

# Leo the Great and Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Eucharist

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*In his homilies and letters, Leo the Great displays an understanding of the Eucharist that is organically connected to his views on the church and, more importantly, to his Christological doctrine. Leo's remarks on the Eucharist demonstrate how for him the Eucharistic presence of Christ, conceived in very realistic terms, is at the heart of the Christian life, both individual and ecclesial. Within the context of the many other ways in which the incarnate Christ, after his ascension, remains connected and present to his Church, the Eucharist constitutes the highpoint of how he stays with his disciples until he will come again as judge, bringing to completion his mission as the one savior and mediator. Comparing Leo's statements with Balthasar's more elaborate reflections of the Eucharist shows how profoundly similar their views are, especially with regard to the deep connection between Christology, Ecclesiology, and Eucharistic theology, but also how Balthasar was more influenced by the Greek Fathers he studied than by the post-Augustinian, Latin tradition, for which Leo stands, with its strong Christological focus and its way of preserving a distinct sense of how the church, while strengthened by Christ's sacramental presence, is waiting for his eschatological return.*

## Introduction

*“Hoc est enim corpus meum – Hic est enim calix sanguinis mei”*: These two phrases are at the basis and at the heart of all Eucharistic theology. From early on, the Christians were looking at the Eucharist in terms of a representation of the Christ event and in terms of a presence of Christ. As rightly pointed out in N. Healy's paper, at “the heart of the Church's faith in the real presence of Christ in the Sacrament is the affirmation that Christ has communicated nothing less than the very substance of his life” (under 2<sup>nd</sup> thesis). This statement, however, presupposes, that at the heart, or at the basis, of the Church's faith in the Eucharist is the conviction that in this sacrament Christ is present in a unique way. Over the course of the centuries in which Christian dogma developed, it became ever more clear that the mode of that presence surpasses or, rather, includes all other forms of divine presence in the world.

Hans Urs von Balthasar developed his thought, notably about the Church and the Eucharist, on the basis of his engagement with patristic theology, with an emphasis on some of the Greek Fathers, but also including later Catholic, western developments. He thus contributed to what is called “Eucharistic ecclesiology,” which, while formally developed during more recent times, is rooted in Christian antiquity. Among the Western Fathers, Augustine pays special attention to the connection between Eucharist and Church, both understood as the Body of Christ; Ambrose focuses more on the transformation of the Eucharistic gifts. The Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation is a kind of middle way between a merely symbolic and a sensually realistic concept of the Eucharistic transformation, capable of preserving its personal and spiritual dimension. The Council of Trent takes up this understanding, though in famously cautious terms (DH 1652, 1642).

In his time, Balthasar contributed substantially to the liturgical and patristic movements, which, among other effects, have led to a significant renewal of Eucharistic theology and spirituality.<sup>1</sup> This is true, in particular, for Eucharistic Ecclesiology, as Balthasar took up some specific questions of Eucharistic theology. In order to situate Balthasar's views and our discussion of them within the tradition, this paper will first look at a patristic writer who was not among Balthasar's favorites but who, in his Roman simplicity and doctrinal clarity, can be considered a key witness to influential concepts and views of the Eucharist connected to Christology and ecclesiology. In this way, we will work out some characteristic features of Balthasar's own Eucharistic teachings.<sup>2</sup>

### Leo the Great: *In id quod sumimus transeamus*

The patristic voice we will listen to is Pope Leo the Great. According to the *Liber Pontificalis*, he inserted the words “*sanctum sacrificium, immaculatam hostiam*” into the Roman Canon.<sup>3</sup> In general, however, Leo rarely spoke about the Eucharist explicitly, even if he gave his homilies in the context of the Eucharistic celebration. When he does mention the Eucharist, he very clearly affirms the presence of Christ in it and illustrates how this presence is connected to Christ's true humanity or to his presence in the poor.<sup>4</sup>

Leo underlines that the Eucharistic sacrifice presupposes Christ's sacrifice on the cross, thus implying his true humanity; at the same time, the Eucharist is related to Christ's intercession for us in the presence of the heavenly Father (Romans 8:34).<sup>5</sup> Leo can deduce and confirm theological affirmations from liturgical practice: even little children confess the reality of Christ's body and blood with their *Amen* at communion—which is an argument in favor of Christ's true humanity.<sup>6</sup> The Eucharist is united to Christ by many bonds: He instituted the sacrament, as sacrifice to be

<sup>1</sup> As background for the introduction cf. Art. “Eucharistie, Eucharistiefeyer,” *LTK* 3, 944-968. All abbreviations according to Hubertus R. Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church: A Comprehensive Introduction* (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 2007), xvii-xxxix.

<sup>2</sup> For Balthasar's Eucharistic theology, this paper considers in particular *Spiritus Rector: Skizzen zur Theologie III* (Einsiedeln: Johannes 1967), 166–217, and *Theodramatik*, vol. III: *Die Handlung* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1980), 363–379. English translations *Creator Spirit: Explorations in Theology*, vol. III (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993) and *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. IV: *The Action* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> *Lib. Pont.* 47,8 (MGH.GPR 1,105,11): “Hic constituit ut intra actionem sacrificii diceretur *sanctum sacrificium et cetera*”; cf. Camille Callewaert, “S. Léon, le ‘Communicantes’ et le ‘Nobis quoque peccatoribus,’” *SacEr* 1 (1948): 123-164. My reflections on Leo in this paper rely on Hans Feichtinger, *Die Gegenwart Christi in der Kirche bei Leo dem Großen*, *Patrologia* 17 (Frankfurt: Lang, 2007). Leo's homilies (*tractatus: tr.*) are quoted from *Sancti Leonis Magni Romani Pontificis Tractatus Septem et Nonaginta*, ed. Antoine Chavasse, CCSL 138–138A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1973), his Letters from *Concilium Universale Chalcedonense. Leonis Papae I Epistularum Collectiones*, ed. Eduard Schwartz, ACO II 1–4 (Berlin-Leipzig: deGruyter 1932–1936).

<sup>4</sup> *Tr.* 91,3 (566,49–61): “*Tunc enim et sacrificii munda est oblatio et misericordiae sancta largitio, quando hi qui ista dependunt, quid operentur intellegunt. Nam dicente Domino: Nisi manducaueritis carnem Filii hominis, et biberitis sanguinem eius, non habebitis uitam in uobis, sic sacrae mensae communicare debetis, ut nihil prorsus de ueritate corporis Christi et sanguinis ambigatis. Hoc enim ore sumitur quod fide creditur, et frustra ab illis Amen respondetur, a quibus contra id quod accipitur disputatur. Dicente autem propheta: Beatus qui intellegit super egenum et pauperem, ille circa inopes uestimentorum et ciborum laudabilis distributor est, qui se Christum in indigentibus et uestire nouit et pascere, quoniam ipse ait: Quamdiu fecistis uni ex fratribus meis, mihi fecistis.*”

<sup>5</sup> *Ep.* 80,2=37 (ACO II 4,39,25–30).

<sup>6</sup> *Ep.* 59,2=34 (ACO II 4,34,27–30): “*in quibus ignorantiae tenebris... iacuerunt? ut nec auditu discerent uel lectione cognoscerent quod in ecclesia dei in omnium ore tam consonum est, ut nec ab infantium linguis ueritas corporis et sanguinis Christi inter communionis sacramenta taceatur.*”

offered to God, connected to his cross.<sup>7</sup> He himself is the true lamb, offered in the one true sacrifice;<sup>8</sup> his cross is the true altar, fulfilling the old promises and prefiguring the Church's altar.<sup>9</sup>

Leo's rhetorically condensed formulations can only be understood correctly if we keep in mind that when he speaks of the "body of Christ," this can refer to the body of the incarnate Son, to the Church, and to the Eucharistic sacrament, especially when someone is separated from that body.<sup>10</sup> Often, Leo moves from one meaning to the next without warning, using the ambivalence of his expressions for rhetorical and theological purposes. In this sense, e.g., he can accuse the Manicheans of Docetism on account of the fact that they do not receive from the chalice.<sup>11</sup>

A key text of Leo's Eucharistic spirituality is a homily for the beginning of Lent, possibly preached on 9 March 458, where he urges the faithful to show themselves worthy of the Eucharistic banquet by putting on a "dress of virtues" (cf. Matthew 22:9–12).<sup>12</sup> In this context, Leo applies a number of ambivalent terms: the "wedding banquet" refers to the Gospel parable, the Church's Eucharistic celebration, and the heavenly banquet; *sacramentum* refers both to the mystery of salvation and to the Eucharist; and participation in Christ means both receiving communion and imitating him in one's way of life. In this way, Leo is able to transpose the concept of pass-over to the Eucharist: In Communion, "as we receive the power of the heavenly food, we pass over into the flesh of the one who took on our flesh."<sup>13</sup> "We pass over into what we receive"; that is, first, we are sacramentally incorporated into Christ, but the phrase also points to the eschatological *transitus* into his heavenly kingdom.<sup>14</sup> Our transformation fundamentally presupposes Christ's real incarnation, and at present it is effected and mediated by partaking in the Eucharistic gifts. According to the logic of Christ's incarnation, this transformation does not absorb our humanity; at the same time, however, it is not simply moral, but rather initiates a transformation that appears analogous to the incarnation: it touches our very being, as Christ himself is present and at work on us and in us through the sacraments.

There is another famous Leonine phrase we need to consider even if it refers to the sacraments in general. Leo frequently speaks of *sacramenta* and *mysteria*, and the terms take on a very broad significance, including both the mysteries of revelation and salvation as such and their

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<sup>7</sup> Tr. LVIII,3 (342,67–71): "Discumbentibus enim secum discipulis ad edendam mysticam cenam... Christus... corporis et sanguinis sui ordinans sacramentum, docebat qualis Deo hostia deberet offerri."

<sup>8</sup> Tr. LIX,7 (358,179–359,190a): "Nunc enim carnalium sacrificiorum uarietate cessante, omnes differentias hostiarum una corporis et sanguinis tui implet oblatio, quoniam tu es uerus Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, et ita perficis in te uniuersa mysteria, ut sicut unum est pro omni uictima sacrificium, ita unum de omni gente sit regnum."

<sup>9</sup> Tr. LV,3 (325,48–50): "Crux ergo Christi sacramentum ueri et praenuntiati habet altaris, ubi per hostiam salutarem, naturae humanae celebraretur oblatio."

<sup>10</sup> Ep. 114,1=64 (ACO II 4,71,10–1): "nec habeat eius corporis participationem cuius abnegat ueritatem."

<sup>11</sup> Tr. XLII,5 (246,165–248,219) cf. Alois Grillmeier, *Jesus Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, vol. 2, bk. 1: *Das Konzil von Chalcedon; Rezeption und Widerspruch (451-518)*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 1991), 212-214.

<sup>12</sup> Tr. 50,1 (291,10–8).

<sup>13</sup> Ep. 59,2=34 (ACO II 4,34,30–2): "quia in illa mystica distributione spiritalis alimoniae hoc impertitur, hoc sumitur, ut accipientes uirtutem caelestis cibi in carnem ipsius qui caro nostra factus est, transeamus."

<sup>14</sup> Tr. 63,7 (388,135–8, cf. 132–8): "Non enim aliquid agit participatio corporis et sanguinis Christi, quam ut in id quod sumimus transeamus, et in quo commortui et consepulti et conresuscitati sumus, ipsum per omnia et spiritu et carne gestemus, dicente Apostolo: Mortui enim estis, et uita uestra abscondita est cum Christo in Deo. Cum enim Christus apparuerit uita uestra, tunc et uos apparebitis cum ipso in gloria, qui cum Patre et Spiritu sancto..."

liturgical celebration.<sup>15</sup> In Leo's vision, Christ is at the center of history: on the one hand, he draws all things to himself (cf. John 12:32), including the teachings and rituals of the Old Testament; on the other, he lets the images of the Old Testament pass over into the sacraments of Christ, in particular into the sacraments of initiation, ordination and Eucharist.<sup>16</sup> With Christ's ascension, and that is the beautiful key phrase, "what was visible of our Redeemer passed over into the sacraments."<sup>17</sup> The salvific deeds pass over and continue to exist in the sacraments, and both sides have a visible-sensuous and an invisible-spiritual dimension. With the ascension, there is no return to the period of hiddenness, prior to the incarnation, but instead there is a new mediation of Christ's presence, in the sacraments. I do not know any point in Balthasar's works where he makes reference to this Leonine idea. But, in fact, it constitutes a parallel to, or a basis for, Balthasar's insight about the Eucharist according to which, "Christ can give the whole of his life in this Sacrament because his entire life was already Eucharist."<sup>18</sup>

With regard to the problem of Christ's enduring presence, the crucial moment is his ascension.<sup>19</sup> The great Pope shows great interest in the ascension event, and can mention it even in homilies at Christmas or about St. Peter. Historical research has pointed out that the liturgical texts for Ascension Day are particularly close to Leo's formulations.<sup>20</sup>

The ascension event puts Christ's presence and our connection to him into question, as at first sight both seem interrupted. But Leo conceives that day as a moment of transition from the historical presence of the incarnate Christ to the enduring presence of the glorified, yet still incarnate, Christ. Faith, hope, and charity emerge as the new modes of Christ's invisible presence, as they are the gifts of the Ascended (Ps 67:19; Eph 4:8).<sup>21</sup> A transforming power comes down from him unto the members of his body.<sup>22</sup> For Leo, in Christ we are already sitting at the right hand of the Father. The time before Easter mainly revealed Christ's true humanity, confirmed in the weeks after his paschal transition; the ascension fulfills the joy of Easter and fully reveals his divinity and the perfection of human nature with God the Father.<sup>23</sup> The connection between head and body continues, just as Christ's humanity continues in its glorified state. In a Christmas homily

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Feichtinger, *Die Gegenwart Christi*, 151–3.

<sup>16</sup> *Tr.* 66,2 (402,46–9): "*Dicente enim Domino: Cum exaltatus fuero, omnia traham ad me, nihil legalium instructionum, nihil propheticarum resedit figurarum, quod non totum in Christi sacramenta transierit.*" *Tr.* III,1 (11,22–30) on Melchisedek's priesthood.

<sup>17</sup> *Tr.* LXXIV,2 (457,42–3): "*Quod itaque Redemptoris nostri conspicuum fuit, in sacramenta transiuit.*"

<sup>18</sup> Healy, under 2<sup>nd</sup> thesis.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Feichtinger, *Die Gegenwart Christi*, 171–2.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. David R. Holeton, "The Sacramental Language of Leo the Great. A Study of the Words 'munus' and 'oblata'," *EL* 92 (1978): 115–65, 136–7; Bernard Capelle, "Une Messe de S. Léon pour l'Ascension," *EL* 67 (1953): 201–9.

<sup>21</sup> *Tr.* 5,2 (23,43–8): "*Quia enim iustus ex fide uiuit et haec est iustitia credentis ut recipiat animo quod non cernit aspectu, ascendens Dominus in altum captiuans duxit captiuitatem, dedit dona hominibus, fidem scilicet et spem et caritatem, quae inde magna sunt, inde fortia, inde pretiosa, quia quod carnis oculis non adtingitur, id miro mentis affectu et creditur et speratur et amatur.*"

<sup>22</sup> *Tr.* 66,4 (404,97–9, cf. 113–8): "*Nihil enim non ad nostram salutem aut egit aut pertulit, ut uirtus quae inerat capiti inesset et corpori.*" Cf. Georges Rieux, "Le temps du salut chez saint Léon," *BLE* 44 (1993): 95–112, 105.

<sup>23</sup> *Tr.* LXXIII,4 (454,79–80): "*eos sibi concorporatos Dei Filius ad Patris dexteram conlocauit.*" *Tr.* LXXIV,1 (455–6,4–6. 19): "*Et licet multa etiam in forma serui Diuinitatis signa radiauerant, proprie tamen illius temporis actio ad demonstrandam suscepti hominis pertinuit ueritatem*"; "*Sicut ergo in sollemnitate paschali resurrectio nobis Domini fuit causa laetandi, ita ascensio eius in caelos praesentium nobis est materia gaudiorum, recolentibus illum diem et rite uenerantibus quo natura nostrae humilitatis in Christo... ad Dei Patris est prouecta consessum.*" *Tr.* LXXVII,5 (491,87–8).

in 454, Leo, with the full force of his rhetoric, no less than six times repeats: “one and the same” (*idem*), emphasizing the unity of the two natures before the ascension and then the identity of Christ ascending, remaining present and returning.<sup>24</sup>

While Balthasar seems to emphasize that the *whole* Christ is present, Leo stresses that it is the *same* Christ (*idem/ipse*). We should not lose sight of the fact that the Eucharist is the supreme place and mode of Christ’s presence only for the time being: his presence depends on his incarnation, which itself culminates in Christ’s paschal *transitio*, and it will come to an end with his eschatological return, as will the faith and the sacraments. The Eucharistic Church, in a sense, continues the incarnation, and, at the same time, anticipates the second coming—but it also is longing for that moment. For Leo, the assurance of Christ’s presence stands at the basis of the pastoral office in the Church—but as he looks towards Christ as the final judge on how it is to be exercised.<sup>25</sup> Christ’s ascension does not leave his disciples as orphans, for he himself dwells in his body and assists the patience of God’s adopted children—but he does this as he calls them to their glorification in heaven.<sup>26</sup> Christ is with his disciples as he dwells in his temple, the Church, without separation—still it does not belong to this life, but to eternal life, that God is all in all: Christ is, in fact, and is, only, the head of the Church, the beginning, and the first-born of the dead (cf. Col 1:18-20).<sup>27</sup> As pointed out by N. Healy, no Eucharistic theology is complete without a strong eschatological sense. Similarly, no explanation of the real presence is complete without recognizing how Christ is in fact absent and needs to come again. The Acts of the Apostles state it clearly: “This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (1:11), and St Leo would add “in the same flesh.” In the Eucharist, Christ fulfills his promise “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt 28:20). Still, we must not get carried away with our piety and theology about the Eucharistic presence to such a degree that the second coming becomes redundant. As Nichols says at the very end of his introduction to Balthasar, quoting the Romantic poet Novalis: “‘Desire for a strange land has left us; We want to go home to the Father’. Secular-minded critics, both outside and inside the Church, may not like our saying so, but that is where humankind is meant to belong.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Tr. 30,5 (156,113–157,121): “*Idem est in forma Dei, qui formam recepit serui. Idem est incorporeus manens et corpus adsumens. Idem in sua uirtute inuiolabilis et in nostra infirmitate passibilis. Idem a paterno non diuisus throno et ab impiis crucifixus in ligno. Idem est super caelorum altitudines uictor ascendens, et usque ad consummationem saeculi uniuersam Ecclesiam non relinquens. Idem postremo est qui, in eadem qua ascendit carne uenturus, sicut iudicium sustinuit impiorum, ita iudicaturus est de omnium actione mortalium*” Cf. also tr. LXXII,3 (444,72–5, cf. 64–71), see below note 26.

<sup>25</sup> Tr. 5,1 (22,26–23,40): “*Quamuis enim singuli quique pastores ...sciantque se pro commissis sibi ouibus reddituros esse rationem . . . , tanto amplius nobis instare oneris sentiamus, quanto cunctis maiora debemus. In hac ergo materia trepidationis, quae nobis esset dependendae fiducia seruitutis, nisi non dormitaret neque obdormiret qui custodit Israhel et qui discipulis suis ait: Ecce ego uobiscum sum omnibus diebus usque ad consummationem saeculi, nisi dignaretur non solum custos esse ouium, sed ipsorum etiam pastor esse pastorum.*”

<sup>26</sup> Tr. LXXII,3 (444,72–5, cf. 64–71): “*et qui ascendit in caelos, non deserit adoptatos, qui sedet ad dexteram Patris, ipse totius habitator est corporis, et ipse deorsum confortat ad patientiam, qui sursum inuitat ad gloriam.*”

<sup>27</sup> Tr. 63,3 (384,46–8): “*Quamuis enim non istius uitae sit, sed aeternae, ut sit Deus omnia in omnibus, tamen etiam modo templi sui, quod est Ecclesia, indiuisus habitator est, secundum quod ipse promisit dicens: Ecce ego uobiscum sum omnibus diebus usque ad consummationem saeculi. Quibus Apostolus consonans ait: Ipse est caput corporis Ecclesiae, qui est principium, primogenitus ex mortuis . . . .*”

<sup>28</sup> Aidan Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar: Hans Urs von Balthasar on Beauty, Goodness and Truth* (London: Darton, Longman&Todd), 111.

In Leo's thought, after the ascension, the divine and the human nature are so united that their actions can no longer be distinguished. The day of the ascension interrupts Christ's physical presence until he comes again "in the same flesh," in order to hold judgment. At the same time, with the ascension, Christ begins to be present in the Church in a new way: what used to be visible about him passes over into the sacraments. Thanks to Christ's ascension, the disciples' faith in him is now "more excellent and powerful," as they perceive more clearly the divinity of Christ who remains connected to the Father and to them.<sup>29</sup> In contrast to that, the time between the resurrection and the ascension was more a confirmation of his true human nature.<sup>30</sup> We have to presuppose that, for Leo, Christ's true and enduring humanity remains the instrument of his mediation. Leo does not say so explicitly: in only one letter he uses words of St. Paul about Christ's intercession for us with the Father (Romans 8:34).<sup>31</sup> Instead of seeing the body of Jesus, it is now Christ's teaching and illumination that serve as the basis for faith, mediated, however, through the Church's sacraments, institutions, and members.

### Balthasar on the Eucharist

Balthasar, like other theologians (such as Hugo Rahner) inspired by patristic writings, was very at home in the language of the Fathers and, following their lead, employs a series of images in order to develop his thinking. As opposed to many theologians of his time, Balthasar remained always "wary of the image of the Church as the people of God," as for him it was "too linked to an Old Testament understanding of covenant, and . . . also in danger of reducing the Church to a sociological reality."<sup>32</sup> Instead, the predominant images for Balthasar are personal: the Church as the Body of Christ and the Church as Bride and Mother. In his writings, Balthasar explains the two fundamental topics of ecclesiology, namely how Christ and the Church are one and how they are distinct, the first in Christological, the second in Mariological terms. Both times, the concept of body or flesh plays a central role: it explains the organic connection between Christ and his members, who together form the *totus Christus* and *una caro*. For Balthasar, the Church is Christ's prolongation into space and time. "Who is the Church? The Church is Christ, but the total Christ, head and members. As St Augustine would put it, when speaking of the Church, 'We

<sup>29</sup> Tr. LXXIV,2 (457,38–45, cf. 58–63): "*corporalis praesentiae modum fecit... donec... ad iudicandos uiuos et mortuos in eadem carne in qua ascendit adueniat. Quod itaque Redemptoris nostri conspicuum fuit, in sacramenta transiuit, et ut fides excellentior esset ac firmior, uisioni doctrina successit, cuius auctoritatem supernis inluminata radiis credentium corda sequerentur. Hanc fidem ascensione Domini auctam et sancti Spiritus munere roboratam.*" Tr. 66,2 (402,48–9, cf. 46–54): "*nihil legalium instructionum, nihil prophetiarum resedit figurarum, quod non totum in Christi sacramenta transierit.*"

<sup>30</sup> Tr. LXXIII,4 (453,58–9, cf. 55–64): "*ut Dominus Iesus Christus uere agnosceretur resuscitatus, qui uere erat et natus et passus et mortuus.*"

<sup>31</sup> Ep. 80,2=37 (ACO II 4,39,27–30): "*qui licet in patris dextera sit constitutus, in eadem tamen carne quam sumpsit ex uirgine, sacramentum propitiationis exequitur dicente apostolo: Christus Iesus, qui mortuus est, immo qui et resurrexit, qui est in dextera dei, qui etiam interpellat pro nobis.*" Cf. Basil Studer, "Leo the Great," *Patrology*, vol. IV: *The Golden Age of Latin Patristic Literature; From the Council of Nicea to the Council of Chalcedon*, ed. A. Di Berardino (Westminster MD: Christian Classics, 1994), 589–612, 604–5.

<sup>32</sup> John J. O'Donnell, *Hans Urs von Balthasar, Outstanding Christian Thinkers* (Collegeville MA: Liturgical Press, 1992), 115; cf. the results of Joseph Ratzinger's doctoral dissertation and his (Pope Benedict XVI) foreword in Joseph Ratzinger, *Volk und Haus Gottes in Augustins Lehre von der Kirche: Die Dissertation und weitere Studien zu Augustinus und zur Theologie der Kirchenväter*. Gesammelte Schriften I (Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 2001), 5–9; 412–8.

are Christ' (*Christus sumus*)."<sup>33</sup> This Augustinian concept is fundamental also for Leo. Connecting incarnation and ecclesiology, Balthasar emphasizes the mediating function of bodiliness: God's spirit always seeks to become bodily, hence "the risen Christ becomes bodily in the flesh and blood of the Church."<sup>34</sup> The "clearest manifestation of the bodiliness of the risen Christ and of the bodiliness of the Church is found in the eucharist. 'Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you' (John 6:53)."<sup>35</sup> As Nichols very correctly emphasizes, the Spirit "never renders the Word discarnate."<sup>36</sup>

In presenting Balthasar's views of the Eucharist, J.J. O'Donnell speaks of it as "the culmination of the incarnation"<sup>37</sup>—which to me seems a less felicitous formulation. Calling it "the fulfillment of the work of the cross" and "the culmination of anthropology" sounds more appropriate, though it leaves open how exactly these diverse aspects go together. For Leo, the Eucharist is the heart and the highpoint of Christ's continued presence in his Church and in the world, but his incarnation culminated in the Passover, and our own Christian life will be perfected when he will glorify us at the end of time. Thus, it is correct to say that "the eucharistic gift of himself, together with the pouring out the Holy Spirit, is the most perfect form of the Son's truly completing his mission himself."<sup>38</sup> Still, the Eucharist is instituted for the time after Christ goes "away" to his Father, and the disciples "see him no longer," and when—to their advantage—he will send the Spirit (cf. John 16:5–15). "A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me" (John 16:16).

The Eucharist is the fruit of the incarnate Christ's sacrifice, brought forth by his resurrection, thus utterly dependent on it, not culminating in it. Better call it the completion of incarnation and *pascha*, in the sense of Augustine's *Christus totus*, whose glorification is, yes, begun and guaranteed, but yet needs to be accomplished. We possess the Spirit, but as *pignus*, pledge (2Cor 1:22). The incarnation constitutes the structure of how salvation is accomplished, both by Christ and, analogously, by his followers, but it does not in and of itself bring about the work of salvation.<sup>39</sup>

### **The Eucharistic Presence: Leo, Casel, Balthasar**

As a specific and controversial Eucharistic topic, Balthasar treats the question of the Mass as sacrifice: (how) can the sacrifice be offered by Christ *and* also by the Church and her priests today? In order to solve the problems inherent in the Catholic conviction that the Mass is a sacrifice, Balthasar makes recourse to Odo Casel's mystery-theology, to Augustine's *Christus*

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<sup>33</sup> O'Donnell, *Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 116.

<sup>34</sup> O'Donnell, *Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 116.

<sup>35</sup> O'Donnell, *Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 116–7.

<sup>36</sup> Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar*, 110.

<sup>37</sup> O'Donnell, *Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 121.

<sup>38</sup> Nicholas Healy & David L. Schindler, "Balthasar on the Church as Eucharist," *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. E.T. Oakes & D. Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 51–63, 57.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Jean-Pierre Jossua, *Le salut, incarnation ou mystère pascal: Chez le Pères de l'Église de saint Irénée à saint Léon le Grand*, *Cogitatio Fidei* 28 (Paris: Cerf, 1968), 251–387.

*totus*, to the theology of the priesthood, and returns to his own concept of Marian ecclesiology and the feminine dimension of faith.<sup>40</sup>

The debates about Casel's "mystery-theology" have drawn on Leo's writings. According to Leo, in both the salvific deeds *and* their liturgical celebration, Christ's actions show forth the same divine power (*virtus*) that causes their original and enduring efficacy. The one power demonstrates that, then and now, one and the same Christ is at work.<sup>41</sup> To participate in Christ's suffering and to hope for glorification only makes sense if he transcends the limits of space and time and is capable of being effective even today. We have to be cautious about putting later questions to Leo, but his own words make us ask whether he only imagined a representation of the divine power and truth,<sup>42</sup> or whether he seems to presuppose a physical connection, a kind of mystical or "mysterical" presence of Christ.<sup>43</sup> Leo himself never explicitly reflects on this problem, but he insists on the objective reality and actual efficacy of Christ's deeds in the sacraments. When Christ ascends to heaven, his physical presence is succeeded by a new mode of presence, though forever dependent on his incarnation.<sup>44</sup> Not only do the sacraments possess a divine power (*virtus*); they also come to us through the one divine mediator, and they are—and remain—connected to the incarnate savior. They follow the logic of the incarnation and thus offer to human beings a mode of Christ's presence that reaches them, that comprehends all dimensions of human existence, from the physical to the supernatural. A strict opposition between "power" (*virtus*) and physical presence, as distinguished by modern theology, will not do justice to Leo's words.

The picture that emerges from Leo's homilies is like this: The liturgical assembly, the proclamation and explanation of the word, the ritual practices and the reception of the sacraments (in the narrow sense) are like consecutive levels or concentric circles, through which Christ brings about his presence. Just as Easter is the center of its liturgical season, so generally the Eucharist is the center of every liturgical celebration.<sup>45</sup> None of these levels is simply absorbed by the next higher one, and already at the very lowest, Christ is present and at work. The hierarchical relation is also there between the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the Sacrament: No one can deny that Leo ascribes to the proclamation, especially of the Passion, a "sacramental" efficacy, but this efficacy differs from the sacramental operation in baptism or in the Eucharist, frequently described as *transitus*. Baptism alone unites the faithful with Christ,<sup>46</sup> and only the Eucharist

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<sup>40</sup> For the discussion of Casel's theology, see Balthasar, *Spiritus Creator*, 174–9, and Feichtinger, *Die Gegenwart Christi*, 153–4.

<sup>41</sup> *Tr.* 36,1 (195,6–196,36); cf. Jossua, *Le salut* 287–90.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Bertrand de Margerie, *Introduction à l'histoire de l'exégèse*, vol. IV: *L'occident latin de Léon le Grand à Bernard de Clairvaux* (Paris: Cerf, 1990), 44–53.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Odo Casel, "Mysteriengegenwart," *Jahrbuch für Liturgiewissenschaft* 8 (1928): 145–224, 153–5. 172–4. Leo's formulations are open for Casel's theories about the presence of both the fruits and the events of salvation in the sacraments, according to which the reality and the presence of Christ, his passion and its effects always go together (cf. 185).

<sup>44</sup> *Tr.* LXXIV,2–3 (456,34–458,63).

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Rieux, "Le temps du salut chez saint Léon," 110. The necessary distinction is obfuscated by defining the "entire liturgy as a worded event," see Holeyton, "The Sacramental Language of Leo the Great," 145–6. 148–9.

<sup>46</sup> *Tr.* XXIV,3 (112,82–113,85): "*Cuius spiritalem originem in regeneratione consequimur, et omni homini renascenti aqua baptismatis instar est uteri uirginalis, eodem sancto Spiritu replente fonte.*" *Tr.* 29,1 (147,39–41); *tr.* XLI,2 (234,56–235,58); *tr.* 69,4 (423,97–100).



possesses transformative power;<sup>47</sup> both baptism and Eucharist enable and demand that the faithful lead an authentically Christian life.<sup>48</sup> In Leo's homilies (and letters), the sacraments are embedded in the liturgical life just as the liturgy is embedded in the Christian existence.

Casel had affirmed that the mystery of Christ exists in a one-double way: in the historical incarnation *and* as "cult mystery," the latter also being objectively given by Christ, prior to all subjective intervention or repetition. Divine grace is definitively incarnated in Christ, no longer separable from him, as effect of a past deed or merit. The mysteries are the "likeness" of the historical act, something intermediary between a mere image and the reality itself. Such concepts, according to Casel, are influenced by Platonism, but more so by ancient mystery cults. Casel detects an analogy between ancient and Christian mysteries: the former ones yearning and being hollow form, Christ the unique and superabundant fulfillment. According to Casel, on the cross the historical Christ offered himself as sacrifice alone, the pneumatic Christ does it with his Church: it is still the same sacrifice, into which now the Church is drawn, actively participating in it. The Church performs what the Lord has done, and so his salvific deed becomes present, he himself is present and acts through the Church, and she acts with him. Casel's biblical bases are Pauline formulations that emphasize the likeness between Christ and believers. The ministerial priesthood, as instrument (*causa instrumentalis*), is essential, yet totally subordinate to, and inseparable from the mystical body and the mystical marriage between Christ and his Church. The Church is primarily receptive in this dynamic, still, not merely passive.

Reviewing Casel's theory, which seems to be in agreement with so many patristic texts, Balthasar detects some problematic aspects, not so much with regard to the first paradox, the concept of mystical presence itself (which is the more disputed issue), but rather with regard to the second paradox, i.e. the Church's activity in the sacrifice (*offerimus*). Balthasar underlines that Christ's gift of self is at the center of the sacrifice, and he maintains that, while Casel does not forget the mystery of the Cross in favor of the aspect of the transfiguration, in his writings it is "dissolved too quickly . . . into mere forgetfulness of self, transcendence of self and Benedictine objectivity."<sup>49</sup>

Balthasar recalls that, against reformed theologies, Trent defined the Mass as a sacrifice and not only a sacrifice of praise (DS 1753), and he rejects any attempt to poise the spiritual and the material against one another: "The praise and the sacrifice are two sides of one reality. In other words, our praise of the Father consists in our inserting ourselves into the sacrifice of Christ, whose thanksgiving to the Father consisted in his willingness to let himself be offered for the sake of his people."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *Tr.* 26,2 (126,37–40); *tr.* 63,7 (388,135–8).

<sup>48</sup> Such a way of thinking recalls the Neo-platonic ladder "*purificatio, illuminatio, unio*," cf. Hans Feichtinger, "Ὁὐδένευα and humilitas: Nature and Function of Humility in Iamblichus and Augustine," *Dionysius* 21 (2004): 123–60, 125–8; Michael Lurje, "Die Vita Pythagorica als Manifest der neuplatonische Paideia," *Jamblich: Pythagoras; Legende – Lehre – Lebensgestaltung*, ed. Michael von Albrecht, John Dillon, Martin George, Michael Lurje, David S. du Toit. TzF, Sapere 4 (Darmstadt: WBG, 2002), 221–53, 224–36.

<sup>49</sup> Balthasar, *Creator Spirit* 202 (orig. *Spiritus Creator* 181)

<sup>50</sup> O'Donnell, *Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 124.

The Eucharist is also the highest moment of action and contemplation. In it, Christ's action becomes present and involves our actions, by which we let Christ act in us—and Christ's presence endures: he never takes back his gift, in front of which we fall on our knees, trying to understand the depth of his love and asking that we might begin to live in accordance with what we receive and contemplate.<sup>51</sup> The identity of the sacrifice between Head and Body is realized in the *causa instrumentalis* of ministerial priesthood, but this is nothing more than the occasion and the beginning of this identity. The Church joins herself to His being a sacrifice by the most personal participation: she receives His gift and also does something herself, giving herself most intensely and associating herself to His sacrifice, becoming one sacrifice with Him. Here is the place of the mysteries, and the Church is to be understood as the mystical person of Christ and his Body or as mystical Bride of Christ, being “one flesh” with Him, thus giving space to the idea of the one sacrifice. For Balthasar, however, misgivings remain in front of Last Supper and Cross, and he has to ask if there is a way of understanding the mystery of the unity of the one Body within a distance (between Christ and the Church) that is maintained and that emerges in the unity. There may only be a nuance between Casel and what he envisages, but it might be an essential nuance.<sup>52</sup> More convincingly than Casel, Balthasar's Mariological reflections offer an account of what the role of Mary/the Church is in the Eucharistic sacrifice. And if we look closely enough, we can see how this is true not only for the celebration of the Mass now, but already in Christ's passion and at the cross itself.

In the debates ensuing from Casel's monumental theory, theologians introduced a difference between the actual presence of Christ's passion and the substantial presence of Christ.<sup>53</sup> Balthasar himself sounds unsatisfied with the precision or concreteness of Casel's language. The question indeed seems to be how the presence of the acts and the presence of the agent are to be coordinated. I see no other way than to introduce different modes of presence in order to account for the different “items” (persons, events, intentions, effects) that become present to different subjects via different agents.

Vatican II has two very famous affirmations about the Eucharist: it is *fons et culmen* of the Church's life; and Christ becomes present there in the priest, the praying community, the Word proclaimed and, most of all, in the Eucharistic gifts (cf. *Sacrosanctum concilium*, 7 and 10). Quite rightly, N. Healy reminded us that already the soon-to-be-blessed Paul VI clarified that “this presence is called ‘real’—by which is not intended to exclude the other types of presence as though they could not be ‘real’ too, but because it is presence in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is substantial presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present.”<sup>54</sup> It is in fact misleading to state that any form of divine presence or revelation could always only be “unsurpassable” (because it is God who is there or who is speaking), and not to

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. O'Donnell, *Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 125.

<sup>52</sup> Balthasar, *Spiritus Creator* 180–182.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Ulrich Kühn, “Abendmahl IV. Das Abendmahlsgespräch in der ökumenischen Theologie der Gegenwart,” *TRE* 1, 145–212, 167.

<sup>54</sup> Paul VI, Encyclical *Mysterium fidei* (3 September 1965), Nr. 39, quoted by Healy under “2nd thesis.”

allow any significant differences between modes of the divine presence.<sup>55</sup> An attempt to level all forms and modes of divine presence to one not only contradicts the way the Church has traditionally spoken, thought, and prayed about these things, but also neglects the need, on our part as humans, for diverse forms and gradations of presence. Leo looks at Christ as present and at work in many ways: not only in the liturgical celebrations and sacraments (and there already in different ways), but also in ecclesial institutions, assemblies and ministers, in the emperor, in the poor and their rich benefactors, and, more generally, in all the believers leading a Christian life, according to Christ's commandments and in virtue of his grace, especially in the Saints. In Leo's works, Christ's presence is described in three different, though connected modes: 1) the presence of the incarnate Son on earth, 2) its continuation in the Church, especially its traditions and institutions, and 3) its re-presentation, particularly—and again differently—in the sacraments, the Saints, the poor, and the good deeds of the Christians.<sup>56</sup>

To speak of diverse forms of presence, however, already implies a sense of Christ's absence—which is in fact adequate for our time; i.e. until he comes again. Balthasar compares the Eucharistic theology of Augustine and of Gregory of Nyssa. For Augustine, "Christ was, in his glorious state, 'localized' in heaven—'non est hic (he is not here)'—whence we have the obscurities of Augustine's Eucharistic texts."<sup>57</sup> As opposed to the Latin doctor, Gregory, against his immediate opponent Apollinaris, emphasizes that Christ is "with us" ("in us" individually and "in the midst" of us collectively): "he manifests himself incorporeally to all parts of the world." Gregory is convinced that as he manifests himself to us corporeal beings incorporeally, he will not manifest himself corporeally to the incorporeal beings in heaven.<sup>58</sup> I am wondering if Leo would be completely happy with such affirmations: Are they doing full justice to the incarnate Christ as the one mediator who now intercedes for us with the Father, as incarnate yet glorified, and will come again, always the same and in the same flesh? Theology will have to distinguish adequately between Christ's divine omnipresence and his incarnation, and similarly between how the incarnate Christ is present to us human beings, before and after his incarnation, after his resurrection and ascension, in the Eucharist and other sacraments, and when he comes again.

For Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335 – c. 395), the glorified Christ is omnipresent, taken away from (any) place, thus transcending space; Balthasar acknowledges how far removed this theology is from other patristic authorities like Chrysostom (344/49–407) and Augustine (354–430).<sup>59</sup> We have seen how Leo (c. 400–461) tries to hold these things together by stating that after the ascension, the actions of the divine and the human nature can no longer be distinguished.

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<sup>55</sup> Such a problematic concept lies behind the "interiorism" developed by Gerhard Gäde with regard to the divine revelation present in non-Christian religions, see his *Christus in den Religionen: Der christliche Glaube und die Wahrheit der Religionen* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2003).

<sup>56</sup> Cf. the results of Feichtinger, *Die Gegenwart Christi*, 296–305.

<sup>57</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought: An Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa*, tr. Mark Sebanc (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995), 177, with reference to Karl Adam, "Zur Eucharistielehre des hl. Augustinus," *TQ* 112 (1931): 490–536.

<sup>58</sup> Balthasar (*Presence and Thought*, 177) refers to and quotes *C. Apoll.* II, 1268 B–1269A; he also mentions Gregory's letter against pilgrimages, *ep.* 2, III, 1012–3.

<sup>59</sup> For Augustine, cf. the introductions by Erich Naab in Augustinus, *Über Schau und Gegenwart des unsichtbaren Gottes*, *Mystik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* I,14 (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstadt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1998), 25–62, 88–115.

The question is how to understand the Eucharist in a theology that does not allow for any substantial distinctions between forms or intensities of Christ's presence. The root cause for such difficulties of distinction may lie in the relative theology of the incarnation, or may be mirrored there: how do we distinguish the divine presence of the Son in the *homo assumptus* from his omnipresence—even before resurrection and ascension? But if we do, as we have to, how is it impossible or illegitimate to distinguish, analogously, forms and intensities of the presence of the risen and ascended Christ, especially in the Eucharist? Looking at the patristic authors, we surely can detect different viewpoints, not only between east and west, but more so concerning before, during and after Chalcedon. If indeed there are obscurities in Augustine's theology of the Eucharist, we at least have to be fully conscious of the price paid by Gregory for not sharing them. And how do we adequately explain what and who is coming when he comes again? Still, Gregory is particularly conscious of the difficulties inherent in speaking about these matters: "If all things were within our grasp, the higher power would not be beyond us."<sup>60</sup>

### Balthasar's Eucharistic Theology

The manner in which Balthasar approaches the disputed question of the Mass as a sacrifice of the Church, first of all, needs to be appreciated for its intellectual and theological honesty: he makes no attempt at explaining away the strongly sacrificial language of the Roman Canon or the fact that it does not conceive the Church's sacrifice as identical with Christ self-oblation on the Cross.<sup>61</sup> Looking at the language used by Trent, Balthasar sees the unity of Christ's and the Church's sacrifice described in terms of *repraesentatio*, *memoria* (more than *nuda commemoratio*), *salutaris virtus*, and *sacrificium vere propitiatorium*. Trent bases its doctrine on Christ's command to "do this in memory of me," on his substituting the old passover with a new. According to Balthasar, Trent holds together the unicity of Christ's sacrifice and its perpetual actuality through all times, and its teachings are compatible with the more recent mystery-theology.<sup>62</sup> "Christ fulfills his mission at the moment he surrenders himself in the Spirit by gathering others into his ecclesial body and thus endowing others with an inner participation in his mission."<sup>63</sup> According to Balthasar, Christ fulfills the double mission of representing God to the world and the world to God, but these two aspects, held together in an abiding unity, are only the basis of his mission. The mission is to communicate to the world a participation in the divine exchange of life so that it becomes capable of returning to God as a divine gift those things it has received from God,<sup>64</sup> as the Roman Canon puts it: *offerimus . . . de tuis donis ac datis*.<sup>65</sup> Leo never reflects on this sentence from the Canon, but in his view, in virtue of Christ's passover, his life and power are shared out to the believers, through the sacraments and through the new life to which they empower and obligate. Leo points out to the rich among his listeners that, in

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<sup>60</sup> "Εἰ γὰρ πάντα ἡμῖν ἦν καταληπτὰ οὐκ ἂν κρείττων ἦν ἡμῶν ὁ κρείττων." Balthasar quotes this phrase at the beginning of his *Presence and Thought*, originally published as *Présence et pensée: Essai sur la philosophie religieuse de Grégoire de Nysse* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1942).

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Balthasar, *Spiritus Creator*, 166.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Balthasar, *Spiritus Creator*, 166–73.

<sup>63</sup> Healy & Schindler, "Balthasar on the Church as Eucharist," 55.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Healy & Schindler, "Balthasar on the Church as Eucharist," 54.

<sup>65</sup> A propos, Nichols quotes the Chrysostomus liturgy "Thine on thy own we offer thee" (*A Key to Balthasar*, 78).

giving alms to the poor, Christ works in them and the image of God appears while at the same time Christ, in the poor, receives their gifts.<sup>66</sup> Thus, the incarnate Christ, identifying with both givers and recipients of alms, continues his presence and mediation: his divine and his human nature are both intact, though inseparable in their operation after his glorification.

For Balthasar, the Eucharist is the epitome of the Church and “the form of the world’s redemption in that it is the visible expression of the encounter between infinite and finite freedom.”<sup>67</sup> Such nearly hymnic formulations presuppose, but do not specify, a concept of presence that is less substantial but rather dynamic: what becomes present is an event, an encounter, more specifically it is “the ‘hour’ of Christ’s *kairos*”:<sup>68</sup> “The supper and the Cross together constitute the ‘hour’ for which he had come (Jn 12:27f.).”<sup>69</sup> Cross and Last Supper are when and how Christ teaches the logic of his Incarnation, which is the power to share his life with others, so the love of the Father comes into this world. The Last Supper, as a meal, is a social act, constituting the interior form of the Church, emerging out of Christ’s glorified body. In virtue of the resurrection, the Eucharist becomes a moment of doxology between Father and Son, where the Son is “liquefied” and poured into human hearts.<sup>70</sup> For Balthasar, when a Christian believer accepts his/her mission in Christ, s/he participates in Christ’s redemptive work, expressing the love of God in an analogous way. In this sense, every Christian becomes Eucharistic, becomes a sacrifice shared out, in, with, and through Christ, as nourishment for the Mystical Body.<sup>71</sup> “This is the greatest goodness, the goodness of being a saint.”<sup>72</sup> These formulations are strikingly similar to Leo’s idea of Christ passing over into the sacraments, and from there into the lives of the Christians, which is so central to many of Leo’s sermons. Leo specifies that this transition happens with the ascension, after which the Church and the believers have the sacraments from which to draw their strength and the norms of life, so they themselves can imitate Christ and thus represent him.<sup>73</sup> Balthasar’s theology is more reflective and brings out the connection between sacraments and Christian life more explicitly; but Leo, no less impressively, emphasizes the underlying doctrines on Christ and on grace with a stronger accent on Christ’s mediation. I think it is fair to say that Leo’s focus is on Christology, Balthasar’s on Trinitarian theology.

Balthasar’s theology of the Eucharist can make a powerful impression on the reader. As the Eucharist is so central to Christian faith, life, and doctrine, we cannot be surprised by the

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<sup>66</sup> Tr. 45,3 (266,73–4. 266,89–267,92): “*Ac ne dubitemus Deo tribui quod inpenditur indigenti, dispensatores elemosinarum quae commercia ineant audiamus*” [follows Mt 25 passim]; “*Mundana benivolentia in his quos adiuuat habet finem; christiana pietas in suum transit auctorem, dum in ipsum dicamur benigni, quem in nobis confitemur operari, dicente Domino: Sic luceat lumen uestrum...*” [follows Mt 5,16]. Tr. 48,5 (283,114–6): “*et ubi curam misericordiae inuenit, ibi imaginem suae pietatis agnoscit.*” Tr. LXXXVII,4 (545,71–7); tr. 94,4 (580,72–4) (Mt 25,40); cf. Feichtinger, *Die Gegenwart Christi*, 224–6.

<sup>67</sup> Kevin Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar: In Irenaeian Retrieval* (New York: Herder&Herder, 2002), 116, with reference to *Theodrama* 2,145–6, and *Scandal of the Incarnation*, 92.

<sup>68</sup> Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought*, 117.

<sup>69</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. I: *Seeing the Form* (San Francisco/New York: Ignatius/Crossroad, 1982), 571.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought*, 117, with references to *Glory of the Lord* I, 571; VII, 152. 226.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar*, 69, with reference to *Theo-Drama III*, 527–8.

<sup>72</sup> Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar*, 69.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Feichtinger, *Die Gegenwart Christi*, 219–57.

degree to which Balthasar employs biblical and patristic language, images and concepts as he develops his theology of the Mass. The question is *how* he does this and whether his way of doing theology is methodically convincing.

I am referring here to some criticisms formulated by Brian Daley, who specifically examines Balthasar's "eclectic" use of the Fathers, whom, according to Daley, he always reads as an "accompaniment to his very personal intellectual agenda"<sup>74</sup>. Daley, himself a patrologist, is a benevolent critic who shows sincere respect and sympathy for Balthasar's theology, which is why we can take his critical remarks seriously. Daley finds that Balthasar's attempts to systematize the thought of these Fathers are forced, and conditioned by his own philosophical and theological formation in the Hegelian and Neo-Thomistic tradition. On the basis of what we saw in Balthasar's Eucharistic theology, however, I would like to offer a meta-criticism and first of all ask: Is Balthasar actually trying to systematize? And what is the alternative to systematizing? In my perception, Balthasar's theology, rather than systematic, is symphonic—using his own terminology.<sup>75</sup> Balthasar's theological method allows for tensions and displays a sense for the apophatic: what it wants to avoid is contradiction and unintelligibility. He tries to hold the different aspects and traditions together, in a symphonic way, but without inadequate harmonizing. In his theology of the Eucharist, he attempts to look at the biblical and liturgical foundations as well as later doctrinal statements and theological developments. We have seen how profoundly he agrees with important authors like Leo, even if he never explicitly engages with them. Balthasar tries to situate even the more disputed affirmations within a comprehensive view. In his explanation of the Mass as sacrifice of the Church, he connects the teachings on the Church, on the Eucharistic sacrifice as a whole, on Christ, and on Christian anthropology. Balthasar's theology of the Eucharist maintains an objectivity and realism that, in my view, are paramount to any attempt of theological reflection on the Eucharist that wishes to avoid the temptation of "explaining away" certain aspects of the Eucharistic doctrine and spirituality. At the same time, he avoids the kind of rationalism by which Neo-Scholastic dogmatics may have been affected, in both its language and its underlying concepts. And finally, his Mariological considerations on the Eucharistic sacrifice are, as far as I can see, a truly genial contribution to theology.

As Daley rightly emphasizes, Balthasar develops his Christian ontology on the basis of Chalcedon's classical Christological doctrine. In this way, Balthasar is able to explain how the transcendent God becomes personally present, as Other, in creation and in Christ Jesus.<sup>76</sup> More clearly than comes out in Daley's very short reflections, we should distinguish different forms or modes of Christ's presence, as he is, in fact, not present in creation "just as" he is present in his assumed human nature or in the Eucharist. Distinguishing different ways of presence is helpful, e.g. in order to properly understand what Vatican II means when it speak of Christ's presence in

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<sup>74</sup> Brian E. Daley, "Balthasar's reading of the Church Fathers," *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. E.T. Oakes & D. Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 187–206, 189; for the following discussion, cf. the whole essay.

<sup>75</sup> See the title of Balthasar's short booklet *Die Wahrheit ist symphonisch: Aspekte des christlichen Pluralismus*, Kriterien 29, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Einsiedeln: Johannesverlag, 2008).

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Daley, "Balthasar's reading of the Church Fathers," 201–2.

the liturgy. The conciliar affirmation that “Christ indeed always associates the Church with Himself in this work wherein God is perfectly glorified and men are sanctified”<sup>77</sup> is redolent of both Leo’s and Balthasar’s views. Balthasar’s contribution to Eucharistic theology is not one of historical liturgical research, but rather serious interpretative work that without doubt has inspired many subsequent theologians, and quite certainly the last Council itself.<sup>78</sup>

According to Daley, Balthasar’s engagement with the Fathers, among other things, was limited by this eclectic approach which left important authors out of the picture or underrepresented (Clement, Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzen, Cyril, and the later Augustine). The most serious of Daley’s criticisms is the lack of sense for historical context that he detects in Balthasar’s approach, which Daley even finds contradictory to Balthasar’s conviction about the positive value of the finite, a lack which ultimately prevents the authors from speaking in their own language. According to Daley, it is indicative that Balthasar published anthologies and excerpts of patristic texts, which by their very nature tell us “more about the taste and understanding of the collector” than about the Fathers themselves.<sup>79</sup> We should look at these criticisms by taking a step back. Inevitably, every author is conditioned by the methods and knowledge available in his time. This does not mean he cannot contribute to the progress of theology. I suspect, hermeneutical philosophy would say that this is the only way of being part of tradition. Balthasar himself seems to have been very aware of the fact that we possess and can know the whole always only in the fragment.<sup>80</sup> Daley’s criticism remains valid, but it pertains also to writings of the Fathers themselves, and also to the documents of all Church councils. Maybe the critique points to a hermeneutical fact of which we need to be aware. In fact, Balthasar can be viewed as eclectic; but again: which theologian is not? Balthasar certainly chose well, engaging with patristic authors that have theological relevance even today, though I agree with Daley on the fact that Augustine remains underrated, and I would add that, unfortunately, Leo goes unnoticed.

I look at Balthasar’s Eucharistic theology as an example of how he tries to follow in the method of patristic theology, not only of collecting isolated opinions or *testimonia* to back up his own vision. To use a comparison (fully aware of the dangers of such operation): we can be part of modern sports events in three ways: as players, spectators in the stadium, or in the TV audience. Looking at our way of doing theology as a game: the players are the believers; the spectators in the stadium are the theologians who, like the Fathers, are close to the action, and in a very real sense part of it, capable of influencing the game itself; merely academically or historically interested researchers sit in front of the TV, able to see certain things more clearly, but ultimately alien to what is really going on. Every comparison is imperfect: perhaps we can

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<sup>77</sup> II Vatican Council, Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, art. 7.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Daley’s judgement on Balthasar contribution to patristic theology in “Balthasar’s reading of the Church Fathers,” 201–2.

<sup>79</sup> Daley, “Balthasar’s reading of the Church Fathers,” 203, cf. 202–3.

<sup>80</sup> See the original German title *Das Ganze im Fragment: Aspekte der Geschichtstheologie* (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1963), published in English as *A Theological Anthropology* (New York: Sheed&Ward, 1967).

save a bigger part of it by saying that in order to be a serious spectator/theologian we also must have hands-on experience as a player.<sup>81</sup>

As Basil Studer OSB demonstrated, the Fathers considered *exercitatio/askesis* as the way that leads to knowledge; the theory and wisdom they sought (*gnosis, theoria, sophia*), a training that included both intellectual and moral efforts, was always based on the faith, without ever substituting it, on this earth.<sup>82</sup> Balthasarian theology both “contains the careful analysis which explains the adoring contemplation of God,”<sup>83</sup> and, more than other theologians of his time, Balthasar insists that “the ‘theological *a priori*’ in our distinctively Christian experience” cannot be reduced to “the ‘religious *a priori*’ in our ordinary human experience.”<sup>84</sup>

Looking at Balthasar’s Eucharistic theology makes it particularly clear how he conceives of theology as comprehending both theory and practice (both liturgical and moral). Basil Studer, interpreting Augustine’s methodological remarks, distinguishes two attempts at theological synthesis: *narratio* leading to *scientia*, and *exercitatio* aiming at *sapientia*. Therefore, we should fully appreciate the sapiential approach in Balthasar’s reading of the Fathers and in his doing theology in general. Letting the ancient authors speak in their own tongue is necessary for a theology as *narratio*, or else we can never know what they really said. But the question is this: can theology be reduced to solid and historical-critical *narratio*? From my student times, I remember the debates at the *Augustinianum* about whether good patristic theology is more, or something else than, good history of Christianity. Studer always was on the side of those who fervently defended a non-reductionist approach. He taught us to look at ancient writings with all the historical and rhetorical means available, such as to really appreciate the content and intentions of the ancient Fathers, and the coherence or the tensions within or between authors and writings. But that was not all: he also looked at the Fathers as those who started the endeavor of theology as such, at their methods, and at how/whether their reflections could be seen as an authentic explanation or development of the faith and thus be relevant and speak to us today. The latter two steps were not offered by those teachers who considered themselves pure historians and insisted on the abyss separating us from antiquity. True, there is an abyss, and there is the fact that an enormous amount of writings has been lost, so that we do not even have a complete picture of early Christian literature. In a sense, we are all eclectics—the manuscript tradition has made big choices for us. But more importantly, the desire to enter into a real theological dialogue with the ancient writers presupposes a certain, perhaps hidden, sometimes non-thematic, continuity between them and us. This continuity is the faith itself or the sacred tradition. For Catholics, this tradition is not something that can only be postulated, but something that continues to exist, to be alive, something we stand on, rely on, and fundamentally trust in.

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<sup>81</sup> Cf. Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar*, 77, where he speaks of the human being as no longer a spectator but a participant in the divine life.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Basil Studer, *Schola Christiana: Die Theologie zwischen Nizäa (325) und Chalzedon (451)* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1998), 16–8.

<sup>83</sup> Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar*, 31–2.

<sup>84</sup> Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar*, 33.



Balthasar's theological vision intends to be very comprehensive. His views on universal salvation, inherited and developed from sources like Origen and Gregory of Nyssa, seem to correspond to this vision of the Eucharist, which mirrors and epitomizes creation's return to the Father, from whom it originally was made, both movements happening through the Son and in the Spirit. Such theology is less interested in distinctions and differences than its more analytical counterparts, ancient, medieval, or modern. Both Leo and Balthasar propose a concept of the Eucharist that is deeply embedded in the Christian existence: rooted in Christ's incarnation, with effects on the Christian life of the individual and of the community, and forming the basis of its yet outstanding consummation. While Leo expounds on this issue from its core, the passover of Christ incarnate, Balthasar contemplates more its ultimate horizon, the cosmic history of the world creation and salvation. Leo is a teacher of the doctrine to which all theology must be referred, Balthasar a visionary of the symphonic coherence it shows forth.

Perhaps we can never perfectly distill the doctrinal tradition out of the many theologies throughout the history of Christianity, but that does not mean it is not there. In doing theology, the priority of the baptismal faith may be more difficult to ascertain than the priority of Holy Scripture, but in the end the "theological *a priori*" is even more crucial as it guides not only the interpretation but already the canonical formation of the Bible. What Studer says about patristic theology, I would apply to theology in general, certainly to how I read Balthasar: "Ultimately, it is about increasing faith and hope and thus about love."<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Final sentence of Studer, *Schola Christiana*, 313: "Es geht letztlich immer um die Vertiefung von Glaube und Hoffnung und damit um die Liebe."