

**In the rite Thou hast enjoyn'd
Let us now our Saviour find
(*Hymns on the Lord's Supper, No. 33*)**

**Re-receiving Catholic Eucharistic Theology from the Eucharistic Hymns of John
and Charles Wesley¹**

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One of the most challenging studies of the Eucharist to emerge from Roman Catholic thinking in recent years is undoubtedly *In Breaking of Bread* by the Durham scholar, P. J. FitzPatrick. Writing both as a Catholic priest and a philosopher, he subjects the language of Eucharistic theology as it is generally expressed in Catholic circles to a devastating critique. It is hard to disagree with his conclusion that in philosophical terms the carefully honed scholastic theological language of transubstantiation, as well as more recent phenomenological attempts to retrieve it in terms of transignification and transfinalization, lacks coherence.² FitzPatrick is uncompromisingly direct:

The appearances are camouflage, dictated by consideration to us and diplomacy towards unbelievers. But what is being camouflaged here if it is not cannibalism?³

His point is not just a linguistic one: the language of transubstantiation seduces us into thinking in terms of sacramental appearances which disguise rather than proclaim Christ's presence.

FitzPatrick argues that the language of transubstantiation seriously undermines our understanding and celebration of the Eucharist in other significant

ways. For Aquinas, eating and drinking cease to be intrinsic to the sacrament for they merely pertain to the use of the consecrated matter and which is merely secondary to its reality.⁴ Although Aquinas himself maintained a reverent agnosticism as to how the sacrament conveyed grace, a tradition, seemingly originating with Cajetan, and which had considerable influence in the later emergence of neo-Thomism, suggested that in some way the Eucharist was to be understood in some way as a ‘physical’ cause of grace.⁵ The sacrament is thus regarded as a thing to be received, or worshipped, rather than a dynamic action which enables Christians to engage with the world, to become other Christs, isolating, if not insulating, the Eucharist from time and place. Nicholas Lash is surely correct in suggesting that such an approach to the sacrament represents a ‘dark distortion of the sacramental [which] maintained its grip on the imagination through the *reification* of Christ’s presence’.⁶

FitzPatrick’s greatest strength is to be found in his challenge to this ‘dark distortion’ of the language and celebration of the Eucharist as it has developed in the scholasticism of the second millennium. He offers as an alternative approach, what he appropriately terms ‘the Way of Ritual’, suggesting an encounter with Christ’s presence not specifically in the Eucharistic elements but in the whole liturgical action: It is in the rich symbolism of eating that we meet Christ and our fellow Christians. The baking and breaking and sharing of bread and the heart-warming produce of the fruit of the grape take us to the roots of human experience and have forever been the context of human celebration, healing and reconciling:

The ritual language of the Passover, already taken up and transcending the day-to-day significance of eating, is put to a new use by the Word made flesh, and now proclaims his death for our salvation.⁷

But here are recognised also darker elements of human experience. It is for this reason that FitzPatrick has earlier made the claim ‘that the apparently materialistic imagery of cookery, eating, death, life, boy and blood’ as well as ‘the indispensable awkwardness of sacrificial language’ are necessarily invoked in living out the meaning of the Eucharistic presence.⁸

It is at this point that we can most appropriately invoke the Eucharistic theology of John and Charles Wesley as we encounter it in their *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*. These remarkable and moving hymns allow us to go rather further than FitzPatrick's study in exploring positively the layers of meaning and resonance inherent in the Eucharist celebration. In the Middle Ages even in the small village churches the Eucharistic was given a specific setting: above the worshippers the chancel arch presented the scene of the great Doom, the last judgement, and below, the rood carried the image of the saving and sacrificial love of Jesus revealed on the Cross. The hymns replace this pictorial frame with powerful verbal icons. These hymns, largely composed by Charles Wesley, were published in 1745 with a preface formed by John Wesley's careful abridgement of the High Church Caroline Divine, Daniel Brevint's, *Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice*. Although the hymns are not a slavish and narrow commentary on Brevint's theology, the latter summarizes their intent:

The main intention of Christ herein, was not the bare *remembrance* of his passion, but over and above, to invite us to His sacrifice, not as done and gone many years since, but, as to grace and mercy, still lasting, still new, still the same as when it was first offered for us.⁹

The Wesleys, in dismissing what were commonly considered Roman aberrations, are at one with St Thomas in proclaiming:

No local Deity

We worship, Lord, in Thee:

Free thy grace and unconfin'd,

Yet it here doth freest move;

In the Means thy Love enjoin'd

Look we for thy richest Love. (no 63)

Like FitzPatrick, the Wesleys had serious concerns about the language of transubstantiation but are no less firm in upholding a doctrine of Real Presence:

The Sign transmits the Signified,

The Grace is by the Means applied. (no 71)

Indeed, as Ernest Rattenbury emphasizes, one group of these hymns functions as the '*epiclesis*', calling down the Holy Spirit to transform the elements:

Come, Holy Ghost, thine Influence shed

And realize¹⁰ the Sign,

Thy Life infuse into the Bread,

Thy Power into the Wine.

Effectual let these Tokens prove,

And made by Heavenly Art

Fit Channels to convey the Love

To every Faithful Heart (no 72)

The parallels between these hymns and FitzPatrick's study are noteworthy. The Wesleys, too, seek the reality of Christ in the way of ritual:

In the rite Thou hast enjoyn'd

Let us now our Saviour find (no. 33)

Or again:

But none like this Mysterious Rite

Which dying Mercy gave

Can draw forth all his promis'd Might,

And all His Will to save.

This is the richest Legacy

Thou has on Man bestow'd,

Here chiefly, Lord, we feed on Thee,

And drink thy precious Blood. (no 42)

Both the Wesleys and FitzPatrick wish to escape from a veiled or disguised Christ, somehow hidden in the Eucharistic elements: the function of the Eucharistic Rite is to reveal Christ to us alive in the heart of the Church:

Thou dost ev'n Now thy Banquet crown,

To every faithful Soul appear,

And show thy Real Presence here. (no 116)

As Rattenbury has it: 'the eschatological hymns throb and thrill with the realized presence of Christ':¹¹

By faith and hope already there,

Even now the marriage feast we share,

Even now we by the Lamb are fed;
Our Lord's celestial joy we prove,
Led by the Spirit of His love,
To springs of living comfort led.
Suffering and curse and death are o'er,
And pain afflicts the soul no more
While harbour'd in the Saviour's breast;
He quiets all our plaints and cries,
And lulls us in His arms to rest! (no 93)

On reading these hymns it becomes quite clear that neither John nor Charles Wesley was a memorialist: they demonstrate a rich understanding of the concept of *anamnesis* as not merely a recalling by his people, but a re-presentation of, and participation in, the sacrifice of Christ in the presence of the Father at once in heaven as on earth as it is spelt out in Hebrews and the Book of Revelation:

Angels and Men might strive in vain,
They could not add the smallest Grain
T'augment thy Death's Atoning Power,
The Sacrifice is all-compleat,
The Death Thou never canst repeat,
Once offer'd up to die no more.

Yet may we celebrate below,
And daily thus thine Offering shew
Expos'd before the Father's Eyes;
In this tremendous Mystery

Present Thee bleeding on the Tree

Our everlasting Sacrifice. (no 124)

The fact that Rattenbury's study of the Wesleys' Eucharistic hymns was perhaps unduly influenced by Gregory Dix's magisterial study, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, which stressed the centrality of the Church's participation in the offering of Christ's sacrifice in the Eucharist rather than its role in pleading his sacrifice before the Throne of Grace has left some commentators uneasy.¹² John McHugh in a fine and detailed study of the Council of Trent's discussion of the sacrifice of the Eucharist makes it clear that the Council Fathers rejected any suggestion that the Eucharist and the Cross represent 'two sacrifices'.¹³ McHugh summarizes the first chapter of the Tridentine decree promulgated on September 17 1562 in Session XXII:

Christ at the Supper instituted a visible sacrifice which was to be for ever continued in the mass *in order that* through this rite the once-for-all redeeming sacrifice of the cross might be rendered present ('repraesentaretur') to all future ages, so that men by participation in this communion-sacrifice which takes place in the mass might receive a share in the grace of forgiveness which comes from the sacrifice of the cross.¹⁴

An earlier intervention on the subject made by the Dominican, Girolamo Muzzarelli, might serve as a fitting commentary on this finely wrought chapter. While insisting that the offering of Christ's body and blood in the Mass could appropriately be called a sacrifice, he went on to affirm:

this sacrifice does not avail for the blotting out of sins by way of merit, only by successful petition, so that forgiveness is requested and granted, but not as if it were earned or deserved.¹⁵

For the Council of Trent, then, as for the Wesleys, the sacrifice of the mass is ‘a divine summons to unite oneself, by prayerful participation and especially by Holy Communion, with the total self-dedication of Jesus Christ the Redeemer in his obedience unto death, even death on a cross’.¹⁶ The sacrifice of the Head is also that of the Body: in the Eucharist Christ’s sacrifice is the Church’s sacrifice. This has implications both at a personal and corporate level. A somewhat crude expression brings FitzPatrick’s Way of Ritual home to us: the Eucharist is not to be regarded as a ‘commodity’ but as the performance of a grace-filled, transforming action.¹⁷ As those who have received the Eucharist, we are to be a Eucharistic people: we are to live out Christ’s sacrifice in the pattern of our lives. The Eucharist is incomplete and is a mandate to Christians to share his sufferings and, as Paul dares to claim, to make up in our own bodies what was lacking in his afflictions (Col. 1.24). The rather bland dismissal, ‘Go in the Peace of Christ’, suggesting closure, at our modern Eucharistic celebration curiously fails to catch the import of the medieval *‘Ite, Missa est’*: that open-ended sending out of his people to disturb and challenge the world as models of Christ’s redeeming presence. This is a presence which cannot be lived without cost; we are to take up our own cross in lives of sacrificial service:

Would the Saviour of Mankind

Without his people die?

No, to Him we all are join’d

As more than Standers by. (no 131)

One might say with Louis-Marie Chauvet that, like Christ’s sacrifice, the sacrifice of his people is to be fulfilled ‘existentially and not ritually’,¹⁸ but there is no doubt that

the ritual sets the scene for the existential and provides an interpretative scheme for the Christian life.

For Fitzpatrick the Way of Ritual models the greater openness and vulnerability of living out our lives in the give and take of *communio* which replaces the hierarchical/monarchical model represented by the ‘undifferentiated dorsality’ (FitzPatrick’s phrase) of the old rite. This offers a serious challenge for members, of the Church, and especially the curial style of the Roman authorities, to accept and model the Church’s own brokenness and fragility.¹⁹

FitzPatrick refers critically to the mid-eleventh century theological revolution that resulted in severing the link between the terms Body of Christ and Mystical Body. Joseph Ratzinger is even more forthright in lamenting the separation of Eucharist from ecclesiology:

The essential identity of Church and liturgical assembly, of Church and *communio*, was no longer evident. Like any other society, the Church was now, in a certain sense, a juridical instrument, a complex of laws, ordinances, claims. In addition, of course, she had also what was peculiarly her own: the fact that she was the *situs* of cultic acts – of the sacraments. But the Eucharist was just one of these – one liturgical act among others, no longer the encompassing orbit and dynamic centre of ecclesial existence per se. In consequence, the Eucharist itself was fragmented into a variety of loosely related rites: sacrifice, worship, cultic meal.²⁰

Such fragmentation remained throughout the middle ages and into the modern period and is further illustrated by the fact that the Council of Trent decided ‘to separate the

treatment of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist from its treatment of the sacrificial character of the rite'.²¹ This added to the isolation of the Eucharist both from its context as liturgical action as well as its complex interrelationship with the mystery of the Church. Roman Catholic devotion in the period after Trent merely exacerbates this late medieval tendency. It was not until the tentative steps made by such nineteenth century theologians as Johannes Adam Möhler and given official recognition in Pius XII's *Mystici Corporis Christi* of 1943 that opened the way to Vatican II's return to a more dynamic relation between Church and Eucharist. *The Hymns on the Lord's Supper* similarly allow us to focus on this subtle vein of experiential knowledge:

Who the Mysterious Supper share,
Here at thy Table fed,
Many, and yet but One we are,
One undivided Bread. (no 165)

This understanding of the Church which the Russian Orthodox theologian, Nicolas Afanasiev so appropriately terms 'Eucharistic ecclesiology' is beautifully celebrated in Augustine's sermon to the newly baptised called to mind by Paul Murray in his introductory essay to the volume *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*:

So if it's you that are the body of Christ and its members, it's the mystery meaning you that has been placed on the Lord's table; what you receive in the mystery that means you. It is to what you are that you reply *Amen*, and by so replying you express your assent. What you hear, you see, is *The body of Christ*, and you answer, *Amen*. So be a member of the body of Christ, in order

to make that *Amen* come true... Be what you can see, and receive what you are.²²

As Paul McPartlan explains in his own contribution to this volume of essays Afanasiev's thought contributed to the text of *Lumen Gentium* and thus set the scene for a dialogue between Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy.²³

Just as within Roman Catholicism, this unity between Eucharist and Church has tended to be lost in the history of Methodism. It is something taken up in the corporate doctrine of Scriptural holiness, so powerfully echoed in chapter 4 of Vatican II's constitution of the Church, *Lumen gentium*, developed in terms of Society and Church explored by such nineteenth and twentieth century Methodist scholars as Benjamin Gregory, George Gallanders Findley and John Scott Lidgett, but there is surprisingly little reference here to the Eucharist. Gregory's *The Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints* might stand as a representative text:

Christ's headship of the Church is... no mere honorary headship... it includes the actual communication from Christ to his members of strength, peace, blessedness and purity, in fact of his own 'nature', and a reciprocal consciousness between Him and them.²⁴

Methodists, too, have things to re-receive from John and Charles Wesley.

The Hymns on the Lord's Supper deserve to be carefully read and offer a powerful call to Roman Catholics to re-receive the imagery of the sacrificial tradition celebrated in the Way of Ritual which has been called for in different ways by many within the Catholic community, including no less a name than Benedict XVI, while at the same time being a startling reminder that such a doctrine is less alien to

an evangelical faith than we might think. Here is an agenda for a rich a fruitful dialogue.

¹ I would like to dedicate this short piece to the memory of Margaret Barrett (1923-2008) of Durham who delighted in singing the hymns of the Wesleys.

² P.J. FitzPatrick, *In Breaking of Bread*, Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 1-48, 49-107.

³ FitzPatrick, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

⁴ FitzPatrick, *op. cit.*, pp. 167, 211-215, 218.

⁵ See Philip L. Reynolds, 'Philosophy as the Handmaid of Theology: Aquinas on Christ's Causality', in Fergus Kerr, *Contemplating Aquinas*, SCM, London, 2003, pp. 217-245, who usefully cites in his discussion of this point, Bernard Leeming, *Principles of Sacramental Theology*, Longmans, Green & Co, London, New York and Toronto, 1956, pp. 334-335. Leeming concludes his discussion by arguing that there is indeed 'a special force or power added to the sacraments by God's institution, but it is such as is consistent with the nature of sacraments as signs' (p. 339) (my emphasis).

⁶ Nicholas Lash, *Theology for Pilgrims*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 2008, p. 199.

⁷ FitzPatrick, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

⁸ FitzPatrick, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

⁹ Daniel Brevint, 'The Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice', section 2, paragraph 3, cited in J. Ernest Rattenbury, *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley*, Epworth Press, London, 1948, p. 178.

¹⁰ Rattenbury suggests replacing the archaism 'realize' with 'real make', Rattenbury, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

¹¹ Rattenbury, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

¹² I am grateful to the Revd. Dr. David Chapman for alerting me to this point.

¹³ John McHugh, 'The Sacrifice of the Mass at the Council of Trent', in S. W. Sykes, ed. *Sacrifice and Redemption, Durham Essays in Theology*, S.P.C.K., London, 1991, pp. 157-181; see especially p. 169.

¹⁴ McHugh, *art. cit.*, p. 176.

¹⁵ McHugh, *art. cit.*, p. 165.

¹⁶ McHugh, *art. cit.*, p. 180.

¹⁷ FitzPatrick, *op. cit.*, p. 337.

¹⁸ Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 1995, p. 299.

¹⁹ FitzPatrick, *op. cit.*, pp. 261-279.

²⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology. Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1987, p. 255.

²¹ FitzPatrick, *op. cit.*, p. 318, see also p. 314

²² Augustine of Hippo, 'Sermon 272. On the Day of Pentecost to the *Infantes*, on the Sacrament', in *the Works of St Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Part III, Sermons*, vol. vii. *Sermons (230-272B)*, *On the Liturgical Seasons*, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle (New York: New City Press, 1993), 300-1. Cited Paul D. Murray, 'Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning – Establishing the Agenda', in Paul D. Murray, ed., *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic learning*, University Press, Oxford, 2008, p. 6.

²³ 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*, University Press, Oxford, 2008, pp. 160-175.

²⁴ Benjamin Gregory, *The Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints*, London, 1873, p. 21. For a useful commentary on Gregory, Findlay and Lidgett see David Carter, *Love Bade Me Welcome*, Epworth, 2002, pp. 35-40, 77-81, 89-98.