106, 68-69).

⁵ PL 105, 1154 d. The same idea is found in Alger of Liège (PL 180, 791 a).

⁶ P. Radbert (PL 120, 1296).

⁷ Lanfranc (PL 150, 425 a).

It is clear that the stages overlap: there are some anticipations and also some survivals. A significant example is that of Peter of Troyes, who wrote his *Sentences on the Sacraments* between 1165 and 1170. Following St Jerome, he distinguishes a double flesh of Christ. He attributes three epithets to the first: *vera*, for the sake of realism, *propria*, specifying its identity with the flesh born of the Virgin, and *sacramentalis*, that is, the Eucharistic species. The second flesh, the fruit of the first, is the *caro mystica*, that is, the Church unified by the virtue of the sacrament. We can therefore see how *sacramentalis* and *mystica*, which until recently were synonymous, are now disjointed and opposed. In the second half of the 12th century, the Church began to be called *corpus mysticum*, and it seems that this expression spread quite rapidly from then on⁸.

2. From the Carolingian period to the controversy of Berengar of Tours

In 831, the abbot of Corbie, Paschase Radbert, wrote his *De Corpore et sanguine Domini*, which can be considered the first theological treatise on the Eucharist⁹. The fundamental thesis is the identity of the historical body and the Eucharistic body of Christ, which do not have the same mode of being. For the Eucharistic body, it is a spiritual presence. However, the Eucharist is both truth and figure: figure in everything that is perceived externally (*exterius sentitur*), truth in everything that is grasped by the intellect or believed in faith (*interius recte intelligitur aut creditur*). The Church's early statements of faith therefore remain content to affirm Eucharistic realism, without providing much explanation about this spiritual mode of presence.

This writing, which was not intended to be polemical, was nevertheless contradicted by a monk from the same abbey, Ratramnus, who wrote a book with the same title. In it, he denies the identification between the Eucharistic body of Christ and his historical body, and seems to exclude the possibility that the Eucharist can be both figure and truth. Although it is difficult to see any traces of formal heresy in his words, given the imprecise context of the time, it is certain that a century later Bérenger of Tours would be inspired by him, as would the reformers of the 16th century. All of them place little emphasis on the real presence, without formally denying it, and prefer to consider the sacrament in a figurative sense and in terms of its role in spiritual life. From the outset, therefore, we find two currents that could be described as *realistic* and *spiritualist*, each with their own followers and heirs.

⁸ H. de Lubac, *Corpus mysticum*, p. 118 ff.

⁹ Paschase Radbert, *De Corpore et sanguine Domini*, PL 120, 1267-1350.

Bérenger of Tours went one step further: he denied the real presence and reduced the Eucharistic presence of Christ to pure symbolism. For him, theology, like any science, should only accept purely rational knowledge (dialectics). It is therefore contradictory to assert that the bread disappears, even though its qualities remain. What he failed to understand, due to an insufficient distinction between substance and accident, was that a thing is not identified with its sensible qualities¹⁰. Here, beyond the vocabulary, we encounter a problem of philosophy even more than theology¹¹. The two concepts that are difficult to define concern change (real presence) and identity (sacrifice of Christ). In response to Bérenger, Lanfranc presents his Eucharistic doctrine as a realistic transposition of his opponent's pure symbolism. "For both of them, the *res sacramenti* belongs to the order of absent reality, and is therefore evoked and thought of, and the *sacramentum* belongs to the order of present, concrete and material reality, but this *sacramentum*, which, in Berengar's opinion, is only consecrated bread and wine, is, according to Lanfranc's belief, the very flesh and blood of Christ. The difference is radical."¹² Lanfranc soon became the *official theologian* in this whole affair. He relied on tradition to affirm the substantial change (*i.e.* fundamental, truly affecting the reality of the bread and wine) as a truth of faith, prior to any explanation, insisting both on the reality and the mystery that surrounds it. This is a notable advance over the Fathers and Paschase: if bread has become the body of Christ, this can only be understood if it has ceased to be bread. His work was approved by the Council of Rome in 1050; he can therefore be considered the person who best expressed the thinking of the Roman Church at that time. It is more than likely that

¹⁰ It is interesting to note that his own reasoning was flawed on this point: theological rationalism sometimes betrays reason as much as it does faith (J.H. Nicolas, *Op.cit.*, p. 907).

¹¹ See the excellent reflections of J. de Montclos, *Lanfranc et Bérenger*, p. 441 ff. Bérenger attributes excessive powers to reason and places it above authority in matters of faith, because he sees authority only in its human aspect; for him, on the contrary, reason is the reflection of the divinity of man, allowing us to perceive the truth in all its evidence. However, he tends towards Aristotelianism in the sense that he believes that reason is dependent on the senses. His natural inclination therefore leads him to deny the change of bread in the Eucharist on the basis of sensory evidence, which reveals nothing of the sort.

¹² J. DE Montclos, *Op.cit.*, p. 440. The significance of this difference is clearly expressed in the following text: "The same slope, which is climbed by some, can be descended by others. The doctrine of the true, real, immediate presence of Christ under the sacramental appearances may seem too lofty for some of us, children of the Catholic Church as we are, but seduced by easy solutions. Why not replace it with the simple doctrine, without mystery or scandal, of the mediated presence of the sign? We would keep the same language, we would continue to speak of the "real presence" of Christ in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, of giving the faithful "the body of Christ". We would explain, and everyone would understand, that bread can be used in a profane way, for nourishment, and that bread can be used in a sacred way, to unite ourselves with Christ. Physically, Christ is in heaven, nowhere else; on the altar there is bread, nothing else. But if you take this bread with faith and a desire to unite yourself with Christ, the meaning, the purpose, the finalisation of the bread are no longer profane; you have changed them, they have become sacred. *Naturally* profane, they have now become *functionally* sacred. A *trans-signification*, a *trans-purpose*, a *trans-finalisation* of the bread has taken place. And if we concede that things are worth less for what they are than for *the use* we make of them, why not go so far as to designate this "transfinalisation" by the true and traditional word *transubstantiation*? In this way, we would seem to be joining, but moving away from the Church, those who were just now approaching it. However, it is better to climb the slopes than to descend them. Here, the other words of the Lord might apply: "He who is not with me is against me," "he who does not gather with me scatters" (Mt 12:30). (C. Journet, *La Présence sacramentelle du Christ*, pp. 26-28)

he was responsible for the wording imposed as the final oath on Berengar in 1078¹³ ; Pope Gregory VII considered the term *substantialiter* to be the fundamental contribution of this wording.

It was therefore necessary to add a doctrinal clarification to shed light on the meaning of Christ's words at the Last Supper, so that their profound truth could be expressed without ambiguity. Here we touch on the problem of the relationship between Scripture and magisterium: the phrase "*This is my Body*", taken literally, can be interpreted in the sense of Berenger or in the realistic sense; the role of the magisterium in this case is to guarantee the authentic meaning conveyed by Tradition and consistent with *the whole* of Scripture¹⁴ . Berenger raised other objections that were taken up by others and later found satisfactory solutions: the simultaneous presence of Christ on several altars, Christ truly present in a large number of hosts (Guitmond uses the comparison of the word reaching a large number of listeners), separate consecration of bread and wine, which would imply two Christs, permanence of *appearances* (*qualitas and forma* in Lanfranc and Alger, *accidens* in Guitmond). We can already see here that heretical negations have made it possible to move forward by responding to the problems raised by reason, which do not eliminate the mystery of faith, but assimilate it and show that it is not contradictory.

From this period onwards, we can consider that the first two bodies are united, but a new danger is emerging: doctrinal interest is shifting from the Church to the Eucharist, distinguishing them more than before.¹⁵

3. The great dogmatic definitions

3.1 The golden age of scholasticism

The term transubstantiation entered theology in 1140, in a text sometimes attributed to the theologian Roland Bandinelli, who became Pope Alexander III from 1159 to 1181. The idea can already be found in Guitmond: he speaks of *substantialiter transmutari*¹⁶ . It should be noted that this term was not imposed by authority, but because it was recognised as the most appropriate way to defend the true faith (the introduction of the term *homoousios* at Nicaea was cited in a similar way). The term *transubstantiation* takes up and clarifies the term *conversio* used by Saint Ambrose, which itself renders the Greek *metabolè*. Lateran IV introduced it into the conciliar definition of its

¹³ Dz Sch. 700.

¹⁴ Cf. J. Dupont, "This is my Body," pp. 1025-1041.

¹⁵ Alger speaks of *alterum corpus and proprium corpus* (PL 180, 794 c) and Rupert of DEUTZ in his *De divinis officiis: non duo corpora dicuntur, aut sunt* (PL 170, 35).

¹⁶ PL 149, 1143 c.

symbol¹⁷ ; canonists then borrowed it from theologians. Subsequent councils did the same, thus establishing through usage the terms and ideas underlying them¹⁸ . We are already a long way from Ratramnus and Berengar.

Saint Thomas established himself as the theologian of the Eucharist par excellence. On the borderline between legend and history, there is the famous episode in which Saint Bonaventure, summoned before Pope Urban IV with Saint Thomas, his rival in holiness and humility, to propose an office for the Feast of Corpus Christi, tore up his pages as the Angelic Doctor read his. Admittedly, St Thomas' treatise is not an act of the Magisterium, but the Church has been so inspired by it that it is impossible not to mention it briefly.

His treatise covers questions 72 to 83 of the *Tertia Pars*. It draws more on the great patristic ideas than on Holy Scripture, and uses Aristotle more discreetly than in other places¹⁹ . However, Eucharistic conversion poses an ontological problem: he is therefore forced to resort to the analogical division of being into substance and accident. He pushes the ontological analysis as far as possible. This is both brilliant and disappointing insofar as he himself knows that the rational instrument used is insufficient. He concludes that these distinctions do not exclude the mystery that belongs to God alone. The originality of his treatise lies in its application of the general doctrine of the sacraments to the specific case of the Eucharist (Q. 73). He provides a remarkable explanation of its character as a sign (Q. 74 for matter and Q. 78 for form) and its realism (Q. 75-76). We find the ideas dear to the Fathers, systematically organised: he refers the sacrament to the past (the Passion of Christ), to the present (the unity of the mystical body), and to the future (the effects and future glory). He specifies the three levels of sacramental understanding of the mystery: *sacramentum* (the sign: the species of bread and wine), *res et sacramentum* (the body and blood of Christ truly present, effective signs of grace), *res tantum* (that which is fully realised, grace). His theology stems from the sacramental life of the Church rather than from philosophy; it is like the assumption of the philosophy of being (conclusion, Q. 83). The nominalists and reformers would not understand this...

3.2 The Reformers and Trent

It is impossible to summarise the reformed positions succinctly. The overall impression is rather confused, as each person often professed divergent opinions throughout their thinking. One

¹⁷ Dz Sch. 802.

¹⁸ For example, the Council of Florence (Dz Sch. 1320-1321).

¹⁹ Could it be because he felt that its epistemological realism did not help him with this specific question? See note 11.

significant episode was the Marburg Colloquy in 1529, where Luther and Zwingli met. They were unable to agree on the real presence. Calvin wrote these sad words to Melanchthon: "It is of great importance that no suspicion of the divisions among us should pass into the next century; for it is ridiculous beyond imagination that, after breaking with everyone else, we should agree so little among ourselves from the very beginning of our Reformation²⁰". All agree in rejecting the Catholic doctrine of sacrifice: according to them, the Eucharist is not a *work* by which man can make himself acceptable to God. But the fundamental dispute concerns the reiteration of Christ's sacrifice. They therefore raise the philosophical problems of time and space. Another important question is that of the identification of the oblates with the body and blood of Christ. On this point, notable differences emerge. Calvin, for example, finds himself in an unresolved paradox: on the one hand, he insists on the *sign* in its most tenuous and spiritual sense (*representing the body of Christ*), hence a violent rejection of transubstantiation and even the old notion of conversion²¹; on the other, he professes a high esteem for the Eucharist, through which we commune with Christ the Saviour not only through the act of believing but also through the act of eating, which is different from the former²².

The essential difference stems from sacramental theology in general: Catholics say that the sacraments *contain* grace, Protestants that they *confer* it²³. The difficulty arises from a misinterpretation of transubstantiation, according to which Christ undergoes a change. Calvin

²⁰ K.G. Goetz, *Die heutige Abendmahlsfrage in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, Leipzig, 1907, pp. 78–97. "The words of the Lord's Supper, '*Hoc est Corpus meum*', have given rise to the most varied, discordant and, it may be added, fanciful interpretations. It seemed that as soon as the traditional meaning was abandoned and the dogma of the real presence rejected, one fell into a void and could find no support in the text, nor in the early tradition of the Church, for one opinion rather than another. The Lutherans were the first to feel the apologetic influence that would inevitably be drawn against them from these divergences of interpretation, these variations, on such matters. Once the obvious meaning had been abandoned, it was no longer clear where to stop. These variations jeopardised the very principle of exclusive biblicism. This is what the Lutheran André Osiander explained to Zwingli in a letter he sent him in September 1527: "Let us see, then," he exclaimed, "how much you vary: Carlstadt understands it this way: 'This is my body, which is given for you.' You understand it this way: 'This means my body.' Colampade understands it this way: 'This is the figure of my body'. Another, whom you recognise as one of your own, thus: 'This which you eat is, it becomes your body, which, through your faith, is already my body'. Another [*in a note: Theobald Billikan*], who betrayed me with the utmost impudence, as having converted to your heresy, in this way: 'This, that is to say, this external thing, is my body for your souls, as this bread is for your bodies.' Another [*Urbain Rhegius*], whose name I have not retained, thus: 'This, that is to say, bread in general, is my body; it sustains itself, it has grown, it has increased thanks to bread, just as it is written: *You are dust and you will return to dust*, concerning man.' [*Conrad Sam*]". Osiander was therefore already aware at that time of four opinions different from Luther's, which was far from being Catholic doctrine. For Carlstadt, his attacks focused on the word *Hoc*; Zwingli directed them at the word *est*, while Colampade focused them on the word *Corpus*. As for Billikan, Rhegius and Sam, they attacked the entire sentence in order to distort its true meaning. (C. L'EBRALY, *La Doctrine sacramentaire de Ulrich Zwingli*, Clermont-Ferrand, 1939, p. 70)

²¹ *Christian Institution*, IV, 17, § 12 ff.

²² *Op. cit.*, IV, 17, § 5.

²³ "The sacrament is, in short, an outward sign, willed and instituted by God to remedy the weakness of our faith, which must be observed so that God may give us, directly and from above, the promised grace." (Y. CONGAR, *True and False Reform of the Church*, Paris, 1969, p. 391)

cannot conceive of transubstantiation that is not spatial or local, hence his objections to multilocation²⁴. We recall the objections of Berenger.

Luther is generally less extreme. He boasts of being, like the Papists, a defender of the literal meaning of the real presence. However, he rejects transubstantiation as such, in the name of biblical fundamentalism: Saint Paul speaks of *the bread that we break*. He therefore speaks of the simultaneous presence of two substances: the body of Christ is with, in, and under the bread, and the three prepositions are used interchangeably. This is why this doctrine is called "impanation" (*Christus impanatus*).

The decrees of the Council of Trent constitute the response to all these errors. There are mainly two series, separated by a decade:

- on the Eucharist: session XII on the real presence (11 October 1551)
- on the sacrifice of the Mass: session XXII (15 September 1562)

Session XXI of 16 July 1562 provided details on communion under both kinds and communion for children.

One senses that the Council Fathers were operating in a scholastic context, but avoided cutting to the heart of theological controversies. Perhaps they were aware that they were speaking at the end of a certain decline in Eucharistic theology that had begun in the 14th century, particularly with Ockham. The reformers would have an easy time denouncing what they believed to be Catholic theology, which was often nothing more than a caricature²⁵.

3.2.1 *The Real Presence*

The dogma of the *Real Presence* is expressed as clearly as possible in canon 126. It defines the reality and integrity of Christ's presence in the Eucharist (*totum Christum, vere, realiter et substantialiter*: Christ is wholly present wherever a part of his glorified Being is present). It also explains the mode of presence with its scriptural and traditional foundations. The intention here is simply to offer a general reaffirmation, not to respond to every error in detail. The presence of Christ is a special presence, imperceptible to the senses; it is a living body, but stripped of all its material accidents²⁶.

²⁴ *Op. cit.*, IV, 17, § 17 and 30.

²⁵ Transubstantiation seen as a miraculous means by which the body and blood of Christ are placed in the host and chalice, a second immolation of Christ in the Eucharist, exaggerated insistence on its fruits, its efficacy, etc. Here we find an unfortunate flaw in a certain language similar to that which Cardinal Humbert opposed to Berenger: *the body of Christ handled, broken, crushed by the teeth of the faithful* (Dz Sch. 690).

²⁶ Dz Sch. 1636.

3.2.2 Transubstantiation

Transubstantiation as the productive fact of the real presence: canon 2²⁷ . Two things are affirmed here: after consecration, only the appearances of bread and wine remain. The literal meaning of Christ's words is therefore preserved. But there is a new reality that only faith can reveal. Through the divine power of Christ's words, his body and blood take the place of bread and wine. Then there is a change of substance, properly called transubstantiation. However, the council leaves the field open to theological theories to explain it. This definition comes almost word for word from St. Thomas (IIIa, q.75, a.4). Three terms must therefore be preserved beyond the systems. They are:

- change (*conversio*)
- change from one substance to another substance
- change that leaves the original appearances intact

Franciscans and Dominicans clashed, broadly distinguishing between two theories, but the council did not take sides²⁸ .

3.2.3 Mode of presence

Christ is wholly present under each species and in each particle: canon 3²⁹ . This is simply a consequence of canon 1: after the Eucharist in general, Christ's presence is affirmed for each species. Christ's humanity is inseparable from his divinity by virtue of the hypostatic union; it is therefore Christ in his entirety, in glory, who is made present under each species. A clarification by St Bonaventure sheds light on a difficulty: the soul is wholly in the body it animates, and wholly in each part of the body; it is coextensive with the body, although not limited by it³⁰ . So it is with the Eucharistic body of Christ: it has no dimensions like the soul and is therefore not subject, like bread, to the laws of bodies that occupy a portion of space. The canon goes no further than the

²⁷ Dz Sch. 1652.

²⁸ Bellarmine speaks of *adductio* (*Controv. de Eucharistia* 1, 18): the substance of bread disappears, driven out by that of the body of Christ. But St. Thomas denounces the impossibility of this position (IIIa, q. 75, a. 2). In Suarez (*Replicatio de Eucharistia*, disp. 50, sect. 4, 10): transmutation of substance without annihilation or production. The text of the canon is simpler: consecration seems to change nothing in the bread. In reality, everything is changed except appearances.

²⁹ Dz Sch. 1653.

³⁰ *In IV Sent.*, IV, dist. XII, p. 1 dub. IV.

Council of Florence³¹ . This is a practical necessity: whenever we see a particle or a drop of consecrated blood, we know that we are receiving Christ in his entirety.

3.2.4 Permanence of the Real Presence and consequences

Permanence of the real presence and consequences: canon 4³² . The Reformers generally claimed to restrict the real presence – when they believed in it – to the use of the sacrament: Christ is present only during communion, because Christ's promise is addressed only to the person who receives it (*tantum in usu*). We therefore follow here for time what was said for space in the previous canon: the change remains as long as the species are not substantially altered. Canon 6³³ speaks of the worship of latria addressed to Christ as to God himself: Christ is worshipped wherever he is present, not only in communion, but in other forms, the most solemn of which are Corpus Christi, processions and public worship, and the most intimate of which concern the holy reserve, particularly for the communion of the faithful in case of need (echoing Canon 13 of Nicaea on this point: the argument of tradition is therefore important here).

In conclusion, it follows from this overview that, as in liturgy, Trent did not innovate, but only organised and clarified. The texts seek to dispel ambiguities and clarify what is necessary for the preservation of the faith, carefully avoiding sterile polemics. If we had stuck to the clear explanations of the great scholastics (presence *per modum substantiae*, for example), we would have avoided the complicated and hazardous theories of later commentators. An excessive concern for realism in the face of the reformers led to theories of *immolation* or, on the contrary, to the exclusion of any idea of immolation, even non-bloody³⁴ . Other Cartesian-style attempts at explanation rejected scholastic philosophy; doomed to failure because of this, they are not taken up by anyone today.

It was not until the 20th century, following the liturgical movement, that other interventions by the Magisterium were made³⁵ . His Holiness Pius XII, in the encyclical *Mediator Dei*, noted the positive progress of the liturgical movement, but very firmly reiterated traditional doctrine:

³¹ Dz Sch. 1320.

³² Dz Sch. 1654.

³³ Dz Sch. 1656.

³⁴ Cf. J.H. Nicolas, *Op.cit.*, p. 918.

³⁵ One could cite the decree *Lamentabili* by Saint Pius X, in which he condemns this modernist proposition: "Not everything in Saint Paul's account of the institution of the Eucharist is to be taken historically" (Dz Sch. 2045).

transsignification and transfinalisation were declared insufficient to account for the mystery³⁶, and transubstantiation, in the sense of a change affecting the ontological reality of bread and wine, was reaffirmed³⁷. In light of discoveries in atomic physics analysing the intimate structure of matter, the encyclical *Humani Generis* questions whether this poses a problem for transubstantiation. Descartes and his successors had already sought a physical explanation (the bodily inclusion of Christ in the dimensions of the host or the application of a dualistic anthropology to the sacraments, with the soul of Christ informing the matter of bread and wine). The Pope opted to maintain the scholastic categories. The Second Vatican Council took up and developed the text of *Mediator Dei* in chapter 7 of the constitution on the liturgy³⁸.

4. Worship and rites

The faith of the Church, reflected and defined at its highest level, is perceived by the majority of the faithful only in its public prayer and preaching. The liturgy is therefore of paramount importance for the good people of God. Pius XI said that it can be considered the primary act of the ordinary magisterium, and the sacramental presence of Christ *organises and informs* this prayer of the Church. The last canons of the Council of Trent clearly show that theological concepts call for liturgical implementation³⁹.

The *Ordines romani* had long codified the solemnities of the Mass and the celebration of the sacraments. At the time of the Carolingian controversies, the great emperor, served by Alcuin, had given them as norms to his empire, particularly through Adrian's sacramentary. A little later, the *fusion of the two customs* was consecrated, powerfully promoted by Cluny and the monastic reforms, where ancient Roman hieraticism met the luxuriance of Gallican rites. All this was organised in symbiosis with medieval Christianity. From the time of Constantine's peace, and therefore well before, the cult of saints allowed bishops and the Church to "offer their own definition of the urban community and provide the rituals that would help to make this definition manifest⁴⁰". The Church came to be identified practically with the whole of organised society. This is why the tradition of the patristic era with its *three bodies* regained importance: the relics placed

³⁶ Similarly, in *Mysterium fidei* by Paul VI, which quotes Trent on transubstantiation (G. Dumeige, *La Foi catholique*, 795,3).

³⁷ Dz Sch. 3840.

³⁸ Dz Sch. 4007 @ 3840.

³⁹ For example: Dz Sch. 1643 ff. and especially 1744 ff., with the corresponding canons.

⁴⁰ P. Brown, *Le Culte des saints, son essor et sa fonction dans la chrétienté latine*, Paris, 1984, pp. 20, 21 and 59.

under the altar table were a sign of the integration of this society into a unified architectural and mental structure. Both in the East and in the West, allegorical interpretations of the Eucharistic mystery in general and of the rites that express it in detail developed⁴¹. It was during the Carolingian Renaissance, when the West was consolidating its feudal structure, that Paschase and Ratramne established their theology of the Eucharist. The same period saw the emergence, from the 9th to the 11th century, of a significant innovation: the transition from leavened bread to unleavened bread⁴², which henceforth replaced offerings in kind and bread., a significant innovation emerged: the transition from leavened bread to unleavened bread, which replaced offerings in kind and bread made directly by the faithful with bread made by *specialists*, considered more suitable for expressing the purity and holiness of the Eucharist, which was now approached with fear and trembling. Thus, a whole network of social relations that had been maintained for more than 800 years, maintaining a direct link between earthly food and the bread of angels, the work of the laity and the ministry of the clergy, was erased. The consequence was that we reached the culmination of a distancing from Eucharistic communion, a movement that began at the start of the Constantinian era, with piety gradually cooling off with the end of persecution. Only the consecrated were exempt, so much so that the Fourth Lateran Council had to impose, by way of canonical obligation, at least annual Easter communion. In the long term, popular piety could only be frustrated by this, seeking the marvellous in all its forms. It was at this point that the gesture of elevation appeared as the rite that showed Christ now more contemplated than received. Theological reactions echoed this contrast: excessive realism or disembodied spiritualism. Here and there, Eucharistic miracles maintained a certain climate of fervour. This central gesture of the Mass, which springs forth in the midst of the silence of the canon, emphasised by incense and bells, harmonises with the soaring heights of the great sanctuaries and that cathedral of thought that is scholastic theology. It is significant that it was Paris, one of the centres of theological reflection at that time, which first introduced this practice in the last years of the 12th century. All this fertile ground, rich in urban culture, high intellectualism and refined liturgy, was therefore conducive to the emergence of Corpus Christi. "Liturgy-wise, it first blossomed as an amplification, on the choir side, of the gesture of elevation; and, on the nave side, as a collective orchestration of an attitude of adoration that was first established in the individual exercise of piety. All of which served as a living emblem in history in the names of Urban and Thomas⁴³." "In fact, at the turn of the Romanesque and Gothic periods,

⁴¹ See J.A. Jungmann, *Missarum sollemnia*, p. 119 sq.

⁴² J.A. Jungmann, *Op.cit.*, p. 117.

⁴³ C. Macherel and J. Steinauer, *L'Etat de Ciel*, p. 90.

the ceremony reached a level of perfection that would ensure its survival beyond the upheaval of the Reformation.

Julienne de Cornillon grew up in the milieu of the beguinages, communities of women who provided support for wives and widows abandoned by husbands who had gone on crusade. This milieu owed much to the sensitive piety of the Rhineland mystics, where prayer frequently blossomed into ecstasy and exaltation of all kinds, which quickly became the focus of attraction for the holy reserve. Thus, by contagion, what was initially a very private cult tended to become public, integrating the entire body of a society, hitherto feudal but shaken by the rise of the communes and economic upheavals, into a new, demonstrative and orderly piety. The aim was therefore to give this movement a religious and symbolic significance, a Christian representation in an attempt to solidify the entire edifice. A fairly clear parallel is suggested to us by the argument put forward by the Prince-Bishop of Liège, which is quite significant in terms of his intentions. It can be summarised briefly as follows:

Once a year, publicly and everywhere, the feast of the Body of Christ will be to the feast of his saints what the Real Presence is to the daily worship of saints in special or private places.⁴⁴

What Saint Ambrose and Saint Augustine had done in their time by integrating the cult of saints into Christian worship to give meaning to a society in disintegration, Robert de Thourotte and Urban IV, faced with a similar problem, would do the same nine centuries later, developing the meaning of the neglected Eucharist and giving it a popular dimension. Both Christianised very profound movements, which then acted as factors of supernatural cohesion. We are therefore witnessing the transition from rural, feudal and monastic forms to an already Christianised society, but in the context of a nascent, mercantile and intellectual city, where the mendicant orders would soon reign supreme. It is not uncommon for relics and saints to be part of the Corpus Christi procession. The procession makes a circular tour of the city, with four altars at the cardinal points, emblems of unity that delimit a sacred space. The heart of the procession is organised on a concentric plan around the Blessed Sacrament, rigorously hierarchical according to an order of

⁴⁴ C. Macherel and J. Steinauer, *L'Etat de Ciel*, p. 91.

prestige and a precise classification⁴⁵. As in altars, the presence of saints, in the form of fragmented bones, truly dead, contrasts symmetrically with another presence, the flesh of Christ, truly alive and glorious. It is therefore not only the earthly city that is represented here in its ephemeral value and mortality, but also the glory of the saints, patrons and protectors, who surround the sacrificed Lamb of the Holy City. It is well known, moreover, that it was customary at the time to place, in the absence of relics in the tomb of the altars, a leaf from the Gospel or a consecrated host, the culmination and conclusion of all that we have just said.

Certain abuses of this dimension of incarnation will lead to massive rejection by reformers. They will reject not only the Eucharistic sacrifice and the Real Presence, but also anything that manifests, directly or indirectly, the visibility of God in this world⁴⁶. This is why the churches that emerged from the Reformation do not have a liturgy in the strict sense of the word: it would obscure the purity of prayer and be nothing more than a distraction in the relationship with Christ. The Catholic response was the triumphant Baroque, bathed in gold and light, manifesting the fundamental optimism of a Counter-Reformation that restored Catholicism to an honourable place in the West. A perfect expression of this mentality can be found in the commentary on the conciliar texts of Trent: "Truth, victorious over falsehood and heresy, must assert its triumph, so that its adversaries, witnessing such splendour and joy throughout the Church, either confess their weakness and defeat and be confounded, or, seized with shame, return to better sentiments⁴⁷ But everything has now been said about possible reactions⁴⁸. The defence of Catholic truth leads to the exaltation of the real presence and the priesthood, leaving the participation of the faithful, dazzled

⁴⁵ "Throughout the history of religions, and therefore also here, the number four symbolises the four corners of the world, that is to say, the entire universe, the world in which we live. That is why blessings were given towards the four cardinal points: in this way, they wanted to place them entirely under the protection of the Eucharistic Lord. The four Gospels express the same thing. [] The beginning is for the whole; by proclaiming it, we impose, as it were, the breath of the Holy Spirit on the four winds so that it may penetrate them and make them salvific. We proclaim that the world is the place of God's creative Word, and we submit matter to the power of his Spirit. [] Is it not beautiful to see a relationship established here between the new bread, that is, the Eucharistic bread, and the daily bread, and in each daily bread there is the mysterious reminder of the One who wanted to become our bread for all. Thus the liturgy opens up to everyday life, to our lives and our earthly concerns; it goes beyond the confines of the Church because it truly embraces heaven and earth, the present and the future. How necessary this sign is for us! (J. Ratzinger, *La Célébration de la foi*, p. 127) It is worth reading the three meditations that the author offers here, starting with a commentary on a text from the Council of Trent: "Corpus Christi must counteract man's tendency to forget; it must make him grateful, and it evokes what is common, the unifying force that comes from looking to the one Lord." (Id., p. 123.)

⁴⁶ For example, here is what the reformer Pierre Viret said in Lausanne: "There is no creature so small, remaining in its being and perfection, that does not teach us and show us better the power, wisdom and goodness of God than all the images in the world. Even a tree, though it bears fruit, still bears witness to the power and goodness of God, which it in no way represents, but when it is converted into an image, it is utterly cursed and bears no fruit and serves only idolatry and wickedness." He draws this conclusion: "The true Church of Jesus rejects human inventions and especially images, which God has so strongly forbidden." (G. Bavaud, *La dispute de Lausanne*, p. 11 ff.)

⁴⁷ Dz Sch. 1644.

⁴⁸ Cf. J.A. Jungmann, *Op.cit.*, p. 183.

spectators (is it always non-participation? ...) of a sacred theatre where nothing is spared to magnify the King of kings⁴⁹ . Monstrances, repositories, forty hours and solemn expositions rival each other in splendour, while communion is generally distributed outside of Mass: the exact opposite of the reformed positions.

One positive aspect of the gap between traditional Roman liturgy and the spirit of the times was that attempts to replace it were largely unsuccessful, apart from a few short-lived and marginal experiments inspired by Jansenism, for example⁵⁰ . Dom Guéranger, in France, was from the outset a staunch opponent of the neo-Gallican liturgies, so much so that by 1860 most French dioceses had returned to the Roman liturgy. Our century has been marked by the liturgical movement. We probably do not fully realise the revolution it has represented in the liturgical practice of the Church: even among the most traditional, certain practices that are now accepted would have been simply unthinkable less than a century ago. While we sometimes witness with sadness certain abuses due to fanciful interpretations of the last council, we cannot decently deny the contribution it has made to the piety of the faithful⁵¹ .

Conclusion

The intellectual and theological difficulties, the variations and inevitable inadequacies of liturgical expression are only the flip side of the greatness of the mystery. Is it not in the order of things that a reality as great as the Eucharist should be continually exposed to distortions, heresies, abandonment and misunderstandings, but also to triumphs, illuminating insights and dazzling manifestations?

From the humble fidelity of silent worship to the annual solemnities in which the whole society takes part in Catholic countries, we witness a never-ending fascination, capable throughout the centuries of touching every soul of good will. However, we must remain humble in the face of any achievement, any reconquest, any better understanding. What Father de Lubac says about theology can also be applied to the expression of liturgical mystery: "We must not forget that a thaw is not an absolute beginning. It presupposes that something had frozen that was once warm and alive. There is indeed a rhythm of the spirit, just as there is a rhythm of nature. Both have their dead

⁴⁹ At the consecration of Salzburg Cathedral in 1628, a mass by Benevoli was performed, with two eight-voice choirs and corresponding orchestras, totalling fifty-three voices. (J.A. JUNGSMANN, *Op.cit.*, p. 191)

⁵⁰ It is true that, especially in 18th-century France, there was a proliferation of neo-Gallican rites. But this does not invalidate our argument: on the one hand, they hardly affect the structures of the liturgy, and on the other hand, Tradition itself will be stronger. So much so that anything that does not conform to it will hardly last...

⁵¹ This was noted, well before the Council, by Pope Pius XII in his encyclical *Mediator Dei*, 2²part II, 3.

spots and their winters. However, what makes possible the illusion we would like to combat is that in the rhythm of the spirit, unlike the rhythm of nature, every thaw, every 'palingenesis' is a metamorphosis. Springs follow one another, but they are not alike. What is reborn does not simply reproduce what perished at the end of the last season. It is a flower of a different essence, a fruit with a different flavour. The mind is more inventive than nature... Perhaps we should be wary of a certain belief, more prideful than enlightened, in a single type of intelligence, as in a single type of civilisation, both always defined by the one to which we currently belong... A certain simplistic philosophy... whose premise strangely resembles the thesis recently put forward by Mr. Brunschvicg on the "ages of intelligence": the difference between one and the other consists merely in the fact that the certificate of adulthood is issued to reason a few centuries earlier...⁵²

The refinement of theology corresponds to the enrichment of liturgy. But their development is not strictly parallel, although it has many points of contact: the truth that is reflected upon cannot be other than the truth that is prayed for⁵³. Sometimes one precedes the other. History generally shows, it seems to me, that *lex orandi* precedes *lex intelligendi*, if not *lex credendi*: we can understand that faith is first lived and contemplated globally in order to give life to the body of the Church, which is primary according to the intuition of the Fathers; for the Eucharist is transmitted by the Church and cannot be transmitted without her⁵⁴. And we understand that the Church, in its historical dimension as well as in its actualisation of God's eternal *hodie*, is the guarantee of this ineffable Presence which remains forever at the heart of its faith.

In this sense too, the true subject of the liturgy is the Church, as *the communio sanctorum* of all places and all times. From this we can derive the three ontological dimensions in which it unfolds: the cosmos, history and mystery. It is opposed to *group* liturgy, which "is not cosmic, but derives its life from the autonomy of the group. It has no history: what characterises it is precisely its emancipation from history and its self-sufficiency, even if historical settings are used. And it knows no mystery, because everything in it is explained and must be explained. This is why development and participation are as foreign to it as obedience, which opens up a meaning that transcends the merely explainable."⁵⁵

⁵² H. de Lubac, *Op.cit.*, p. 365 ff.

⁵³ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Op.cit.*, p. 33 ff. The chapter entitled "Form and Content of the Eucharistic Celebration" analyses this relationship very well. See also the encyclical *Mediator Dei*, Part I, IV: "Progress and Development of the Liturgy".

⁵⁴ Cf. the very pertinent remarks of Cardinal Ratzinger in *A New Song for the Lord*, p. 155 ff.

⁵⁵ J. Ratzinger, *Op. cit.*, p. 158.

At the heart of the Church and its liturgy is the real presence of the glorious Christ, who gave himself as a sacrifice and as food out of love for his Father and for his brothers and sisters. The centre of history, the point of no return, is located both outside of time and within time, between Holy Thursday and Easter morning. Meditation on the great prayer of the Church gives us a glimpse of this throughout the centuries, allowing us to understand it enough to walk to the mountain of the living God, where He will be all in all.