

Mysterium Fidei
The Eucharist, the Church, and Vatican II

Paul McPartlan

It is a great pleasure to address this 2015 National Meeting of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, and I am very grateful for the kind invitation. The overall theme this year is ‘The Church at Prayer: Faith Received, Fostered and Formed,’ and I am particularly delighted to have been asked to reflect with you on the relationship between the Eucharist and the Church. As we know, all of the Church’s prayer centers on the Eucharist. This weekly, and even daily, celebration is, indeed, the focal point of the Church’s life, the place where the Church is regularly renewed, *re-forged*, we might even say.

We can see this from many angles. The Church is the body of Christ, as St Paul teaches, and in the Eucharist we *receive* the body of Christ. St Augustine invited the early Christians to reflect on the significance of St Paul’s words to the Corinthians: ‘Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread’ (1Cor 10:17) — one bread, one body. If you are the body of Christ, he said, then it is your mystery that is there on the Lord’s table and that you receive. You hear it said, ‘The Body of Christ,’ and you reply ‘Amen’; well then, ‘be a member of the body of Christ,’ he said, ‘in order to make that Amen true.’ ‘Be what you see, and receive what you are.’¹ Receive what you are: famous and wonderful words! If, in the Eucharist, we receive what we are, then this surely is the celebration by which the Church lives; the Eucharist is the Church’s lifeline.

¹ St Augustine, *Sermo 272* (PL 38, 1247–1248).

Often nowadays we say that the Church is a communion, and that term once again points us to the Eucharist, where we actually *receive communion*. That is our regular term for receiving the Eucharist, but perhaps we suddenly see its deep significance. Communion, *koinonia*, is primarily the life of God himself, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the blessed Trinity, and as members of the body of Christ by the grace of the Holy Spirit we actually participate in the life of the Trinity, the primordial Holy Communion. By its very nature, that participation can only be sustained from above, by the regularly renewed *gift* of holy communion, that we receive in the Eucharist. Be what you see and receive what you are!

Turning to St Paul again, let us note that he says to the Thessalonians: ‘always be thankful’ (1Thess 5:18), *en panti eucharisteite*, in Greek, which shows the meaning of our word, Eucharist: it means *thanksgiving*. But more than that: if, as St Paul insists, thanksgiving is meant to be the attitude of Christians at all times — and we acknowledge that in our prefaces, ‘It is truly right and just, our duty and salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God’ — and we actually have a celebration that is called the Thanksgiving, namely the Eucharist, it would seem that that celebration must indeed be the heart and soul of the Church’s life, the source and the summit, as Vatican II said, significantly *both* in its constitution on the sacred liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (1963; hereafter, SC, n.10) and in its dogmatic constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (1964; hereafter, LG, n.11). This conjunction is one of many that show how closely knit those two constitutions actually are, which is only right and fitting, because the liturgy is the beginning and end of the Church’s life.

So, the link between the Eucharist and the Church is far closer and more intimate than it might seem at first. Perhaps we tend to think of the Eucharist as the bread and wine that are

transformed into the body and blood of Christ in the Mass, and of the Church as an international institution with the pope at its head; Eucharist and Church then indeed seem far apart. However, the biblical, patristic and liturgical renewal movements of the early 20th century taught us to expand our understanding of the Eucharist from just the elements to the whole celebration in which they are transformed. They are ‘God’s holy gifts for God’s holy people,’ as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) teaches, drawing on the Eastern liturgies (CCC 948); and those same movements taught us to think of the Church itself not primarily as a pyramid, as in medieval times, with the pope at the top, but as a communion of local churches, each of which gathers for the Eucharist around its bishop, all of the bishops being in communion with the Bishop of Rome in their midst. The Church is a ‘body of churches,’ a ‘*corpus Ecclesiarum*,’ said *Lumen Gentium* (LG 23). If we widen our understanding of Eucharist from the elements to the celebrating community, and focus our understanding of the Church on those local eucharistic communities around the bishop, rather than on the pyramid, Eucharist and Church begin to seem very close. Joseph Ratzinger went even further: ‘The Church is the celebration of the Eucharist,’ he said, and ‘the Eucharist is the Church; they do not simply stand side by side; they are one and the same; it is from there that everything else radiates.’²

That is a powerful programmatic summary of what is called eucharistic ecclesiology,³ which involves both a eucharistic understanding of the Church and an ecclesial understanding of

² Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. Sr Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), p.53. Translation amended to include the final clause, cf. Ratzinger, *Theologische Prinzipienlehre* (Munich: Erich Wewel, 1982), p.55.

³ See Paul McPartlan, *Sacrament of Salvation: An Introduction to Eucharistic Ecclesiology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995).

the Eucharist. Eucharistic ecclesiology draws strongly on the scriptures and the early Church, and it has been gathering momentum in recent decades, especially in the Catholic and Orthodox Churches,⁴ as a fruit of biblical, patristic and liturgical renewal. Vatican II gave a lot of support to eucharistic ecclesiology, after almost a millennium in which a pyramidal, institutional model of the Church predominated, and that development is full of implications, not least for ecumenism.

Being very specific, it has lots of implications for an understanding of the bishop's ministry, and this of course is of particular relevance to your work as diocesan liturgical commissions. The bishop is the lynchpin of eucharistic ecclesiology. Perhaps the most famous expression associated with eucharistic ecclesiology is 'the Eucharist makes the Church', a principle coined in the 1940s by the French Jesuit pioneer of Vatican II, Henri de Lubac (1896–1991).⁵ From the perspective of eucharistic ecclesiology, because the Eucharist makes the Church, the bishop, who presides over the local church, naturally presides also over the local Eucharist, because that is the very celebration that sustains and gives life to his people, his church. The local community is indeed a local church, with a certain fulness, not just a 'diocese', an administrative subdivision of something bigger; and the bishop is not just a manager, with

⁴ See Paul McPartlan, 'Catholic Learning and Orthodoxy — The Promise and Challenge of Eucharistic Ecclesiology', in Paul D. Murray, ed., *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp.160–175.

⁵ Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, trans. Gemma Simmonds CJ with Richard Price (London: SCM, 2006), p.88. See also, Henri de Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, trans. Michael Mason (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), pp.134, 152; and Paul McPartlan, *The Eucharist Makes the Church: Henri de Lubac and John Zizioulas in Dialogue* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993; new ed., Fairfax VA: Eastern Christian Publications, 2006).

juridical power received from the pope, he is ordained as bishop, and graced by the Holy Spirit to be the image of Christ in the midst of his people.

Vatican II made all of these points, starting in its very first document, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, where we read: ‘The bishop is to be considered as the High Priest of his flock from whom the life in Christ of his faithful is in some way derived and upon whom it in some way depends’; and ‘the principal manifestation of the Church’ is the ‘full, active participation of all God’s holy people’ in a given place in the celebration of the Eucharist, presided over by the bishop together with his presbyters and ministers (SC 41).⁶ Presbyters in parishes act in the bishop’s name, it said (SC 42); they are not free agents, but ‘cooperators’ with the bishop (LG 28), so we should imagine all priestly ministry as centered on the bishops.

Departing from the view of scholasticism that bishops were just priests with extra jurisdiction, and drawing instead on early sources such as the *Apostolic Tradition*, dating probably from the third century, *Lumen Gentium* solemnly taught that bishops are the Church’s primary priests, ordained to the ‘high priesthood,’⁷ ‘the fulness of the sacrament of orders,’ and that they receive all of their powers to sanctify, teach and govern from that sacrament, though they should of course exercise those powers in communion with the pope and with the episcopal college. They represent Christ himself, ‘teacher, shepherd and priest,’ in the midst of the faithful (LG 21), and are indeed to be thought of as ‘vicars ... of Christ’ (LG 27). *Lumen Gentium* specifically rejected the idea that they are ‘vicars of the Roman Pontiff’ (LG 27), as was often

⁶ Quotations from Vatican II documents are taken from Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II. The Conciliar and PostConciliar Documents* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1975).

⁷ See *The Apostolic Tradition*, ed. Paul F. Bradshaw, Maxwell E. Johnson, L. Edward Phillips (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 3.4-5 (p.30).

assumed beforehand, with the pyramid in mind, and it further banished the pyramid by expressly calling local communities around their bishops ‘churches’ (LG 26). Moreover, it strongly implied that the one Eucharist over which all the bishops preside in their different local churches is the deep-down reason for the collegiality that binds them to one another and to the bishop of Rome in caring for the Church as a whole, by giving its teaching on collegiality (cf. LG 22) immediately after its teaching on the ordination of bishops to the high priesthood (cf. LG 21).

I have dwelt quite a lot on the link between the bishop’s roles as shepherd and priest in eucharistic ecclesiology, but what of his ministry as teacher? The council emphasized that ‘preaching the Gospel has pride of place’ among the bishop’s tasks (LG 25); it is his first duty. However, preaching the Gospel is not an end in itself. The council taught that the Eucharist is also ‘the source and the summit of all preaching of the Gospel.’⁸ ‘The goal of apostolic endeavor,’ it said, ‘is that all who are made [children] of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of his Church, to take part in the Sacrifice and to eat the Lord’s Supper’ (SC 10). So, while the bishop’s first task is to preach the Gospel, it is the Eucharist that sustains his proclamation, and he preaches with the goal of gathering the faithful around the eucharistic table. So the Eucharist provides the frame within which not only his ministry of governance but also his ministry of proclamation can be understood. The bishop, of course, presides over the liturgy of the word in the very celebration of the Mass, and he preaches there to break the word for the faithful and to summon them to the table where he will then break bread for them. The one act flows into the other; the liturgy of the word and the liturgy of the Eucharist, ‘one single act of worship’ (SC 56). So, the Eucharist and the Church are intimately

⁸ Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*

linked, and the liturgy of the word is intrinsic to the celebration of the Eucharist. The bishop is the first proclaimer of the word, the prime celebrant of the Eucharist, and the one who presides over the local community. Benefitting from the work of pioneers such as de Lubac, the council renewed those fundamental connections.

So, local eucharistic communities around their bishops are the living cells of the Church, in which the very life of the Church is constantly renewed. We *receive* the body of Christ in order to *be* the body of Christ; we *receive* communion in order to *be* a communion. I suggested above that we might even say that in the Eucharist the Church is *re-forged*, and I had in mind a memorable phrase of Henri de Lubac: ‘we must all be molten,’ he said, ‘in that crucible of unity which is the Eucharist.’⁹ And let us realize that to say that we regularly *gather* for the Eucharist is only half of the story, because it is just as true to say that it is from the Eucharist that we are regularly *sent out* again into the world on mission: *Ite missa est*. That sending is so intrinsic to the meaning of the celebration that it has given the Eucharist its regular Catholic name, ‘the Mass.’¹⁰ So, we gather and we go, we gather and we go; that is the regular heartbeat of a eucharistic Church.

Mysterium Fidei

Having succeeded Saint John XXIII as pope in 1963, it was Blessed Paul VI who steered the council to its successful conclusion. When he beatified him in October 2014, Pope Francis

(1965), n.5.

⁹ De Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, p.148.

¹⁰ See Pope Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis* (2007), nn.51, 55, 84.

referred to Pope Paul as ‘the great helmsman of the Council’, and thanked him for his ‘humble and prophetic witness of love for Christ and his Church’.¹¹ Among his recent predecessors, it is sometimes thought that Pope Francis has a particular regard for Paul VI. He quoted Pope Paul’s address to the United Nations when he himself spoke there on 25 September 2015. Paul VI had a passion for ecclesiology, understanding the Church and its mission, and his first, programmatic encyclical letter, *Ecclesiam Suam* (1964), presented a vision of the Church constantly in dialogue, both with those outside and also within itself. That is a vision close to the heart of Pope Francis, too, dialogue being the way of Christ himself.¹² Paul VI was deeply aware of the new currents in ecclesiology associated with the pre-conciliar renewal movements. De Lubac’s book, *Méditation sur l’Eglise*, published in 1953, was a prime example. However, because de Lubac, like so many of the pioneers of renewal, was under a cloud of suspicion at that time, his book could not be translated in Rome. It was Archbishop Giovanni Battista Montini of Milan, the future Paul VI, who arranged for the publication of the book in Italian, and then distributed copies to his priests. It was said to be his own bedside reading. No other book foreshadows the council’s teaching in *Lumen Gentium*, a decade later, as much as that book of de Lubac, known in English as *The Splendor of the Church*.¹³

On 3 September, 1965, less than two weeks before he opened the final session of Vatican

¹¹ Pope Francis, Homily at the Mass of Beatification of Pope Paul VI, 19 October, 2014.

¹² See Pope Francis, Address to Bishops of the United States of America, St Matthew’s Cathedral, Washington DC, 23 September 2015.

¹³ See above, note 5. For further indications of Pope Paul’s esteem for de Lubac, see Karl Heinz Neufeld, ‘In the Service of the Council’, in René Latourelle, ed., *Vatican II: Assessments and Perspectives, Twenty-Five Years After (1962–1987)*, vol.1 (1988), pp.74-105, here at pp.86 & 101, note 30; and p.94.

II on 14 September, Pope Paul issued his third encyclical letter, *Mysterium Fidei* (hereafter, MF), ‘On the Holy Eucharist.’ So, this year marks the fiftieth anniversary not only of the closing of the council, but also of the publication of this major text, and it seems very appropriate to look at it afresh in this paper, as we consider the relationship between the Church and the Eucharist, because although *Mysterium Fidei* is mainly remembered for its rejection of certain ideas then being offered to explain the eucharistic change of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, its scope was actually much broader than that. Paul VI wanted to reinforce some of the major lines of the council’s teaching about the Church and its saving mission in the world, and for him that teaching hinged upon a proper understanding of the Eucharist.

Pope Paul indicated that the encyclical was prompted by ‘a number of reasons for serious pastoral concern and anxiety’ (MF 9). Clearly showing the influence of de Lubac, he stressed that the effect of the Eucharist is ‘the unity of the Mystical Body’ (MF 44; cf. 70); ‘through sharing in the Body of Christ [we] become one body’ (MF 73), he said (very Augustinian!). Nevertheless, he insisted that private Masses (by which, however, he did not mean solitary celebrations, cf. MF 32) were not to be disparaged. More significantly, with repeated reference to the teaching of the Council of Trent (1545-63) that there is a ‘marvelous conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the Body and the whole substance of the wine into the Blood of Christ’ in the Mass, he rejected two explanations of transubstantiation that were then being offered, in terms of ‘transignification’ and ‘transfinalisation,’ respectively, as inadequate (MF 11; cf. 3-4, 24, 44, 53, 72).

The closely related ideas of ‘transignification’ and ‘transfinalisation’ are particularly

associated with Edward Schillebeeckx (1914–2009),¹⁴ and to some extent with Karl Rahner (1904–84), also. In a paper originally delivered late in 1965, shortly after the publication of *Mysterium Fidei*, Schillebeeckx said that it was J. de Baciocchi who, in 1959, had first used the word ‘transfinalisation’ to explain the eucharistic change, as follows: ‘the meaning and end of the ordinary bread and wine are radically and, in this sense, substantially changed by consecration in the eucharistic mystery: ordinary bread and wine no longer remain, but instead there is the sacramental gift of the living, glorified Christ’.¹⁵ The whole dispute, of course, hinges on whether it is indeed adequate to interpret ‘substantially’ *in that sense*, that is, in terms of a radical change of ‘meaning and end.’ Pope Paul VI clearly believed that it wasn’t.

Schillebeeckx ended his paper by quoting the encyclical and claiming that it actually endorsed transfinalisation and transignification as he understood the terms. The quote was as follows:

¹⁴ See Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Eucharist* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968), especially pp.107–151. The following comment by Schillebeeckx indicates the context of the encyclical: ‘The years 1964 and 1965 marked the beginning of a new phase in the reinterpretation of Christ’s real presence in the Eucharist.... [I]t was then that the new ideas which had been developing in different countries, especially during the ten years following the publication of *Humani Generis* [encyclical letter of Pope Pius XII] in 1950, became widely known in the Church as a whole’ (*The Eucharist*, p.114).

¹⁵ Edward Schillebeeckx, ‘Transubstantiation, Transfinalization, Transignification’, in R. Kevin Seasoltz, *Living Bread, Saving Cup: Readings on the Eucharist* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1987), pp.175–189, here at 180. See, *The Eucharist*, pp.108–121, for a detailed account of the new formulations of de Baciocchi and others.

After transubstantiation has taken place, the species of bread and wine undoubtedly take on a new meaning and a new finality, for they no longer remain ordinary bread and ordinary drink, but become the sign of something sacred, and the sign of a spiritual food. However, the reason they take on the new significance and this new finality is simply because they contain a new 'reality' which we may justly term ontological.¹⁶

¹⁶ *Mysterium Fidei*, 46, as quoted in Schillebeeckx, 'Transubstantiation, Transfinalisation, Transignification', p.189. The wording is slightly but not substantially different from that of the English translation on the Vatican website, which is used in this paper.

Schillebeeckx commented: ‘In other words, the encyclical admits transfinalisation and transignification on condition that they are not considered as an extrinsic designation or as a peripheral change, but rather as having a profound and ontological content.’¹⁷ However, that is patently not the meaning of Pope Paul’s statement. He says that the species of bread and wine take on a new significance and finality because an ontological change has taken place, not that the new significance and finality themselves constitute the ontological change, as Schillebeeckx wished to claim. In short, Paul VI asserted that transubstantiation meant something more than simply a change, however radical, in the meaning and finality of the bread and wine. It meant a change in the actual reality (substance) of the bread and wine. Schillebeeckx was seemingly operating with a different ontology, and Paul VI did not find it adequate. Ontology for him meant what something objectively *was*, not simply its meaning or finality.¹⁸

Rahner enters the picture, even though he did not personally use either of the disputed terms, because, in an article on ‘The Presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper,’ first published in 1958, he proposed a ‘thesis’ to which Schillebeeckx favorably referred in his paper. Acknowledging that there was some ‘risk’ in his view and that probably not all Catholic theologians would agree with him,¹⁹ Rahner suggested that ‘the dogma of transubstantiation ... is

¹⁷ ‘Transubstantiation, Transfinalisation, Transignification’, p.189.

¹⁸ A proper appraisal of Schillebeeckx, however, needs also to bear in mind his affirmation that ‘I cannot personally be satisfied with a *purely* phenomenological interpretation without metaphysical density. Reality is not man’s handiwork — in this sense, realism is essential to the Christian faith. In my reinterpretation of the Tridentine datum, then, I can never rest content simply with an appeal to a human *giving of meaning alone*, even if this is situated within faith’ (*The Eucharist*, pp.150–151; italics in original).

¹⁹ Karl Rahner, ‘The Presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper’, later published in *Theological Investigations*, vol.4, trans. Kevin Smyth (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966), pp.287–311, here at 300.

a logical and not an ontic explanation of the words of Christ', by which he meant that it simply expresses what Christ said, namely 'this is my body' and 'this is my blood', without venturing to explain how that is so: 'the doctrine of transubstantiation tells me no more than do the words of Christ, when I take them seriously.'²⁰ In other words, the doctrine did not impose a particular explanation of the change; it simply asserted the change itself.

While it is true that Trent primarily wished to emphasize the change in the bread and wine, a change 'most fittingly [*aptissime*]' expressed by the idea of transubstantiation, as it said,²¹ it is nevertheless clearly the case that Trent also thought that 'substance' was indeed the proper category to consider when describing the change. So, while no particular interpretation was necessarily required, which is why Schillebeeckx felt free to offer his own interpretation, only an interpretation consistent with the weightiness of a change of 'substance' could be regarded as sufficient, and Paul VI did not regard transfinalisation and transignification as sufficiently weighty.

But there was more to the encyclical, as I mentioned above. What were the other major themes? Because of the substantial change of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, Pope Paul emphasized the value and importance of eucharistic worship (MF 55-62) and devotion (MF 63-67), highlighting that the Church has always continued to venerate the eucharistic hosts after Mass is ended (MF 56; cf. 11). He also stressed the absolute necessity of recognising the sacrificial aspect of the Eucharist, again in accord with the teaching of Trent (MF 4; cf. 27, 29, 30, 32, 33), and, drawing on the teaching of the Fathers, reiterated at Vatican II (cf.

²⁰ Rahner, 'The Presence of Christ', p.302; cf. Schillebeeckx, 'Transubstantiation, Transfinalisation, Transignification', p.179.

²¹ Council of Trent, Decree on the Most Holy Eucharist (1551), canon 2 (DS 1652).

LG 11), he gave a broad ecclesial interpretation of that sacrificial dimension: ‘the whole Church plays the role of priest and victim along with Christ, offering the Sacrifice of the Mass and itself completely offered in it’ (MF 31). He notably added that he was ‘filled with an earnest desire to see this teaching explained over and over until it takes deep root in the hearts of the faithful’ (MF 31).

In various ways, therefore, and with some urgency, Blessed Paul VI linked the Eucharist to the mystery of the Church. I would like to give some further consideration to that linkage, historically and theologically, then to consider the sacramental and sacrificial aspects of the Eucharist, and then finally to reflect on the idea Pope Paul so loved of the whole Church offering the sacrifice.

Church and Eucharist

Pope Paul mentions Berengar of Tours (c.999–1088), ‘who gave in to certain difficulties raised by human reasoning and first dared to deny the Eucharistic conversion’ (MF 52). The controversy surrounding Berengar, who was twice called to Rome to recant his views (in 1059 and 1079, respectively), had a profound and lasting effect on eucharistic doctrine and ecclesiology in the West, most fully analysed by de Lubac in his celebrated book, *Corpus Mysticum*.²² De Lubac helpfully explains that the term ‘body of Christ’ can refer to three things: Christ himself, the Eucharist, and the Church, respectively, and that the Fathers of the Church throughout the first millennium delighted in exploring the doctrine of the *corpus triforme*, and the interconnections of the three meanings, whereby bread and wine are changed in the Eucharist

²² See above, note 5. *Corpus Mysticum* was originally published in 1944, with a second edition in

into the body and blood of Christ, so that the faithful might then receive and be transformed into the Body of Christ themselves. Hence, ‘the Eucharist makes the Church.’ The Eucharist was the sacramental or *mystical* body of Christ, a gift for the faithful in this life, by which they were transformed into the true and lasting body of Christ that is the Church. The patristic use of *corpus mysticum* and *corpus verum* to refer to the Eucharist and the Church, respectively, should be noted here, because the terminology was reversed after the Berengarian controversy, and the use still today of the changed terminology can block our grasp of patristic teaching.

Because Berengar misunderstood ‘mystical’ in reference to the Eucharist — which originally meant that Christ was really present but sacramentally or *mystically* — to mean that Christ was not really present, he was required to take an oath by Pope Gregory VII acknowledging that the eucharistic bread and wine are ‘substantially changed into the true and proper and lifegiving flesh and blood of Jesus Christ our Lord, and that after the consecration they are the true body of Christ ... and the true blood of Christ’ (MF 52). That profession (in 1079) foreshadowed the teaching of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215²³ (and of course also of the Council of Trent later²⁴) on transubstantiation, and it also showed the change of terminology that resulted from the need to oppose Berengar and to ensure proper eucharistic understanding: the bread and wine become the *true* body and blood of Christ (hence, *Ave verum corpus*), and the Church began to assume the alternative title of the ‘mystical body.’

Scholastic theology, which began around that time, primarily concentrated on the change

1949.

²³ Fourth Lateran Council (1215), Definition against the Albigensians and Cathars (DS 802).

²⁴ Council of Trent, Decree on the Most Holy Eucharist (1551), chap.4 (DS 1642) and canon 2 (DS 1652).

in the eucharistic elements, and an unfortunate consequence was the neglect and eventual forgetting of the further aspect whereby the faithful receive the transformed elements and, thus, the Eucharist makes the Church. Writing also in 1965, Joseph Ratzinger commented:

It may well be said that the separation of the doctrine of the eucharist and ecclesiology, which can be noted from the eleventh and twelfth centuries onwards, represents one of the most unfortunate pages of medieval theology ... because both thereby lost their centre. A doctrine of the Eucharist that is not related to the community of the Church misses its essence as does an ecclesiology that is not conceived with the eucharist as its centre.²⁵

²⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, 'The Pastoral Implications of Episcopal Collegiality', *Concilium*, vol.1, no.1 (1965), pp.20–34, here at 28.

Like de Lubac, Ratzinger wanted to restore the full patristic understanding of the Eucharist, augmenting the rather restricted focus simply on the change in the elements with an appreciation of the building up of the Church by the reception of those elements. They both wanted the second half of the eucharistic mystery, so to speak, to receive as much attention as the first. Indeed, it might well be said that it is only if we understand that the purpose of the Eucharist is to make the Church, to transform human beings into the body of Christ, that we will understand why the elements themselves are truly transformed into the body and blood of Christ. As de Lubac said, so simply and profoundly: ‘Eucharistic realism and ecclesial realism ... support one another, each is the guarantee of the other.’²⁶ One can imagine that phrase being in the mind of Paul VI as he firmly reiterated the doctrine of transubstantiation in the encyclical.

By the time that Ratzinger was writing, Vatican II had already reaped the fruits of the recovery of patristic doctrine by de Lubac and others. There are many places in which it teaches that the Eucharist makes the Church, not least in LG 26 where Pope St Leo is quoted: ‘the sharing in the body and blood of Christ has no other effect than to accomplish our transformation into that which we receive.’²⁷ Pope Paul VI happily reiterated that conciliar teaching in his encyclical, convinced, no doubt, that it was the key to the renewal of the Church for its mission in the modern world, which was the fundamental purpose of the council itself.

Sacrament and Sacrifice

The harmful separation between the doctrine of the Eucharist and ecclesiology around the

²⁶ De Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, p.251.

²⁷ Pope St Leo, Martyr, *Sermo* 63, 7 (PL 54, 357C); cf. also LG 3, 7, 11.

start of the second millennium²⁸ led to another damaging separation, between the sacramental and sacrificial aspects of the Eucharist. Transubstantiation emphasized the sacramental aspect of the Eucharist, the fact that bread and wine are transformed into the body and blood of Christ. However, the Eucharist also has a sacrificial aspect, which Vatican II expressed as follows: Christ instituted the ‘eucharistic sacrifice’ at the Last Supper ‘in order to perpetuate his sacrifice of the Cross throughout the ages until he should come again’ (SC 47). Unless those two aspects are held strictly together, there is a serious danger that it may be thought that what happens in the Mass is that Christ is made sacramentally present by the power of the priest through transubstantiation and then sacrificed again by the priest to God the Father, violating the clear scriptural teaching that Christ offered the sacrifice of himself ‘once for all’ on the cross (Heb 7:27; 9:12, 26; 10:10). It was never Catholic teaching that the Mass was a repetition of the sacrifice of Calvary, but that was an impression that could be given, particularly since the Mass as sacrament and the Mass as sacrifice were now routinely treated as separate topics in Catholic theology, and it led to the (equally unscriptural) Protestant rejection of any sacrificial dimension of the Eucharist at the time of the Reformation, several centuries later.

Ratzinger details the consequences of the initial separation mentioned above. Once the Eucharist and the Church began to be treated separately in ‘the Latin West’, the Eucharist became just one of seven sacraments (first defined as such by the Second Council of Lyons in 1274),²⁹ ‘one liturgical act among others, no longer the encompassing orbit and dynamic centre of ecclesial existence per se.’ Tellingly, he adds:

²⁸ See also, McPartlan, *Sacrament of Salvation*, chap.3.

²⁹ See DS 860.

In consequence, the Eucharist itself was fragmented into a variety of loosely related rites: sacrifice, worship, cultic meal.... The pneumatic character of the remembrance that produced presence was dimmed; the linking of the whole sacramental event to the oneness of the crucified and risen Lord was overshadowed by the emergence of a plurality of separate sacrificial rites.³⁰

Trent, which affirmed that the one sacrifice of the Cross is ‘re-enacted’ (not *repeated*) in the Mass (cf. MF 27), nevertheless unfortunately perpetuated the problematic separation of doctrine on the Mass as sacrament and the Mass as sacrifice, respectively, by issuing its Decree on the Most Holy Eucharist, dealing with the sacramental aspect, in 1551, and its Decree on the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass eleven years later in 1562. While they reaffirmed vital individual points of Catholic doctrine, the very separation of the decrees prevented the fundamental reintegration of sacrament and sacrifice that was needed to respond in depth, and truly scripturally, to the challenge of the Reformers. Ratzinger’s mention of ‘the pneumatic character of the remembrance that produced presence’ serves to indicate the crucial role of the Holy Spirit in the eucharistic mystery, also, and the importance of pneumatology for the integration of sacrament and sacrifice in eucharistic doctrine. The long-standing weakness of pneumatology in the Christian West, now being remedied thanks not least to access to the writings of the Greek and Syriac Fathers and ecumenical dialogue with the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches, must be regarded as another historic factor hampering eucharistic understanding and theological consensus.

³⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology. Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. Sr Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press,), pp.254–255.

There were significant efforts to reintegrate sacrament and sacrifice in Catholic eucharistic theology in the decades prior to Vatican II,³¹ and the council itself notably pointed in that direction by teaching that ‘the life of Christ is communicated to those who believe and who, through the sacraments, are united in a hidden and real way to Christ in his passion and glorification’ (LG 7). The Eucharist, in particular, unites the faithful to Christ in the paschal mystery of his Cross and resurrection, and it is properly understood as a *sacramental sacrifice*.³²

This is readily understood by reference to the scriptures. Christ who is really present in the Eucharist is Christ as he is today (cf. MF 45), risen and glorious, the living Lord, who still bears the marks of his sacrifice. After the resurrection, his body still has the marks of the nails in his hands and the spear in his side (cf. Jn 20:19-29), no longer as wounds, we might say, but as trophies of his victory, carried for evermore. The Letter to the Hebrews teaches that Christ has now entered the heavenly sanctuary where, as High Priest, he makes intercession for us in the power of his ‘once for all’ sacrifice (Heb 5:1-10; 7:23-25, 26-28; 8:1-2; 9:11-14), bearing his precious blood ‘that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel’ (Heb 12:24) before the throne of God; and the victorious Lamb of God seen by John in the heavenly visions described in the Book of Revelation ‘bore the marks of having been slain’ (Rev 5:6; see verses 7–14, also). The Letter to the Hebrews and the Book of Revelation both most likely reflect the eucharistic experience of the early Church: in the Eucharist, it is Christ in the power of his one sacrifice, remembered and celebrated for evermore in heaven, who is really present. Thus it is that as soon

³¹ See, e.g., the work of de Lubac’s Jesuit confrere, Yves de Montcheuil, *Mélanges Théologiques* (Paris: Aubier, 1951), Part 1, ch.2: ‘L’unité du sacrifice et du sacrement dans l’Eucharistie’.

³² See de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, pp.58, 67.

as we encounter him, liturgically, sacramentally, mystically, we encounter his sacrifice, also.³³ As Pope St John Paul II taught in his encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2003; hereafter, EDE), the Mass involves ‘the sacramental re-presentation of Christ's sacrifice, crowned by the resurrection’.³⁴

It may be said that, though *Mysterium Fidei* strongly emphasises both the sacramental and the sacrificial aspects of the Eucharist (see the references given earlier), the integration of those aspects is not as apparent as it is in the later encyclical of Pope John Paul. Pope Paul certainly indicates that those aspects must be held together — ‘both Sacrifice and Sacrament pertain to the same mystery and cannot be separated from each other’, ‘[the Lord] re-presents the sacrifice of the Cross and applies its salvific power at the moment when he becomes sacramentally present’ (MF 34) — but, as was said above, pneumatology plays a crucial role in the integration of those aspects, and the fact is that, in a rather characteristically Western way, *Mysterium Fidei* barely mentions the Holy Spirit (cf. MF 8, 24, 35). Pope Paul and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople initiated the remarkable progress towards reconciliation between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches of recent times by lifting the mutual anathemas from 1054 on 7 December 1965, just three months after *Mysterium Fidei*, and in the encyclical Pope Paul cited many Eastern Fathers, and joyfully said to the Eastern Churches, ‘your belief in the Eucharist ... is ours as well’ (MF 74). However, the pneumatological aspect of Eastern belief is not reflected there. In contrast, four ecumenical decades later, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* made some striking references to the role of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist. For example, it quoted St Ephrem the Syrian: ‘He

³³ For a fuller account, see McPartlan, *Sacrament of Salvation*, chap.1.

³⁴ Pope St John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2003), n.15.

called the bread his living body and he filled it with himself and his Spirit.... He who eats it with faith, eats Fire and Spirit.... Take and eat this, all of you, and eat with it the Holy Spirit. For it is truly my body and whoever eats it will have eternal life.’³⁵

The Church as Priest and Victim

If the faithful receive the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist, the Spirit who unites them with Christ and with one another in communion (cf. 2Cor 13:13), and if the Spirit is the key to holding together the sacramental and sacrificial aspects of the Eucharist, then we can surely say that a stronger pneumatology would serve to consolidate the powerful point that Pope Paul, most of all, it seems, wished to make in his encyclical, namely that in the Eucharist Christ, who is both priest and victim, draws the whole Church to himself such that she too and all of her members become priest and victim along with him. He refers to this as a ‘wondrous doctrine’ of the Fathers of the Church, particularly citing St Augustine’s famous expression of it in *The City of God* (MF 31, note 24),³⁶ and we might well say that this remarkable idea synthesizes all of the aspects of the Eucharist already mentioned: in the sacramental celebration of the Eucharist, Christ unites the Church to himself, not in a static way but in the very dynamism of his sacrificial self-gift to his Father, so that we are taken up to the very throne of God ‘through him and with him and in him, ... in the unity of the Holy Spirit,’ as the doxology proclaims in every Mass.

³⁵ EDE 17; quotation from St Ephrem the Syrian, *Sermo IV in Hebdomadam Sanctam*: CSCO 413/Syr. 182, 55.

³⁶ Pope Benedict XVI refers to the same passage from St Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, X, 6 (PL 41, 284) in *Sacramentum Caritatis*, n.70, and gives the following quote: ‘this is the sacrifice of Christians: that we, though many, are one body in Christ’. ‘The Church celebrates this mystery in the sacrament of the altar, as the faithful know, and there she shows them clearly that in what is offered, she herself is offered.’

Pope Paul speaks with great conviction about this teaching, convinced, as he says, that it is ‘a most effective means ... of extolling the dignity of all the faithful, and of spurring them on to reach the heights of sanctity’ (MF 31). He thereby evokes two of the great themes of *Lumen Gentium*, namely the idea of the Church as the people of God, all of whom are baptised into Christ and share, with a ‘common dignity’ (LG 32), in his threefold office as prophet, priest, and king (cf. LG 9–18, 31–32), and the idea of the universal call to holiness in the Church (cf. LG 39–42), and he strikingly integrates them, indicating that the universal way to holiness is actually by priestly sacrifice: ‘the heights of sanctity’ are reached by ‘the total and generous offering of oneself to the service of the Divine Majesty’ (MF 31). Pope Paul emphasizes that ‘the distinction between the universal priesthood [of all the baptized] and the hierarchical priesthood [of those ordained as bishop or priest]’ (MF 31, quoting LG 10) has to be maintained ‘in a proper way’ (MF 31), but he clearly wants to indicate what that proper way actually is. *Lumen Gentium* teaches that the two priesthoods are ‘ordered one to another’ (LG 10), and that means that for the Church to be healthy in its life and mission *both* priesthoods need to be functioning well, in close interaction.

In the Eucharist, the ordained bishop or priest renews the one sacrifice of Christ at the altar, and the faithful, ‘by virtue of their royal priesthood, participate in the offering of the Eucharist’ (LG 10). Indeed, they join the sacrifice of their lives and of all their activity in the world to that one sacrifice of Christ, and so it is that ‘worshiping everywhere by their holy actions, the laity consecrate the world itself to God’ (LG 34). That immense and noble vocation of the laity is clearly essential to the sanctifying mission of the Church in the world, and its effective exercise centers on the celebration of the Eucharist, in which, clearly, they must

actively participate (cf. SC 14).

Wanting to reinforce that conciliar teaching, Paul VI stresses that it is ‘a matter of the highest importance to urge the faithful to participate actively’ in the celebration of the Eucharist (MF 1), and, since the meaning of that conciliar directive is still so often misunderstood, his explanation of it is of prime importance: it means that the faithful, ‘with undivided faith and the utmost devotion’, unite themselves as members of the Church to the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, offering it ‘along with the priest as a sacrifice for their own salvation and that of the whole world’ (MF 1, cf. 32). The council actually urged priests to teach their people to offer the sacrifice of Christ in the Mass and to join the sacrifice of their own lives to it.³⁷ So, the encyclical, which as I mentioned earlier is mainly remembered for its rejection of various reinterpretations of the idea of transubstantiation then being offered, is actually seen to have, like Vatican II itself, a profoundly pastoral motivation. Its concern was not just for sound doctrine, but for the vitality and effectiveness of the Church in the world, particularly through the dynamic interaction of the ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood of the faithful in the celebration of the Eucharist.

By means of that interaction, the change that occurs on the altar ripples out to affect both the Church and the world, and the purpose of God, which is not just the *salvation* of humanity and the cosmos but their very *transformation* in Christ, is carried out. Bread and wine are transformed into the body and blood of Christ in the Mass, as a foretaste and pledge of the new heavens and new earth (2Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1), and the making new of all things (Rev 21:5), when the mystery of the will of God will be fulfilled and ‘things in heaven and things on earth’ will all

³⁷ Cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n.4.

be united in Christ (Eph 1:10). In his encyclical letter, *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis says that, 'Joined to the incarnate Son, present in the Eucharist, the whole cosmos gives thanks to God,' and he quotes Pope Benedict: 'in the bread of the Eucharist, "creation is projected towards divinization, towards the holy wedding feast, towards unification with the Creator himself."'”³⁸

It is within the context of God's overall plan of transformation and divinization that the meaning and purpose of the eucharistic change is best understood, as is the role of the Church, also, which ministers to that cosmic plan of God by the collaboration of all of its members, both clerical and lay, a collaboration which radiates outwards from their interaction in the Eucharist. The dramatic words of *Lumen Gentium* bear repeating in conclusion: 'worshiping everywhere by their holy actions, the laity consecrate the world itself to God' (LG 34).

³⁸ Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si'* (2015), n.236.