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**short, as a sacrificial figure, one who will, on behalf of the entire nation, offer himself for the sins of the many. His greatness will consist, not in personal independence and political power, but rather in his willingness to bear the weight of sin, to disempower sin, as it were, from within. In a word, the covenant of which Jeremiah speaks (the writing of the law in the hearts of the people) would be effected through the sacrificial servant of whom Isaiah speaks. Having considered these many strains of Old Testament theology, and having seen the tight correlation between Jeremiah's everlasting covenant and Isaiah's suffering servant, we are ready, finally, to speak of Jesus and his sacrifice.**

**JESUS THE LAMB OF GOD**

**One of the earliest heresies that the Christian church fought was Marcionism, the conviction that Jesus should be interpreted in abstraction from the Old Testament. 1 spent so much time drawing together the Old Testament themes of covenant and sacrifice because 1 share the anti-Marcionite conviction that it is impossible to make sense of Jesus apart from his Jewishness. The categories that Paul and the Gospel writers used to present Jesus as the Christ were, almost exclusively, drawn from the Hebrew Scriptures. One reason that we have today such a difficult time appreciating Jesus is that we have become, effectively, Marcionite—that is to say, indifferent to, and/or ignorant of, the Bible. Without a properly Israelite preparation, most**

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**of the Christological language of the New Testament and the dogmatic tradition remains opaque.**

**For example, in the official teaching of the Church, formulated at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, Jesus is described as the coming together of two natures—divine and human—in the unity of the divine person. Though it can seem desperately abstract, this formula takes on density and resonance when we consider it against the backdrop of the Israelite theology of covenant that we sketched. As we saw, from Abraham through David, Yah-weh pledged that he would be Israel's God and Israel would be his special people. However, despite God's fidelity, the covenant consistently came apart due to the people's sin. What the first Christians discerned was that in Jesus the long-desired covenant was finally fulfilled, that divinity and humanity had indeed embraced, that God's will and the will of faithful Israel had fallen, at last, into harmony. And this is precisely what, in their more philosophically accented language, the fathers of the Council of Chalce­don were saying. And thus the Chalcedonian statement is but a more conceptually exact rendition of what John the Evangelist tells us in the prologue to his Gospel: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14). The Word of God's covenantal love, which was addressed to Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, has now entered into a radical union with the flesh of this particular Israelite, Jesus from Nazareth, and thus, in this Jesus, the longing of Israel is fulfilled.**

**Now, covenant and sacrifice are always linked. There­fore when, in the Gospel of John, John the Baptist spies**

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**Jesus, he turns to a group of his disciples and says, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" (John 1:36). This is one of the first and most important interpretive keys that John the Evangelist gives us: Jesus is the one who will play the role of the sacrificial lambs offered in the temple. In accord with our formula—no communion without sacrifice—Jesus, the covenant in person, will perforce be a sacrificed victim as well. Pope Leo the Great, writing in the sixth century, gave expression to a patristic commonplace when he said, "There was no other reason for the Son of God to be born than that he could be fixed to a cross." Jesus came, in short, to be the suffering servant who would, through a sacrifice, take away the sins of the world. We find the same idea carved in stone on the facade of Chartres Cathedral. There isn't a trace of sentimentalism in the Chartres sculptor's depiction of the birth of Jesus: he shows Mary with a look of stoic acceptance and Jesus lying, not in a manger, but on a cold stone slab, the altar on which he would be offered. C.S. Lewis makes much the same point when he says that Jesus entered the world clandestinely and unobtrusively in the manner of a soldier sneaking behind enemy lines, for his mission would be the undermining of the fortress of sin. Let us look now at just a few Gospel scenes that are helpfully read under this rubric. Even the most skeptical of historical critics of the New Testament agree that Jesus was, at least in the earliest days of his ministry, connected to John the Baptist. Their confidence is based upon two criteria: multiple attestation (the Baptist is mentioned in all four Gospels) and embarrassment (elements that the Christian community would prefer to have suppressed but**

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**that still find their way into the Gospels are most likely based on historical fact). Why should the connection to John the Baptist be embarrassing to Jesus and the first Christians? Because John was offering a baptism of re­pentance and to him, consequently, sinners were flocking. One would suppose that the first Christian authors would have been a tad uneasy presenting the Savior of the world as someone who stood in need of a sinner's baptism. But this very tension provides, in fact, the best clue to reading this passage. Matthew tells us that Jesus "came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him" (Matt. 3:13). Jesus did indeed slip into the muddy waters of the river and stand side by side with those seeking forgiveness, identifying himself with their condition. Anyone passing by would have presumed that Jesus was one sinner among many. When the Baptist saw him, he was taken aback: "John would have prevented him, saying, '1 need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?'" (Matt. 3:14). But Jesus persisted, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15). Was this exchange simply placed in the mouths of John and Jesus to cover up the early Christians' embarrassment, or does it reveal something decisive about Jesus' identity and mis­sion? In point of fact, the phrase "fulfill all righteousness" is a sort of scriptural code, designating both covenant and sacrifice. When Israel followed the covenantal re­quirements of the Lord, it became "righteous"—that is to say, correctly ordered—and when the repentant sinner performed a sacrifice, he recovered a lost righteousness. Jesus' words to the Baptist, therefore, signify that he has**

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**come to realize the covenant (union between divinity and humanity) precisely through a sacrificial participation in the condition of the sinner. In the manner of Isaiah's suffering servant, Jesus at the Jordan was identifying himself totally with the condition of sinners, announcing his intention to bear their burden and assume their guilt. He was, accordingly, the incarnation of God's own (rather embarrassing) humility and condescension. Just after the description of Jesus' baptism, we find in Matthew's Gospel an account of his confrontation with the tempter. Here we see what the identification with sinners, adumbrated at the baptism, looks like in practice. After forty days of fasting in the desert (evocative of Israel's forty years of wandering in the desert), Jesus meets the devil, who proceeds to lure the Messiah onto the path of sin. His sacrifice will entail his coming to battle sin at close quarters, his willingness, therefore, to be drawn by its power, to come under its sway. Satan first tempts him with sensual pleasure: "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread" (Matt. 4:3). One of the most elemental forms of spiritual dysfunction is to make the satisfaction of sensual desire the center of one's life. Thus Jesus enters, through psychological and spiritual identification, into the condition of the person lured by this sin, but then he manages to withstand the temptation and in fact to twist this perversion back to rectitude: "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). He does the same thing with the temptations to glory ("Do not put the Lord your God to the test" [Matt. 4:7]) and to**

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**power ("Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him" [Matt. 4:10]). If these perversions had been addressed only from a distance, only through divine fiat, they would not have been truly conquered; but when they are withstood by someone willing fully to submit to their lure, they are effectively exploded from within, undermined, defeated. This is the strategy of Jesus, the Lamb of God.**

**We see it in a number of Gospel scenes where Jesus is tired out after his contact with the sick, the lost, the sinful. At the beginning of Mark's Gospel, we find an account of a typical day in the ministry of Jesus. The people press on him from all sides, compelling him to find refuge in a boat lest he be crushed by the crowd, and at one point there are so many supplicants surrounding him that he couldn't even eat. Mark tells us that Jesus went off to a secluded place to pray, but even there they sought him out, coming at him from all sides. In the magnificent narrative of the woman at the well in the Gospel of John, we hear that Jesus sat down by Jacob's well, "tired out by his journey" (John 4:6). This description is straightforward enough on the literal level: Who wouldn't be tired after a morning's march through dry country? But as Augustine and others have reminded us, it has another sense on the mystical level. Jesus is tired from his incamational journey into human sin and dysfunction, signified by the well. "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again" (John 4:13), Jesus says to the woman, indicating that the well is emblematic of errant desire, her tendency to fill up her longing for God with the transient goods of creation: money, pleasure, power, honor. In order to effect a change**

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**in her, the Lamb of God had to be willing to enter into her dysfunctional world and to share the spiritual weariness of it. J.R.R. Tolkien keenly appreciated the sacrificial dynamic that we've been exploring. His great Christ-figure, Frodo the hobbit, brought about the salvation of Middle-earth precisely through his entry into the heart of the land of Mordor, disempowering that terrible place through his humble willingness to bear the full weight of its burden. All of this was, however, but an anticipation of the ultimate sacrifice of the Lamb of God. The final enemy that had to be defeated, if God and his human family could once again sit down in the easy fellowship of a festive meal, was death itself. In a very real sense, death (and the fear of death) stands behind all sin, and hence Jesus had to journey into the realm of death and, through sacrifice, twist it back to life. Innumerable heroes in the course of human history had tried to conquer that realm by using its weapons, fighting violence with violence and hatred with hatred. But this strategy was (and still is) hopeless. The battle plan of the Lamb of God was paradoxical in the extreme: he would conquer death precisely by dying. From Jesus' first appearance, the world (biblical shorthand for the arena of death) opposed him. Herod sought to stamp him out, even when he was an infant; the scribes and Pharisees plotted against him and hunted him down; the temple establishment feared him; the Romans saw him as a threat to right order. At the climax of his life and ministry, Jesus came into Jerusalem, David's city, the site of the temple, riding not on a fine charger in the manner of a worldly warrior, but on a humble donkey. He arrived**

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**in the place where his enemies were most concentrated, and he had every intention of fighting, but his weapon would be the very instrument on which his opponents would put him to death.**

**On the cross, Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Dying on a Roman instrument of torture, he allowed the full force of the world's hatred and dysfunction to wash over him, to spend itself on him. And he responded, not with an answering violence or resentment, but with forgiveness. He therefore took away the sin of the world (to use the language of the liturgy), swallowing it up in the divine mercy. Over his cross, Pontius Pilate had placed a sign, announcing in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek that Jesus was the King of the Jews. Though Pilate meant it as mockery, it was in fact the fulfillment of a prophecy. An essential aspect of the hope of Israel was that one day a king in the tradition of David and Solomon would rise up, take his place in Jerusalem, and deal definitively with the enemies of the nation. This is precisely who Jesus was and precisely what Jesus did. But what an odd, unexpected sort of king he was, conquering Israel's enemies through nonviolence, disempowering them by refusing to respond to them in kind. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus compared himself to a mother hen who longed to gather her chicks under her wing. As N.T. Wright points out, this is much more than a sentimental image. It refers to the gesture of a hen when fire is sweeping through the barn. In order to protect her chicks, she will sacrifice herself, gathering them under her wing and using her own body as a shield. On the cross,**

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**Jesus used, as it were, his own sacrificed body as a shield, taking the full force of the world's hatred and violence. He entered into close quarters with sin (because that's where we sinners are found) and allowed the heat and fury of sin to destroy him, even as he protected us. With this metaphor in mind, we can see, with special clarity, why the first Christians associated the crucified Jesus with the suffering servant of Isaiah. By enduring the pain of the cross, Jesus did indeed bear our sins; by his stripes we were indeed healed.**

**And this is why the sacrificial death of Jesus is pleasing to the Father. Though it has in recent years been lam­pooned as advocating a type of divine child abuse, the doctrine of the atonement stands at the heart of Christian faith and proclamation. The Father sent his Son into godforsakenness, into the morass of sin and death, not because he delighted in seeing his Son suffer, but rather because he wanted his Son to bring the divine light to the darkest place. It is not the agony of the Son in itself that pleases his Father, but rather the Son's willing obedience in offering his body in sacrifice in order to take away the sin of the world. St. Anselm (the one most often blamed for propagating the theory of atonement) said that the death of the Son reestablished justice—that is to say, the right relationship between divinity and humanity. He did it, Anselm continues, by going all the way to the bottom of the muck of sin in order to find and extricate the pearl (humanity) which had fallen in. It was not the suffering of the Son per se that the Father loved, but rather the Son's willingness to make that downward journey.**

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**THE EUCHARIST AS SACRIFICE**

**It is only now, at the conclusion of this survey of practically the whole of salvation history, that we are in a position to understand the relationship between the Eucharist and sacrifice. This association is far from arbitrary or accidental, for it was made by Jesus himself as he was summing up the meaning of his life in the company of his disciples on the night before his death. Luke tells us that, at his last great festive meal, Jesus "took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me'" (Luke 22:19). And then, at the conclusion of the meal, he took a cup of wine and said, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20). On Matthew's telling, Jesus makes the sacrificial significance even clearer: over the cup he says, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:27-28).**

**In order to appreciate these perhaps overly familiar words, we have to put ourselves in the thought world of Jesus' first audience. As they heard these extraordinary statements, the Apostles were undoubtedly hearing over­tones and resonances from the scriptural and liturgical tradition that we have reviewed. Jesus was using the Passover supper to give a definitive interpretation to the actions that he would take the next day, Good Friday. As this bread is broken and shared, so, he was saying, my body tomorrow will be broken and offered; as this cup is poured**

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**out, so my blood tomorrow will be poured out in sacrifice. His body, he was implying, will be like the animals offered by Abraham when God struck a covenant with him, and his blood will be like the oxen's blood sprinkled by Moses on the altar and on the people, sealing the agreement of the Torah. In his crucified body, he will be like the Passover lamb slaughtered in the temple, signifying Israel's total commitment to Yahweh and Yahweh's to Israel. Moreover, his body will be like that of Isaac as he waited for the knife of his father to fall, with the telling difference that Jesus' Father will carry through the sacrifice. And if we attend carefully to the words over the cup, we can't help but see that his act on the cross will be the condition for the possibility of the perfect covenant of which Jeremiah dreamed. When Jesus said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (i Cor. 11:25), his disciples certainly thought of the promise that one day Yahweh would effect a fully realized union with his people. And when they heard that this covenant was to be accompanied by the shedding of blood, how could they not think of the link between Jeremiah's dream and the suffering servant of Isaiah? In sum, the words of Jesus over the bread and cup at the Last Supper effected a stunning gathering of the variety of strands of covenantal and sacrificial theology in the Hebrew Scriptures. The covenants and their accompa­nying sacrifices that mark the entire religious history of the Jews are being recapitulated, Jesus says, in me and my sacrifice. He undoubtedly knew that the horror of the Crucifixion would be so stark as to block any attempt to assign meaning to it. And thus, in the relative safety and**

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**intimacy of the upper room, Jesus calmly and in advance provided the interpretive key to the climactic action of his life.**

**Why did Jesus invite his disciples to consume the bread and wine that he had radically identified with his sacrifice? In Jeremiah's prophecy of the new covenant, Yahweh had said, "1 will put my law within them, and 1 will write it on their hearts" (Jer. 31:33). This means that the everlasting agreement would be written not on stone tablets but in the flesh of the people's hearts; it would not be an oppressive law externally imposed but a rule congruent with the deepest longing of the human soul. Jesus thus wanted them to ingest his sacrifice so as to appropriate it in the most intimate, organic way, making it bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh. Thomas Aquinas commented that the Old Law of the Torah and the various covenants had a mitigated effectiveness, precisely because it appeared as external to the human heart. But, he continued, the New Law of the Gospel is efficacious because it is realized internally, through the identification of Christ and his Body the Church. And nowhere is this identification more complete than in the Eucharist, when a disciple physically consumes the incarnate Christ, the law par excellence.**

**We are now in a position to address more fully the issue that we raised at the outset of this chapter—namely, how the Mass can be construed as a sacrifice. We have al­ready shown how the sacrifice of Jesus' cross sums up and gathers the sacrificial history that preceded it. The Mass, the Eucharistic liturgy, can be understood as an extension or re-presentation of the sacrifice of Jesus, bringing the**

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**power of the cross to bear in the present. Hence the Mass, in a very real sense, recapitulates and makes concrete everything we have been describing in the course of this chapter. If Jesus were one religious figure among many, an inspiring example from the past, we could gather now as his disciples and rather blandly remember him, much as the Abraham Lincoln Association might assemble and recall the virtues of the great president. Because of who Jesus is, however, something else obtains. The Mass is indeed described as an *anamnesis* (a remembrance) of the Last Supper and Calvary, but this term is meant in much more than a merely psychological sense. Since Jesus is divine, all of his actions, including and especially the sacrificial act by which he saved the world, participate in the eternity of God and hence can be made present at any point in time. To "remember" him, therefore, is to participate even now in the saving events of the past, bringing them, in all of their dense reality, to the present day. The Battle of Hastings cannot be re-presented, except in the most superficial sense, since it belongs irretrievably to the past, but the sacrifice of Jesus can. Those who are gathered around the altar of Christ are not simply recalling Calvary; Calvary has become present to them in all of its spiritual power. Due to the eternity of Christ, there is indeed a kind of collapsing of the dimensions of time at the Mass, present meeting past—and both present and past anticipating the eschatological future. St. Paul caught this trans-temporality of the Eucharistic liturgy beautifully when, in his First Letter to the Corinthians, he said, "As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you**

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**proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (i Cor. 11:26). In other words, here and now, at the Eucharistic assembly, Christ makes present both the past and the future. Indeed, the whole sacrificial history of Israel—from Noah and Abraham through David and Isaiah and Jesus himself—is gathered and summed up, re-presented at the Mass.**

**Martin Luther and the other reformers objected strenuously to the claim that the Mass was a sacrifice. Luther argued that Christ's great sacrifice was once for all and that if we, consequently, arrogate to ourselves the prerogative of repeating it, we are guilty of dangerous spiritual presumptuousness, or in his language, "righteous­ness of works." The Mass, he concluded, is something that is received, not offered, by us. What we have just said about the time-transcending quality of Jesus' act goes a long way toward dissolving Luther's criticism, for we are not repeating Christ's sacrifice on our own terms and through our own initiative; rather we are, as we've said, re-presenting it, tapping into its power. But we can take another step in responding to Luther's concern. The God of the Bible is not competitive with us. As we argued in the first chapter, God the Creator of all things cannot possibly receive anything from creation that he needs. But God does indeed desire something for his human creatures—namely, fullness of life—and this comes when they surrender themselves in love to him. The sacrifice of Jesus is nothing but this total self-gift to the Father that effectively straightens out the human race, and therefore God is delighted when we actively participate in it, joining our minds, wills, and bodies to it. The sacrifice of the Mass**

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**does not constitute a challenge to God; rather, it breaks, as it were, against the rock of God's self-sufficiency and returns to us as a life-enhancing power.**

**The most compelling biblical depiction of Jesus as sacrificial priest is found in the Letter to the Hebrews. The author of this treatise interpreted Jesus in the context of the ritual and ceremonial of the Jerusalem temple, of which he himself was probably a priest. As we saw, the high priest went every year into the Holy of Holies to make atonement for the sins of the people and to bring forth the divine forgiveness. As such, he was a "pontifex," a bridge builder between divinity and humanity. Nowhere in the New Testament is the coming together of the divine and human in Jesus more clearly articulated than in this letter. We are told that Jesus is "the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word" (Heb. 1:3). At the same time, we are assured, "he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect. . . . Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested" (Heb. 2:17-18). This juxtaposition of divinity and humanity made Jesus the unsurpassably perfect high priest, able "to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2:17). But whereas the ordinary high priests of the Old Testament passed through the veil into the earthly Holy of Holies and offered, at best, an inadequate sacrifice, the perfect high priest passed into the heavenly sanctuary, bearing the sins of the world and bringing forth, in the fullest sense, the divine forgiveness: "But when Christ came as a high**

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**priest of the good things that have come ... he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:11-12). The author of the Letter to the Hebrews, so immersed in the Old Testament texts, makes the explicit connection between sacrifice and covenant that 1 have been insisting on throughout this chapter: "For this reason [Christ] is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance" (Heb. 9:15). We recall that God had promised Abraham countless descendants and David an everlasting line of kings. Now in Christ we see the unexpected fulfillment of these covenant promises. Through the final sacrifice of Jesus the high priest, eternal life has been made available to the whole of humanity and the covenant thereby realized beyond the wildest fantasies of Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, or David.**

**The sacrifice of the Mass is a participation in this great eternal act by which Jesus entered on our behalf into the heavenly sanctuary with his own blood and returned bearing the forgiveness of the Father. When the high priest came out of the sanctuary and sprinkled the people with blood, he was understood to be acting in the very person of Yahweh, renewing creation. The ultimate sacrifice having been offered, Christ the priest comes forth at every Mass with his lifeblood, and the universe is restored. The priest's actions at the altar are but a symbolic manifestation of this mystical reality, which is why he is described as operating *in persona Christi* (in the person of Christ). And this is why, furthermore, the forgiveness of sins is so central to the**

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**Eucharistic liturgy. Though it isn't stressed enough, all of our venial sins (that is to say, those sins that have not involved a radical compromising of our relationship with God and hence rendered us spiritually dead) are washed away by Christ's Blood at Mass.**

**The Vatican 11 document on the Church, *Lumen Gentium,* says that every baptized person is a priest—that is to say, someone capable of entering into the sacrificial dynamic of the liturgy. Though the ordained priest alone can preside at the Mass and effect the Eucharistic change, all of the baptized participate in the Mass in a priestly way. They do this through their prayers and responses but also, the document specifies, by uniting their personal sacrifices and sufferings to the great sacrifice of Christ. So a father witnesses the agony of his son in the hospital; a mother endures the rebellion of a teenage daughter; a young man receives news of his brother's death in battle; an elderly man tosses on his bed in anxiety as he contemplates his unsure financial situation; a graduate student struggles to complete his doctoral thesis; a child experiences for the first time the breakup of a close friendship; an idealist confronts the stubborn resistance of a cynical opponent. These people could see their pain as simply dumb suffer­ing, the offscourings of an indifferent universe. Or they could see it through the lens provided by the sacrificial death of Jesus, appreciating it as the means by which God is drawing them closer to himself. Suffering, once joined to the cross of Jesus, can become a vehicle for the reformation of the sinful self, the turning of the soul in the direction of love. Mind you, 1 am not suggesting a simplistic causal**

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**correlation between sin and suffering (indeed, the book of Job rules out such a move); but 1 *am* suggesting that pain, consciously aligned to the sacrifice of Jesus, can be spiritually transfiguring. Thus, the sufferer becomes, not simply a person in pain, but Abraham giving away what he loves the most, Moses enduring the long discipline of the desert, David confronting Goliath and being pur­sued by Saul, or the crucified Messiah wondering why he has been forsaken by the Father. The place where this alignment happens is the liturgy, for the liturgy is the re­presentation of the sacrifice of the Lord in all of its richness and multivalence. Consequently, those who gather, with intentionality and focus, at the altar of Jesus are not simply witnessing the event of the cross; they are sharing in it. And this participation changes fundamentally the manner in which they experience and interpret their own pain.**

**And thus we can see, finally and fully, the intimate link between the meal and the sacrifice aspects of the Eucharist. Only in the measure that we are transformed through sacrifice, only when our sin and suffering have been dealt with, can we sit down in the fellowship of the sacred banquet. And thus we have come full circle. The Eucharistic liturgy is the sacred meal *because* it is a sacrificial offering. In the Blood of Jesus, the bliss of Eden is restored, and God and human beings are once again friends.**

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**CHAPTER 3**

*"Iflfs a Symbol, to Hell with It"*

**In 1950, Flannery O'Connor was brought by friends to a dinner with the prominent author Mary McCarthy and her husband. At the time, O'Connor, who would eventually blos­som into one of the greatest Catholic writers of the twentieth century, was just commencing her career, and there was no question that she was a junior member of this elite circle of conversation. In fact, in a letter describing the scene, she commented, "Having me there was like having a dog present who had been trained to say a few words but overcome with inadequacy had forgotten them." As the evening drew on, the talk turned to the Eucharist, and Mary McCarthy, who had been raised Catholic but had fallen away from the Church, remarked that she thought of the Eucharist as a symbol and "implied that it was a pretty good one." She undoubtedly in­tended this condescending observation as a friendly overture to the Catholic O'Connor. But O'Connor responded in a shaky voice, "Well, if it's a symbol, to hell with it." One can only imagine that the elegant dinner party broke up rather soon after that conversational bomb was dropped. In its bluntness,**

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**clarity, and directness, Flannery O'Connor's remark is one of the best statements of the Catholic difference in regard to the Eucharist. For Catholics, the Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Jesus, and any attempt to say otherwise, no matter how cleverly formulated or deftly articulated, is insufficient. O'Connor's *bon mot* reflects what the Catholic Church speaks of in its doctrinal statements as the "Real Presence" of Christ in the Eucharist. As the Vatican 11 fathers pointed out, Christ is indeed present in a variety of ways—in the very intelligibility of the universe, in the gathered assembly at Mass, in the reading of the Scriptures, in the person of the priest—but he is "really, truly, and substantially" present, that is to say, present in a qualitatively different way, in the Eu-charistic elements. In the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas gave voice to the same conviction when he said that whereas the power (virtus) of Christ is operative in the other sacraments, Christ himself (ipse *Christus)* is present in the sacrament of the altar. O'Connor, Aquinas, and the fathers of Vatican 11 are all indicating that the intertwining of meal and sacrifice at the Eucharist is made possible by the dense objectivity of what is on offer there. If Christ's presence in the Eucharist is only symbolic, then the sacrifice is mitigated, and if the sacrifice is mitigated, the communion is compromised. In a word, the Real Presence is the glue that holds together the elements that we've been considering. But what precisely does this "Real Presence" mean, and what is the ground for holding it? Once again, 1 would like to answer these questions from within a biblical framework.**

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***"If It's a Symbol, to Hell with It"***

***■* THE SCANDAL OF JOHN 6**

**1 mentioned earlier that all four Gospels have an account of the multiplication of the loaves and fish. St. John's version of this story can be found at the beginning of the sixth chapter of his Gospel. In his telling, immediately after performing this miracle, Jesus fled to a mountain and then crossed the Sea of Galilee, pursued by a crowd eager to see more wonders and to make the wonder-worker into a king. They finally tracked him down in the synagogue in the lakeside town of Capernaum, and there a remarkable dialogue ensued. In many ways, the Catholic doctrine of the Real Presence flows from and continually returns to this conversation. Thus, we must attend to it with particular care.**

**When they asked Jesus how he had gotten there ahead of them, the Lord chided them: "Very truly, 1 tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life" (John 6:26-27). Ordinary bread satisfies only physical longing, and it does so in a transient way: one eats and one must soon eat again. But the heavenly bread, Jesus implies, satisfies the deepest longing of the heart, and does so by adapting the one who eats it to eternal life. The Church Fathers loved to ruminate on this theme of divinization through the Eucharist, the process by which**

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**the consumption of the bread of life readies one for life in the eternal dimension. In the versions of the Lord's prayer found in the synoptic Gospels, we find the phrase *ton arton* ... *ton epiousion,* usually rendered as "daily bread." But the literal sense of the Greek is something like "supersubstantial bread," designating, not so much the bread of ordinary human consumption, but the bread suitable for a higher pitch of existence.**

**As is often the case in the Gospel of John, a skeptical question opens toward deeper understanding: "So they said to him, 'What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you?... Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness'" (John 6:30-31). They were appealing, of course, to the miracle by which Yahweh fed the children of Israel during their forty years' wandering in the desert, but Jesus wants them to understand that he is offering a food that will nourish them in a more abiding way. "Your ancestors ate the manna in the wil­derness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die" (John 6:49-50). "Heavenly bread" catches much of the paradox of the orthodox teaching concerning the Eucharist: though it remains, as far as the eye can see, ordinary bread, the Eucharist in fact participates in a properly transcendent mode of existence and possesses, consequently, the power to produce eternal life. In Jesus' next observation, we see precisely why the heavenly bread has this virtue: "1 am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that 1 will give for the life of the world is my flesh" (John 6:51).**

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**Here again we see that stubborn realism upon which the Catholic tradition will insist. Jesus unambiguously identifies himself with this bread that will nourish his people to eternal life.**

**What follows is one of the most beautifully under­stated lines in the Gospel of John: "The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?'" (John 6:52). 1 say "understated," for the term "dispute" barely hints at the intensity of the objections that must have come forward from the crowd upon hearing Jesus' words. They must have found this discourse not only intellectually and religiously problematic but—if 1 can put it this bluntly—nauseating. Throughout the Old Testament, we can find numerous explicit prohibitions against the eating of flesh and blood. For example, in the book of Genesis, in the context of the Noah story, we find this divine directive: "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as 1 gave you the green plants, 1 give you everything. Only, you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood" (Gen. 9:3-4). The idea here is that since blood is the vital principle that belongs to God alone, it ought not to be brought under the control of human beings. We find the same prohibition among the legal decrees in the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy: "It shall be a perpetual statute through your generations, in all your settlements: you must not eat any fat or any blood" (Lev. 3:17), and "Only be sure that you do not eat the blood; for the blood is the life, and you shall not eat the life with the meat" (Deut. 12:23). Moreover, in his vision of apocalyptic judgment, the prophet Ezekiel speaks of**

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**the carrion birds who will swoop down on the enemies of Israel and eat their flesh and drink their blood: "You shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the**

**princes of the earth You shall eat fat until you are filled,**

**and drink blood until you are drunk" (Ezek. 39:18-19). Finally, a popular Aramaic saying of Jesus' time identified the devil as the "eater of flesh." If the prohibitions we have rehearsed had to do with the consumption of the bloody flesh of animals, how much more offensive must Jesus' words have been, which encouraged the eating of his own human body. Hence the viscerally negative reaction of Jesus' audience.**

**If Jesus, therefore, wanted to soften his teaching, to place it in a wider interpretive context, to insist upon the metaphorical or symbolic sense of the words he was using, this would have been the perfect opportunity. As 1 mentioned, the skeptical questions of his interlocutors are often the occasion, in John's Gospel, for Jesus to clarify the meaning of his pronouncements. A very good example is his symbolic explanation of the sense of "being born from above" when confronted with the literalistic question of Nicodemus, "Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" (John 3:3-5). But in this case, Jesus didn't spiritualize his rhetoric; just the contrary. He said, "Very truly, 1 tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53). Behind the English term "eat" in this sentence is not the Greek word we would expect, *phagein,* which means to eat in the ordinary sense. The term that is used is *trogein,* which was typically employed to communicate**

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**the manner in which animals consume their food; it might be rendered as "gnaw" or "munch" in English. Thus, if they were bothered by the gross animalistic overtones of what he had said, he purposely bothered them further. And in case they still missed his meaning, he added, "For my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink" (John 6:55). He then draws the crucial conclusion from all of this bluntly realistic talk: "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and 1 in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and 1 live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me" (John 6:56-57). For Chris­tians, Jesus is not simply a wise teacher by whose words one abides (like Confucius) or an ethical exemplar whom one might strive to follow (like Gandhi or St. Francis) or even a bearer of definitive revelation to whom a person might feel beholden (like Muhammad); rather, Jesus is a power in whom we participate, a field of force in which we live and move and have our being. In his master metaphor, St. Paul speaks of the Body of Jesus of which baptized people are members. The rhetoric that we have just cited implies an intensely organic relationship between the Father, Jesus, and the Church, the third deriving its life from the second who derives his life from the first. We must eat the Flesh and drink the Blood of the Lord because that is the way that we come to participate in him and thus, finally, in the life of the Father. Elsewhere in John's Gospel, we find equally vitalistic language: we are much more than followers of Jesus; we are grafted onto him as branches are grafted onto a vine. The very earliest theology of the Eucharist is found in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, penned probably**

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**in the early fifties of the first century, and it clearly brings forth this organic, participative quality. Paul speaks of the intense identification that is effected between Jesus and his Church precisely through the Eucharist: "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?" (i Cor. 10:16). The evocative Greek term behind "sharing" is *koinonia,* meaning communion or mystical participation.**

**Is this a hard doctrine? At the conclusion of the Eucha-ristic discourse, delivered at the synagogue in Capernaum, Jesus practically lost his entire Church: "When many of his disciples heard it, they said, 'This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?'" (John 6:60). Again, if he were speaking only at the symbolic level, why would this theology be hard to accept? No one left him when he observed that he was the vine or the good shepherd or the light of the world, for those were clearly only metaphorical remarks and posed, accordingly, no great intellectual challenge. The very resistance of his disciples to the bread of life discourse implies that they understood Jesus only too well and grasped that he was making a qualitatively dif­ferent kind of assertion. Unable to take in the Eucharistic teaching, "many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him" (John 6:66). Jesus then turned to his inner circle, the Twelve, and asked, bluntly enough: "Do you also wish to go away?" (John 6:67). There is something terrible and telling in that question, as though Jesus were posing it not only to the little band gathered around him at Capernaum, but to all of his prospective disciples up and**

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**down the ages. One senses that we are poised here on a fulcrum, that a standing or falling point has been reached, that somehow being a disciple of Jesus is intimately tied up with how one stands in regard to the Eucharist. In response to Jesus' question, Peter, as is often the case in the Gospels, spoke for the group: "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68-69). As in the synoptic Gospels, so here in John, it is a Petrine confession that grounds and guarantees the survival of the Church. In the Johannine context, this explicit confession of Jesus as the Holy One of God is bound up with the implicit confession of faith in the Eucharist as truly the Body and Blood of the Lord. When the two declarations are made in tandem, John is telling us, the Church perdures. In light of this scene, it is indeed fascinating to remark how often the Church has divided precisely over this question of the Real Presence.**

**THE WITNESS OF THE CHURCH FATHERS AND THE ARGUMENT WITH BERENGARIUS**

**The great theologians of the early centuries of the Church's life wrote frequently about the Eucharist, but not in a systematic way. We find no treatises devoted precisely to the Eucharistic mystery until the early Middle Ages. But if we attend to the numerous citations, sprinkled here and there in the writings of the Fathers, we remark a number of central themes, including covenant, meal, and sacrifice. And we will also find—though again, not**

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**articulated in a nuanced way—affirmations of the Real Presence. Echoing a central motif of the sixth chapter of John, Ignatius of Antioch, writing to fellow Christians around the year 107 while he was journeying toward his own execution, spoke of the Eucharist as the bread that confers eternal life: "medicine of immortality." If Ignatius thought that the Eucharist were ordinary bread, carrying only a symbolic valence, he would scarcely have imagined that it possessed such transformative power. In his *Epistle to the Romans,* furthermore, Ignatius says, "1 desire the bread of God, the heavenly bread, the bread of life, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, the Son of God... and I desire the drink of God, namely his blood, which is incorruptible love and eternal life." Again, it's hard to imagine that such passionate language could be used of something that Ig­natius considered merely a conventional sign. Around the year 150, Justin Martyr wrote a moving account of what Christians do at their Sunday worship. In the context of that description, he said this of the Eucharist: "This food is called among us Euxapiaria [the Eucharist], of which no one is allowed to partake but the man who believes that the things which we teach are true... . The food which is blessed by the prayer of his word... is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh." Justin also repeats Ignatius' insistence that the Eucharist, precisely as the Body and Blood of the Lord, immortalizes the one who receives it.**

**Another early witness to the Real Presence is St. lre-naeus, a student of Polycarp of Smyrna, who later became bishop of Lyons and who died, probably as a martyr, in 202.**

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**Irenaeus' principal intellectual opponents were the Gnos­tics of whom 1 spoke in the opening chapter. One of the marks of their dualist system was, we recall, a contempt for matter. Accordingly, Irenaeus placed a great stress on the corporeal reality of the Incarnation and, by extension, of the Eucharist. In the fourth book of his masterpiece *Against Heresies,* Irenaeus magnificently combines the two beliefs and manages to refute the Gnostics in one deftly crafted rhetorical question: "How can they say that the bread over which thanks has been given is the Lord's Body and the cup His Blood, when they will not admit that that same Lord is the Son of the world's Creator, that is, His Word, through whom trees bear fruit... and 'the earth gives first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear' (Mark 4:28)?" For our purposes, what is remarkable here is the clear and unambiguous affirmation that the dense reality of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist is a sacramental prolongation of the equally dense physical reality of the Incarnation.**

**Origen of Alexandria was a younger contemporary of Irenaeus and the greatest biblical theologian of his time. Based in Alexandria and Palestine, he produced a stagger­ing number of commentaries, treatises, and sermons, all centering around the Word of God. Trying to communicate something of his enormous reverence for the Scriptures, Origen used a comparison that, in regard to the question under consideration, is extremely illuminating. He told his listeners: "You who are accustomed to take part in divine mysteries know, when you receive the body of the Lord, how you protect it with all caution and veneration lest any**

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**small part fall from it, lest anything of the consecrated gift be lost." In the same way, he urged them, you must strive to conserve and reverence every word of the revealed text. If Origen and his community held the Eucharistic bread to be nothing but a symbol, why would they even think of treating it with such exaggerated respect? And the very fact that this practice could be employed so blithely as a point of comparison proves that belief in the Real Presence was, even at this early period, utterly taken for granted. One of the most precious texts that we have from the patristic period is a series of catechetical talks prepared by Cyril of Jerusalem. In these theologically rich sermons, Cyril was attempting to draw newly baptized Christians into the central mysteries of the faith. When discussing the Eucharist, he directs his listeners' attention to a text from First Corinthians: "For 1 received from the Lord what 1 also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you.'... In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood'" (i Cor. 11:23-25). Cyril comments, emphasizing the organic nature of Eucharistic participation: "The teaching of the Blessed Paul is sufficient to give you a full assurance concerning those Divine Mysteries, of which having been deemed worthy, you have become of the same body and blood with Christ." And lest there be any ambiguity, he adds, "Since [Christ] has himself affirmed and said, This is my Blood, who shall ever hesitate, saying, that it is not his Blood?"**

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**In the fourth century, St. Ambrose of Milan added his voice to the chorus. To those who wondered about the reality of Christ's bodily presence in the Eucharist, he said, "This body which we make is that which was born of the Virgin," and to those who inquired as to the truth of the Eucharistic transformation, he said, "Before the blessing of the heavenly words another nature [bread] is spoken of; after the consecration the Body is signified." St. John Chrysostom, the eloquent fourth-century bishop of Constantinople, bore as one of his titles "Eucharistic Doctor," since he wrote so frequently and passionately about the mystery of Christ's Body and Blood. In one of his homilies, he remarks on the power necessary to effect the Eucharistic transformation: "It is not man that causes the things offered to become the Body and Blood of Christ,**

**but he who was crucified for us The priest, in the role**

**of Christ, pronounces these words, but their power and grace are God's." If Chrysostom and Ambrose considered the Eucharist merely a symbolic representation of Jesus' Body and Blood, they would never have insisted on the necessity of divine power in the words of consecration. There is no reason whatsoever that an ordinary human being could not bring about a new symbolic state of affairs: writers, poets, and artists do it all the time. Thus, their allusions to the power of God's grace in and through the words of consecration are an indirect indication that they believed something much more than merely symbolic was at play in the Eucharist.**

**And the greatest of the Western Fathers, St. Augustine of Hippo, also held to the dense objectivity of Christ's**

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**Eucharistic presence. In the line of Origen, Ambrose, Chrysostom, and others, Augustine maintains that the consecratory words of Jesus have a transformative power, so that when they are pronounced over the bread and wine at Mass, a very real change takes place. In one of his homilies, he comments, "That which you see on the Lord's table is bread and wine. But when a word is added, that bread and wine become the body and blood of the Word. ... Without the word, the oblation is bread and wine, but, when the word is added, the oblation is at once something else. And that something else—what is it? It is the body of Christ and the blood of Christ." Once more, this sort of rhetoric is incompatible with the view that the Eucharistic change is merely figurative, for no one thinks that the ontological constitution of an object mutates when a symbolic meaning is attached to it. But this is precisely what Augustine and his forebears did indeed hold.**

**This patristic consensus on the Real Presence emerged in the course of several centuries, but never during this period did any of the masters of Christian thought en­deavor to explain the "how" of the Eucharistic change, beyond their insistence that the word of Christ was its necessary condition. But during the Carolingian period, when Christianity's intellectual center of gravity shifted to the north and the west, theologians began to pose more technical questions about the Eucharist and attempted to state in more philosophically adequate language what happens when Christ becomes really present in the elements at Mass. Some scholars, in recent years, have bemoaned this development, seeing it as a descent into**

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***"If It's a Symbol, to Hell with It-Si* fussy physicalism, and have called, consequently, for a return to the more poetic and lyrical approach of the Bible and the Fathers. But this, 1 think, is a mistake, for the intellectual move from the "what" and the "why" to the "how" is a natural one, and thus even if we wanted to undo it, we couldn't. And in point of fact, the exploration of the more "technical" dimension of the Eucharist, when undertaken in the right spirit, preserves rather than undermines the mystery of the sacrament.**

**The most important Eucharistic debate of this period centered around the work of Berengarius of Tours, an eleventh-century theologian. Like many of the other intellectuals of the time, Berengarius was fascinated by grammar and the logical property of terms, and he posed a simple but penetrating logical objection to the belief in Jesus' Real Presence in the Eucharist. Berengarius claimed that there is an essential difference between the historical body of Jesus, born of the Virgin and now reigning in heaven, and the "body" that appears sacramentally on the altar. This latter must be, he reckoned, some sort of symbol or figure of the former, since the heavenly body of Jesus is beyond change or corruption, whereas the Eucharistic elements are, obviously enough, changed and corrupted over time. A scriptural *locus* for Berengarius is the Pauline claim that "even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way" (2 Cor. 5:16). In his own commentary on this passage, Berengarius said that the words of the Apostle were a refutation "of anyone who says: 'The empirical *[sensualis]* bread consecrated on the altar is, after the**

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**consecration, truly the body of Christ that exists above.'" And therefore, when the priest at Mass says *hoc est enim corpus meum* (this indeed is my body), the *hoc* in question remains the bread, but a spiritual significance or power *(virtus)* is added to it, making it an efficacious sign of the body of Jesus. One can say that the bread and wine are truly the body and blood of Christ in the sense that the risen Christ is offered spiritually to the recipient through them. Grammatically, Berengarius' argument is interesting. In any change, there must be a substrate—that is to say, something that remains stable throughout the transition: it is the same person, for example, who stays the same even as he puts on a variety of different shirts. What Berengar­ius points out is that if the Eucharistic elements cease to exist at the consecration, no real change is in fact possible. The *hoc* (this) in the priest's formula requires, therefore, the permanence of the bread and wine. When he says, furthermore, that a virtue or spiritual power is added to the elements, Berengarius anticipates by several centuries the work of Martin Luther. The great reformer will argue that the body of Christ comes to exist alongside the bread and the blood of Christ alongside the wine, so that neither bread nor wine pass out of existence or become something essentially different at the consecration. Berengarius, like Luther after him, feels that he can account for the densely realistic claims of the Bible and the Fathers since "what­ever is said to be the case spiritually is truly the case." One has to admit, 1 think, that there is something attractive in the clarity and simplicity of Berengarius' presentation of the Eucharist. It takes the Eucharistic change seriously**

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**without mystifying it; it sets this sacramental transition within the familiar context of symbolic change, aligning it with other instances from our ordinary experience. The doubt that nags at us whenever we consider the doctrine of the *Real* Presence is largely assuaged through Berengarius' intellectual ministrations.**

**Nevertheless, the theory of Berengarius met almost immediately with strenuous opposition. One of its most articulate critics was Lanfranc of Bee, a Benedictine abbot and a mentor to St. Anselm of Canterbury. Rely­ing on John 6 and on the steady witness of the Fathers, Lanfranc maintained that Berengarius' approach was far too subjectivistic, far too cavalier about the *reality* of the Eucharistic change. When the controversy between Berengarius and Lanfranc began to disturb the Church at large, Pope Nicholas 11 called a synod in 1059. At the end of the deliberations, the theology of Berengarius was condemned, and he himself was compelled to sign a recantation and acquiesce in the burning of his books. As part of his recantation, he was forced to admit that "the bread and wine which are placed on the altar are after consecration not only a sacrament but also the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ." This, as we've been suggesting, was the neuralgic point. The synod fathers recognized that at the consecration a change so dramatic and thorough occurs that it would be incorrect to refer to the elements afterward as "bread and wine." Berengarius' symbolic explanation did not account sufficiently for this radically objective transformation. They also insisted that there is something "more" in the**

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**Eucharist than in the other sacraments. One could argue, they implied, that Berengarius presented a valid account of the presence of Jesus in the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, the Anointing of the Sick, etc., wherein a spiritual power is added to a physical element. The oath that Berengarius was forced to take reflected the Church's instinct that something qualitatively different is at play in the Eucharist, a presence at a substantially different level of intensity. Moreover, Berengarius' theory couldn't account for the essential difference between the Eucharist and the wide range of symbolic signs in the Old Testament revelation, from the temple to cultic sacrifice to priestly ritual.**

**Now, there was more in the oath that Berengarius was forced to swear, and it makes even the opponents of Ber­engarius to this day rather uneasy: "The bread and wine ... [are] the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and... are taken and broken by the hands of the priests and crushed by the teeth of the faithful." The frank, even gross, physicality of this formula seems an overcorrective to the too subjectivistic theory of Berengarius, drawing us close to an almost cannibalistic construal of the Eucharistic meal. In fact, in later polemics, the extreme view represented by the anti-Berengarian oath will be characterized as "Capernaitic," because the people in the Capernaum synagogue described in John 6 reacted against the grossly physical idea of "eating" the flesh of Jesus. The tension between Berengarius' excessively subjectivist reading and his opponents' excessively objectivistic in­terpretation establishes the poles between which the later**

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**tradition will attempt to negotiate in its articulation of the Eucharistic mystery. Now, what precisely did Berengarius' opponents propose as an alternative explanation of the Real Presence? When we consult the works of Lanfranc, we find the first major attempt to explain Christ's pres­ence in the Eucharistic elements through the concepts of "substance" and "accident" found in the philosophy of Aristotle. In his *Categories,* copies of which were present in several key monastic libraries of the eleventh century, Aristotle argued that the most basic metaphysical reality is primary substance, an intelligible substrate that lies "underneath" the various accidents of color, shape, size, position, and so forth that qualify it. Thus, a horse (sub­stance) is large, brown, running, in front of another horse, etc. (its accidents). Aristotle's pithy definition of the two terms is as follows: a substance is that which is *neither* present in nor predicable of another, whereas an accident is that which is *either* present in or predicable of another. Armed with this Aristotelian perspective, Lanfranc could make some sense of the Eucharistic change. While the secondary qualities of the bread and wine—color, shape, size, aroma—remain unchanged, their underlying, and essentially invisible, substances are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. This conceptual innovation allowed the opponents of Berengarius to move beyond a purely figurative interpretation without embracing a crude physicalistic reading.**

**This eleventh-century debate eventually influenced the official teaching of the Catholic Church. In 1202, Pope Innocent 111—certainly the most consequential pontiff**

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**of the Middle Ages—used the term "transubstantiation" for the first time in an official ecclesial document, when discussing the use of water and wine at the Eucharist. He remarked that some hold the water to be *transsubstantiatur in sanguinem* (transubstantiated into blood) in the process of consecration. What is intriguing is how casually the pope used the word, indicating that it was already com­mon parlance. Then, at the Fourth Lateran Council, which took place just thirteen years later, the term is employed, but again in an almost casual, taken-for-granted manner: The "Body and Blood [of Jesus Christ] are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the appearances of bread and wine, the bread being transubstantiated into the body by the divine power and the wine into the blood." Undefined and relegated to a position within a subordinate clause, the term is obviously, by this time, generally accepted as an ordinary way of speaking about the Eucharistic change. But there is something more here as well. This very vagueness and lack of definition will be characteristic of official ecclesial usages of the term from this point on, since the Church never wanted to identify itself too strongly with a particular philosophical position or mode of explanation. Though it will consistently use a word marked by Aristotle's philosophy, the Church by no means ties itself thereby to Aristotelian metaphysics in the articulation of its Eucharistic faith.**

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**THE EUCHAR1ST1C THEOLOGY OF THOMAS AQUINAS**

**Called the "common doctor" of the Catholic Church, Thomas Aquinas, a thirteenth-century Dominican theo­logian, born just ten years after the Fourth Lateran Coun­cil, wrote extensively and incisively on the Eucharistic mystery. But the Eucharist was, for Aquinas, much more than merely a topic of academic interest; it was the center of his spiritual life. Thomas would typically celebrate Mass every day and would then assist at another Mass immediately afterward. Rarely, his contemporaries report, would he get through the liturgy without tears, so great was his identification with the unfolding of the Paschal Mystery. When he was wrestling with a particularly thorny intellectual question, he would pray before the Blessed Sacrament, frequently resting his head on the tabernacle itself, begging for inspiration. At the prompting of Pope Urban Vlll, Thomas composed a magnificent series of poems and hymns for the newly instituted Feast of Corpus Christi, several of which are still in wide use today in the Catholic liturgy. Finally, one of the most mysterious events in Aquinas' life centered around the Eucharist. After he had completed his lengthy treatment of the Eucharist in the *Summa theologiae,* Thomas, still unsure whether he had spoken correctly or even adequately of the sacrament, placed the text at the foot of the crucifix and commenced to pray. According to the well-known legend, a voice came from the cross, "You have written well of me, Thomas.**

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**What would you have as a reward?" To which Aquinas responded, *"Non nisi te, Domine"* (Nothing but you, Lord). In this section, 1 would like to study in some detail that treatise which Aquinas placed before the Lord, for in many ways it sums up and gives pointed expression to the tradition that we have been surveying, and it became a per­manent touchstone for much of the Catholic Eucharistic theology that followed it. It constitutes questions 73-83 of the third part of the *Summa theologiae,* Thomas' late-career masterpiece. But in order to understand his treatment of the key sacrament adequately, we have to glance, however briefly, at questions 60-63, which deal with the nature of a sacrament in general. Sacraments, Aquinas tells us, are types of signs, since they point to something that lies beyond them—namely, the sacred power that flows from the Passion of Christ. They are composed of a material element—oil, water, bread, wine, etc.—and a formal ele­ment, embodied in the words that accompany them. Thus, Baptism is a sacred sign involving the pouring of water and the uttering of the words "1 baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," the words specifying the sacred power of Christ operative in and through the water. We can see, therefore, that sacraments are not only signs of grace, but actually the instrumental causes of grace. In Thomas' curt language: "They cause what they signify." The salvific energy of Christ's cross flows, as it were, through these sacred signs, much in the way that the power of the builder flows through the saw that he employs or the authority of the general is made manifest in the soldiers whom he commands.**

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**With that general background in mind, we can turn now to the questions dealing specifically with the Eucha­rist. In the first article of question 73, Thomas poses the straightforward query of whether the Eucharist should be called a sacrament. His answer situates the Eucharist very much in the context of the sacred banquet. All sac­raments, he says, are designed to place the spiritual life within human beings, and the spiritual life is symbolically conformed to bodily life. Thus, just as food and drink are required for the sustenance of biological life, so the Eucharist is necessary for the sustenance of the life of grace. Precisely *asspirituale alimentum* (spiritual food), the Eucharist is thus placed in the genus of sacrament. By it, the power of Christ's death and Resurrection flows into us like food into the digestive system. Commenting on the use of the term *communio* (communion) in regard to the Eucharist, Thomas says that through the sacrament we commune with Christ, participating in his flesh and divinity, and inasmuch as we share in Christ, we commune with one another through him. 1 can't imagine a more succinct summary of the theme of the sacred meal.**

**In question 75, Aquinas broaches the issue of the manner of Christ's Real Presence in the Eucharist. The complexity and thoroughness of his treatment shows that this subject, above all, preoccupied the greatest of the medieval theologians. Article 1 of question 75 poses the central issue bluntly enough: "Whether the body of Christ be in this sacrament in very truth, or merely in a figure or sign?" Let us attend to Thomas' response with some care. He first observes that the true Body and Blood**

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***{verum corpus Christi et sanguinem) are* in the Eucharistic sacrament but not in such a way as to be apprehended by the senses; they are "visible" only through faith, which rests upon the divine authority. We recall that many of the Church Fathers emphasized the importance of Christ's *words* in the determination of the Real Presence. By stress­ing our faith in the authority of Jesus, Thomas Aquinas is making much the same point. In his lovely hymn "Adoro Te Devote," Aquinas expressed this idea in a more poetic vein: "Seeing, touching, tasting are in thee deceived; / How says trusty hearing? That shall be believed." Next, he tries to show how *conveniens* (fitting) it is that Christ is present in this sacrament in a qualitatively different way than in the others. The sacrifices of the Old Law were, he says, prefigurements of the final sacrifice offered on Christ's cross; therefore, it follows that there should be *aliquidplus* (something more) in the sacrifice instituted by Jesus. And this something more is that the Eucharist contains *ipsum possum* (the one himself who suffered) and not simply a sign or indication of him. In other words, if we were to say that Jesus is merely signified in the Eucharist, that sacrament would not be, in a qualitative sense, greater than any of the signs of God's presence described in the Old Testament or acted out in the rituals of the temple. Secondly, the dense reality of Christ's Eucharistic presence is fitting due to the intensity of Jesus' love. Aristotle said that the supreme sign of friendship is to want to live together with one's friends, and this is just what Jesus makes possible by giving us his very self in the Eucharist. The night before he died, Jesus told his disciples, "1 do not**

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**call you servants any longer.... 1 have called you friends" (John 15:15). Thomas implies that the Real Presence in the Eucharist is the seal and guarantee of that friendship with all the Lord's disciples across the ages.**

**The third objection to this question is worth examin­ing. The objector states that nobody can be simultaneously in many places. But the Body of Christ is present at the same time on many altars and in heaven. Therefore, the presence spoken of in the sacramental context must be merely a sign or a figure of the "real" one in heaven. In responding to this dilemma—which goes right back to Berengarius—Thomas makes a decisive distinction between Christ's bodily presence according to his "proper species" and that same bodily presence according to a spe­cies appropriate to the sacrament: a "sacramental species." "Proper species" is technical jargon for the ordinary ap­pearance of something. Thus, in his proper species, Christ is an embodied person of a particular height, weight, and color, existing "in" heaven, though we're not quite sure what this existence is like in a transcendent dimensional system. But this same embodied Christ can also become present according to a species, or appearance, that is alien to him—that is to say, according to a sacramental mode. In light of this distinction, Aquinas clarifies that the body of Christ is not in the sacrament of the Eucharist the way a body is ordinarily in a place, measured by its own dimensions and circumscribed by the contours of the space that it occupies. And thus, though we can say that Christ's body is on various altars at the same time, we shouldn't say that he is in various *places* at the same**

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**time, for this would be to confuse proper and sacramental modes of appearance. In a similar vein, Aquinas specifies that we shouldn't speak of carrying around the body of Christ when we process with the Eucharist or of imprison­ing Jesus when we put the sacramental elements in the tabernacle. To do so would be to conflate these two basic modes of presence. And this is why Thomas Aquinas and the mainstream of the Catholic tradition remain uneasy with that section of the anti-Berengarian oath that speaks of crunching Christ's body with one's teeth. In Aquinas' more precise language, when one consumes the Eucharist, one crunches the accidents of the bread with the teeth, not the body of Christ, since Christ is being received substantially but according to his sacramental species, not his proper species.**

**This distinction helps to clear up a perhaps lingering doubt. At the outset of his analysis, Thomas said that sacraments are found in the genus of sign. So then, if the Eucharist is a sacrament, why should he balk at characterizing it as a sign or figure of the body of Christ? As we saw, a sign is that which points beyond itself to something else. This is true of the Eucharist inasmuch as the sacramental species of Christ indicates Christ in his proper species; there is still therefore a play of presence and absence in the Eucharist. Nevertheless, this particular sign has the unique capacity to contain perfectly (though hiddenly) that toward which it points. Whereas the other sacraments contain only the power of Christ (as we saw), the Eucharist uniquely contains Christ himself, in the**

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**full reality of his presence. And thus it is the chief of the sacramental signs.**

**Now, 1 realize that my reader might still be wondering how these distinctions really *explain* anything. Do they tell us *how* Christ is really present, when all the sensible evidence is that bread and wine are still rather massively there? Aquinas realized the pertinence of such questions, and this is why, in article 4 of question 75, he took up the language of the Fourth Lateran Council and attempted to articulate the Eucharistic change in terms of substance and accident. The specific question that he posed was the following: whether bread can be changed into the body of Christ. Having denied, for obvious reasons, that the change could be through some sort of ordinary local motion (the bread leaving and the body of Christ arriving), Thomas claims that the change takes place at the level of substance, that underlying and essentially invisible substrate that constitutes the deepest identity of a given thing. The substances of the bread and wine change into the substances of the Body and Blood of Jesus, even while the accidents (appearances) of bread and wine remain. This change, unlike anything that occurs in nature, is due to the extraordinary intensity of the divine power, which can reach, as it does in the act of creation, to the very roots of reality. The same God who made bread and wine from nothing and sustains them in existence from moment to moment can transform the deepest ontological centers of those things into something else. Then how do we explain the perdurance of the accidents, once their proper sub­stances have been changed? Once again, Thomas invokes**

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**the divine power. Though God customarily sustains acci­dents through their proper substances, he can, for his own purposes, suspend the secondary causality and sustain them directly himself. Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) said that, at the Eucharistic change, the bread and wine lose their independence as creatures and become, through God's power, pure signs of Christ's presence. They no longer point to themselves in any relevant sense, for they have become utterly transparent to the Christ who makes himself manifest through them.**

**If this talk of substance and accident still seems puzzling, 1 would suggest that we translate the terms into the more straightforward "reality" and "appearance." Practically every major philosopher of both the classical and modern periods makes some sort of distinction between what appears and what is. And we are familiar with this demarcation in our ordinary experience. For the most part, appearance and reality coincide ("If it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck..."); but there are many exceptions to that rule, times when we feel compelled to say, "1 know it looks that way, but appearances are deceptive." When one gazes at the moon from the vantage point of a speeding car, it can certainly appear as though the moon is moving rapidly across the sky, though we know that this is not in fact the case. Although it certainly looks as though the sun traverses the sky in the course of the day, we know that this is not true, in substance. Or when we look into the distant heavens on a clear night, and we see the tiny lights of the stars, it certainly seems that we are seeing something that is**

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**substantially there, but we know that this is false. In point of fact, we are looking into the distant past, for the light from those stars has reached our eyes only after traveling across many years. Or sometimes we make a judgment about someone's character based upon one encounter with him, only to discover, after coming to know him much better, that our original impression was quite false. We might subsequently tell a friend, "1 know he can *seem* that way, but he's really not." What these ordinary examples demonstrate is that reality is never simply reducible to appearance and that, at times, the deepest truth of things is revealed, not through what we see, but by what we hear from authoritative voices: a scientist, an astronomer, an experienced friend. Thomas Aquinas is arguing that, at the Eucharist, the appearances of bread and wine do not tell the deepest truth about what is really present and that, in point of fact, the authoritative word of Christ does. Let us return to Ratzinger's point. In light of his clarification, we can appreciate the eschatological significance of the doctrine of transubstantiation. The Eucharistic elements, fruit of the earth and the work of human hands, are not destroyed or annihilated through the power of Christ; rather, they are transfigured, elevated into vehicles for Christ's self-communication. In the letters of Paul, we find the mysterious observations that, at the culmination of the present age, God will be "all in all" (i Cor. 15:28) and that all people will come together in forming "the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). Could it be that the Eucharistic elements, transubstantiated into the Body and Blood of Jesus, are proleptic signs even now of what**

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**Christ intends for the whole of the universe? Could it be that, in them, we can see, however indistinctly, God's purpose in regard to even the humblest features of his creation? Perhaps, in light of this doctrine, we can begin to understand the mysterious words of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin that the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist signals the eschatological *transsubstantiation du monde* (the transubstantiation of the world).**

**Having explored the nature of the Eucharist, Thomas finally endeavors to explain its effects. The principal consequence of the Eucharist is grace, or a share in the divine life. Since it contains *ipse Christus* (Christ himself) and since Christ came into the world as the bearer of God's life, the Eucharist, above any other sacrament or sign, contains and causes grace. This is powerfully symbolized, Thomas suggests, in the appearances of bread and wine that remain after the transubstantiation. Just as food sustains, repairs, and delights the body, so the Eucharist sustains, repairs, and delights the soul. Without the Body and Blood of Christ, in other words, the spiritual life in us would be compromised by sin, become atrophied and flattened out, and finally would fade away altogether. In article 4 of question 79, Thomas asks whether the Eu­charist remits venial sin, and he answers in terms of this master metaphor of food and drink. Just as food restores to the body that which is lost through everyday effort, so the Eucharist restores that which is drained away from us spiritually through ordinary, day-to-day sins. "Something is also lost daily of our spirituality from the heat of con­cupiscence through venial sins, which lessen the fervor of**

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**charity." Since it is Christ himself, who is nothing but the divine love, the Eucharist reignites in us that lost fervor; in short, it remits venial sin. We recall here the story of the conversion of Matthew. To the sacred banquet Jesus invited the sinful Matthew, and then in his wake there arrived a whole crowd of Matthew's partners in crime. The Eucharistic meal is the place where sinners are especially welcome, for it is the place where they will find precisely what they need. Why then, we might wonder, does Thomas contend that the Eucharist ought not to be received by someone in the state of mortal sin? By definition, mortal sin is a wrong that has so radically compromised one's relation to God that it has effectively killed the divine life in the one who commits it. Therefore, just as it would be foolish to give medicine to a dead person, it would be counterindicated, Thomas concludes, to offer the healing power of the Eucharist to one who is spiritually dead. In saying this, of course, he is only reiterating what St. Paul said to the Christians at Corinth. Commenting on those who receive the Eucharist unworthily, Paul said that they "eat and drink judgment against themselves" (i Cor. 11:29). 1 would like to say a word about the properly delightful quality of the Eucharist of which Thomas speaks. Even the dullest and least appetizing fare would suffice for the maintenance of life; but who among us doesn't enjoy a tasty and sensually appealing meal? So the Eucharist—in its sumptuous liturgical setting, surrounded by music, art, the Word of God, and the prayer of the community—does more than sustain the divine life in us. It delights us, as a foretaste of the heavenly banquet.**

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**SOME CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES TO THE REAL PRESENCE**

**Thomas Aquinas' synthetic approach to the Eucharist, which drew together the scriptural and patristic witness along with the finest philosophical insight of the time, proved a formidable intellectual edifice. Though it was challenged by the Protestant reformers in the sixteenth century, it was, in its essential structure, reaffirmed by the Council of Trent and successfully propagated through Catholic universities, seminaries, and pulpits well into modern times. It was only around the middle of the twentieth century that it was seriously challenged by Catholic theologians. Some complained that the focus on the category of substance led to an overly "thingified" understanding of the Eucharist, one that underplayed the dynamic and participative dimension of the sacrament. Others felt that the hyperstress on "real" presence led to an undervaluing of Christ's presence in other aspects of the liturgy and the life of the Church. Still others wor­ried that the constant reiteration of Thomas' doctrine led to a furthering of the rupture between Catholics and Protestants. Finally, and most importantly, some scholars disputed whether the idea of substance itself was philosophically coherent. In light of the discoveries of contemporary chemistry and physics, did it still make sense, they wondered, to speak about the Eucharist in terms of Aristotelian philosophy?**

**All of these concerns conduced toward a radical re-thinking and re-presentation of the Church's**

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**Eucharistic faith. Certain theologians began to use the terms "transignification" and "transfinalization" in place of the traditional "transubstantiation." By the first, they meant the fundamental shift in meaning that occurs in the Eucharistic context, whereby the bread and wine come to signify, in the midst of the community's ritual prayer, the body and blood of Jesus. By the second, they meant the change in the end or finality of the Eucharistic elements when they are prayed over at Mass: now they are no longer merely for the purpose of nourishing the body or expressing the oneness of the community; rather, their deepest purpose is to point to Christ and the eschatological fulfillment of the Church. These approaches—relatively psychological, symbolic, subjectivistic—avoided the physicalism of which we just spoke and seemed to make the Eucharistic mystery more accessible to a modern au­dience. However, almost immediately, strong objections were raised. Many of the critics of transignification and transfinalization saw the new theories as simply slightly revised versions of the discredited Berengarian expla­nation. If the Eucharistic change involves only a shift in the meaning that the worshiping community assigns to the bread and wine, then the dense objectivity of Christ's presence seemed fatally compromised. If it were only a matter of a given community "deeming" the bread and wine to be something else (much as Americans deem a tri-colored cloth to be representative of the nation), then the community would come to control the Eucharist rather than vice versa. In his encyclical letter *Mysterium Fidei,* Pope Paul VI acknowledged a limited legitimacy to the**

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**new language, but insisted that any change in meaning and finality had to be rooted in a more elemental change in being, hence in a transubstantiation.**

**In the wake of this debate, a number of theologians put forward, with the help of both biblical scholarship and con­temporary philosophical research, a theory that reconciled the classical teaching with the best elements of the new approach. Much of this centered around a consideration of the power of the divine word. The philosophers J.L. Austin and Ludwig Wittgenstein reminded us that our words can function not only descriptively but performatively as well. On the one hand, the words "That house is blue" indicate a state of affairs, but the words "You're fired," when uttered by one's superior, do not simply point out what is the case; they change what is the case. Similarly, if a properly uniformed and deputed officer of the law were to say to you, "You're under arrest," you would, in fact, be under arrest, precisely through the power of his pronouncement. Or if a properly designated umpire were to shout, "You're out!" as a Major League Baseball player slid into third base, the unfortunate player would, whether he liked it or not, be out, the umpire's verbal expression having objectively changed the flow of the game. We can, in Austin's famous phrase, "do things with words."**

**In light of this clarification about the performative  
quality of human words, theologians began to consider  
anew the power of the divine word. In the book of Gen­  
esis, we hear that creation occurred through a series of  
divine speech-acts: "God said, 'Let there be light'; and  
there was light God said, 'Let the waters under the**

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**sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.' And it was so.... And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.' And it was so" (Gen. 1:3,9,24). God is not describing a preexisting state of affairs; he is, through his speech, bringing things into being. St. John, of course, reiterates this idea when in the prologue to his Gospel he says, "In**

**the beginning was the Word He was in the beginning**

**with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being" (John 1:1-3). In the book of the prophet Isaiah, we find the same idea expressed in beautifully poetic form. Speaking the words of Yahweh, Isaiah says, "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth... so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which 1 purpose, and succeed in the thing for which 1 sent it" (lsa. 55:10-11). Again, in the biblical reading, God's word does not so much describe as *achieve.* Thomas Aquinas gave more philosophical expression to this notion when he said that God does not know things because they exist (as we do) but rather that things exist because God knows them. Contemporary Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner summed up this line of thought, commenting, "The word of God is the salutary word which brings with it what it affirms."**

**Now, that very word by which God creates the cosmos became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14). This means**

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**that Jesus is (as we have already indicated) not simply a holy man whose words describe God; he is himself the divine word that effects what it says. And so at the height of a terrible storm on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus stood up in the boat, "rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!"' and "the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm" (Mark 4:39). And standing before the tomb of his friend who had been interred for four days, Jesus said in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out," and "the dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth" (John 11:43-44). And kneeling in front of a small girl lying dead in her room, Jesus said, "'Talitha cum,' which means, 'Little girl, get up!' And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about" (Mark 5:41-42). Again and again, the Gospel writers show us how Jesus' words are efficacious and transformative, producing what they pronounce. Again and again, they present Jesus himself as the incarnation of the creative word of Genesis and of that Isaian word which does not return without accomplishing its purpose. The night before he died, Jesus performed his most extraordinary word-act. Gathered with the TWelve for a Passover supper, he "took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.' Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins'" (Matt. 26:26-28). If he were an ordinary prophet or teacher, these powerful words, spoken the night before his death, would have burned themselves**

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**into the consciousness of his followers and carried enor­mous symbolic resonance. They might even have changed his disciples profoundly at the spiritual and psychological level. But Jesus was not one prophet among many; he was the incarnate Word of God. Therefore, his words had the power to create, to effect reality at the deepest possible level. Since what he says is, the words "This is my body" and "This is my blood" effectively change the bread and wine into his Body and Blood. Like all divine utterances, they *produce* what they say. The same Word that spoke the elements of bread and wine into existence in the first place now speaks them into a new mode of being, changing them into the bearers of Christ's sacramental presence. For Catholic theology, this efficacious word of Christ has not passed out of existence or evanesced into a vague historical memory. Rather, it endures in the Church: in its preaching, its teaching, its sacraments, and above all in the Eucharistic liturgy. When the priest at Mass greets the people, he does not do so in his own name, and when he preaches, he is not sharing his private opinions. In both cases, he is allowing the word of Jesus to speak through his words. Nowhere is this transparency of the priest clearer than when he prays the so-called "institution narrative" at the heart of the Eucharistic Prayer. Addressing God the Father, he recalls what Jesus did the night before he died: Jesus "took bread and, giving thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples.... In a similar way ... he took the chalice and, once more giving thanks, he gave it to his disciples ..." But then he slips into the very words of Jesus: "This is *my* Body, which will be given up for you—**

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**This is the chalice of *my* Blood, the Blood of the new and eternal covenant." At that moment, the consecrating priest is most fully acting *in persona Christi* (in the person of Christ), effacing himself utterly and permitting the same divine word that transformed bread and wine long ago to transform them now.**

**What happens, therefore (and here we see the value of the newer approaches), is that the bread and wine have indeed been transignified and transfinalized, but the shift in meaning has not happened through any puny human effort but through the divine word. And this entails, as we've been arguing, a change at the level of being. In this precise sense, then, transignification and transubstantiation do indeed coincide. Rahner points out that the traditional teaching of the Church confirms this coincidence when it reminds us that the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist is a consequence of the power of the word.**

**The Council of Florence says expressly that "the form of this sacrament [the Eucharist] is the words of the Savior with which he *effected [made]* this sacrament," and the Council of Trent says that Christ becomes present in the Eucharistic elements *ex vi verborum* (by the power of the words). Rahner specifies that even the Eucharistic elements, preserved in the tabernacle for Adoration, would not really be the sacramental species if they were not being constantly determined by the words of consecration, the words of explanation, which were pronounced over them. Even in the silence of the tabernacle, a divine word is being spoken.**

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**One of the most insightful contemporary commenta­tors on the Eucharist is the Catholic philosopher Robert Sokolowski, and 1 would like to conclude this section with a brief consideration of his subtle reflections on the Real Presence. Sokolowski argues that there are three ways to think about the relationship between spirit and matter. According to the first, which he calls "Darwinian," matter is really all that there is, and what we call "spirit" is simply an epiphenomenon of matter. In this Darwinian reading, mind and will, for example, are only refined brain functions. A second way to understand the relationship between the two realities is what he characterizes as the "Aristotelian." In this view, spirit and matter exist more or less side by side and interact with one another in complex ways. Think, for instance, of the standard view of how body and soul relate to each other. But the third model, which Sokolowski calls "creationist" or "biblical," holds to the precedence of spirit over matter. According to this mode of interpretation, the properly spiritual—mind and will—preceded matter and can determine matter according to its purposes. Everything we said above about creation through the word is intelligible only in the context of this third framework. Problems occur in Eucharistic theology, Sokolowski maintains, when we try to think about the Eucharist in the context of either of the first two models. Within a Darwinian framework, the Real Presence is just so much nonsense, for matter is all that there is. Within an Aristotelian framework, the Real Presence comes to be thought of as a sort of inner-worldly change, some new and unprecedented way for**

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**finite natures—one spiritual and the other material—to relate to one another. But within the biblical context, things can make a bit more sense, for in this reading, God is not one nature among others, one being within the world, but rather the creator of the world, the ground of all finite things. And thus God can relate to matter in a noncompetitive way, becoming present through it without undermining it. The supreme instance of this noncompetitive involvement of God within creation is, of course, the Incarnation, and the Eucharist is nothing but a sacramental prolongation of the Incarnation. Thus, God can use the material as a vehicle for his presence without ceasing to be God and without overwhelming the matter that he uses. The Eucharist does not involve the supplanting of one finite nature by another—as though a tree becomes a leopard but continues to look and react like a tree—but the noncompetitive presence of God within an aspect of the nature that he has made. Thus, concludes Sokolowski, when the Church speaks of Christ being substantially present in the Eucharist even as the material appearances of bread and wine remain, it is assuming this uniquely biblical perspective on the relation of spirit and matter.**

**Both Rahner and Sokolowski maintain that the Real Presence in the Eucharist is dependent, finally, on the power of the Creator God. It is only through the word of this reality that lies outside of the limitations of the finite world that the Eucharistic change is possible. And it is precisely to this God, made manifest in the Incarnation and the Eucharist, that St. John, St. lrenaeus, St. John**

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**Chrysostom, Origen, Lanfranc, and St. Thomas Aquinas bore such eloquent witness.**

**"HERE WE HAVE NO LASTING CITY"**

**Earlier in this chapter, we saw that many of the Church Fathers characterized the Eucharist as food that effectively immortalizes those who consume it. They understood that if Christ is really present in the Eucharistic elements, the one who eats and drinks the Lord's Body and Blood becomes configured to Christ in a far more than meta­phorical way. The Eucharist, they concluded, Christifies and hence eternalizes. Now, again, if the Eucharist were no more than a symbol, this kind of language would be so much nonsense. But if the doctrine of the Real Presence is true, then this literal eternalization of the recipient of communion must be maintained.**

**But what does this transformation practically entail? It implies that the whole of one's life—body, psyche, emo­tions, spirit—becomes ordered to the eternal dimension, to the realm of God. It means that one's energies and interests, one's purposes and plans, are lifted out of a purely temporal context and given an entirely new spiritual valence. The Christified person knows that his life is not finally about him but about God; the Eucharistized person understands that her treasure is to be found above and not below. Wealth, pleasure, power, honor, success, titles, degrees, even friendships and family connections are all relativized as the high adventure of life with God opens up. The eternalized person can say with Paul, "It is no longer**

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**1 who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20), and "Here we have no lasting city" (Heb. 13:14).**

**The paradox is this: such a reconfiguration actually makes such people more rather than less effective and happy in this world. G.K. Chesterton said that when he was an agnostic and was convinced that he could be happy only through the use of this world's goods, he was actually miserable. But when he realized that he was not meant to be finally satisfied here below, he found, to his infinite surprise, that he became happy. Dorothy Day, the founder of the Catholic Worker movement, was one of the twentieth century's most radical advocates of social justice and peace—and this was *because* she was so passionately devoted to the Eucharist, *because* she had been, body and soul, immortalized through consuming the Real Presence of Jesus.**

**This is why 1 tell people to be very careful when they approach the Eucharist. Were the elements simply symbols—inventions of our own spiritual creativity and desire—they would pose no particular threat. But since they are the power and presence of God, they will change the one who consumes them. When the communicant says "Amen" and receives the proffered host and chalice, he'd better be prepared to live an eternal life.**

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