Phenomenology and the eucharist

The author illuminates traditional eucharistic theology with new insights into the connections among the eucharist, the church, and the Incarnation. He applies innovative interpretations to aspects of phenomenology, providing "an alternative to the excesses of postmodernism and deconstruction." Finally, he develops a theological reflection on the eucharist which utilizes his interpretation of phenomenology to enrich our understanding of "the one saving action that is the point of the created world." Though it is the policy of Theology Digest to use gender-inclusive language wherever possible, Monsignor Sokolowski has made the following request, which we are honoring: "Like many other authors, I use the traditional style in regard to pronouns and gender (indeed, I have written specifically about the topic in Osservatore Romano, March 3, 1993), and I would like to have that style preserved in this essay."

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The eucharist calls for two kinds of response from us. It calls for the piety of prayer and the piety of thinking, of theological reflection. It is obvious why the eucharist makes these demands. In our Christian faith, the eucharist reenacts the central action that God performed in the world, the redemptive death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This action was performed not only through the power of the divine nature but also through the human nature that the Word of God had assumed in the Incarnation. Redemption was the work of both God and man, a divine and a human accomplishment. This saving event of the death and resurrection of Christ is made present again in the eucharist; it is the substance of the eucharistic celebration. Nothing could deserve our devotion and our contemplation more than this.

The eucharist and the church
The eucharist is the central action performed by the church. In the eucharist, the church accomplishes what she has been established to do; she enters into Christ’s offering of himself to the Father, and she makes Christ present to the world. She joins with him before God the Father, and she manifests him to the world in his most perfect act of obedience and charity. The church is completed in the eucharist. More precisely, however, the eucharist is not just the moment during which the church acts; it is also the moment when Christ accomplishes what he was sent to do, the moment at which he fulfills the mission given him by the Father. The eucharist is not just the action of the church but the action of Christ himself. And still more precisely, the eucharist is the moment during which God acts, the moment at which the Creator achieves his second, more perfect creation and reveals to believers and to all the world who and what he is. The eucharist is the definitive action of the church, of Christ, and of God. Everything else the

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Christian does takes its bearings from this decisive sacrament and sacrifice.

The eucharist tells us about God. It speaks more eloquently to us about God than do the heavens and the earth. The heavens and the earth are the visible signature of God’s creative power, but the eucharist speaks to us about the internal life of God in the Holy Trinity and about the charity that exists in God before and beyond creation. The eucharist does this because it represents the redemptive death and resurrection of Christ. Speaking about our redemption, Cardinal Ratzinger says,

In the pierced heart of the Crucified, God’s own heart is opened up—here we see who God is and what he is like. Heaven is no longer locked up. God has stepped out of his hiddenness.

The created universe, in all its splendor, is no longer the ultimate witness to God’s goodness; it is no longer the final expression of his wisdom and power; the created universe now becomes merely the stage where God, in the person of the Son, became part of what he had created and where he accomplished a new creation through the redemptive death and resurrection of the Incarnate Word. To quote Cardinal Ratzinger again, “Creation exists to be a place for the covenant that God wants to make with man.” One reason why the resurrection is more powerful than the creation narrated in the book of Genesis is that the resurrection brings being and life not out of nothingness but out of the deeper nihilism of sin and death. This saving action of God, this re-creation of the world, brings with it the promise that the resurrected and living Christ will come again at the end of time. It is this redemptive action that is reenacted in the celebration of the eucharist.

According to the faith of the church, the eucharist presents the death and resurrection of Jesus, and in performing this action the eucharist builds up the community of the church, the Body of Christ. It is not the case that we are faced with an alternative, that in the Mass we have either a sacred action or the establishment of a community. The church is not just any kind of community; she is the society that was born on the cross, through the action of Christ, the action of God, that is embodied again in the eucharist. When the church celebrates the eucharist, she both reenacts the death and resurrection of Jesus and confirms herself as the community established by this event.

Furthermore, through the eucharist, the members of this community are enabled to participate actively in the death and resurrection of Christ. They become able to do so because they are adopted into the sonship of Christ and hence into the action that he performs. They form a community because they are incorporated into Christ, through the eucharist, as his Mystical Body. This community of the church, therefore, could not be established except through the real presence of the Lord in the eucharist and through the identification of the eucharist with his saving death and resurrection. The mystery of the Incarnation is prolonged in human history, not only in the words of scripture but also in the action of the eucharist and consequently in the witness, the martyrion, given by those who participate in the eucharist. The church would be a very different thing if she were built up merely through the use of words, without the central action of Christ that gives the words their substance and without the imitation of Christ in the lives of those who are her members.

The eucharist and the Incarnation

The eucharist, together with the church that is built up around it and provides the
context for it, is the prolongation of the Incarnation. The Word of God, the eternal Son of the Father, became man; God became part of what he created. But this work of God was not an event that occurred once and then receded into the past; the Incarnation was meant to change creation and to change history, and to do so in such a way that the change remains palpably present. As St. Leo the Great says in speaking about the Ascension of our Lord, "The visible presence of our Redeemer has passed over into sacraments..." The sacramental presence of the Incarnate Word succeeds the physical presence. The eucharist is not merely an afterthought to the Incarnation and Redemption; there is a kind of teleology and completion in the eucharistic continuation of the presence of Christ in the world. The eucharist is the sacramental extension of the Incarnation.

To help show how the eucharist and the Incarnation are related, I will describe a certain trajectory in the many controversies that have surrounded the mystery of the Incarnation. The Incarnation has been greatly disputed since the earliest centuries of the church. The human mind seems to recoil from the truth that God became man and suffered a humiliating death; the denial of the Incarnation of the transcendent God seems to be the paradigmatic heresy in the life of the church. People have repeatedly tried to interpret Christ in ways that dilute this mystery. It was the Incarnation and not, for example, the transcendence or the unity of God that was the subject of the initial controversies in the church.

Thus the first two general councils, Nicaea in 325 A.D. and Constantinople in 381, addressed the Arian heresy and its variations, which claimed that Christ was less divine than the Father and not a complete human being; the Logos was not fully God, and Christ was not fully man. Arius said, therefore, that the true God did not really become man at all, and the councils condemned his teaching and its variants. The next general council, Ephesus in 431, dealt with the heresy of Nestorius, who accepted the earlier definitions and admitted that Christ was truly both God and man but said that the two natures really did not make up one being; rather, the divine nature was merely joined to the human; it dwelt in the human as in its perfect temple. Once again, God did not really become man; once again, the stark reality of the Incarnation, of God's truly becoming a human being, was denied. The church condemned the teaching of Nestorius and insisted that Christ was truly one person, one being. The next step was the monophysite heresy, which admitted that God took on a human nature in Christ but which then said that this human being was completely transformed into the divine nature and did not continue to exist along with the divinity. This teaching was treated in the fourth general council, that of Chalcedon in 451.

The Council of Chalcedon is often taken to be the last of the great christological councils, and certainly it provided the most definitive teaching on the Incarnation. However, further issues arose in the church that continued to threaten the integrity of this mystery. In the seventh century, a heresy arose that admitted the two natures in Christ, divine and human, but claimed that there was only one will and one mode of activity, the divine. Because this teaching claimed that there was only the divine will and no human will in Christ, it was called the heresy of monothelitism. This position was something like a rear-guard action still being waged by the human mind in its resistance to the "scandal" of the Incarnation; it was condemned by the sixth general council, which was held at Constantinople in 680-81.
But even at this point, the controversies did not come to a halt. In the next century, the eighth, there arose in the Eastern Christian Church the great and important movement of iconoclasm. It was the next expression of this persistent inability of the mind to take in the truth that God became a human being. It dealt not with Christ himself but with the images that we might make of him. It spoke not only about Christ's own being but also about his representation in an icon. The controversy arose in a public and dramatic way in 726, when the emperor Leo III issued an edict condemning icons; he subsequently removed and destroyed the icon of Christ that had been placed over the gate to the imperial palace in Constantinople. The next emperor, Constantine V, argued for the destruction of icons of Christ by saying that the person of Christ was divine and therefore could not be circumscribed or captured in a physical, visible manner. In 754 an iconoclastic synod called by the emperor claimed that the church had fallen back into idolatry by making images of Christ, and it condemned St. John Damascene and others who defended the icons. The controversy lasted about 120 years, and almost all the icons in the Eastern church were destroyed. Only in 843 did the conflict end, with the restoration of icons on the first Sunday of Lent in that year. Iconoclasm was an offshoot of the monophysite heresy. In a subtle and indirect but important way, it denied the full truth of the Incarnation. It admitted that Christ had a divine and a human nature, but when it denied that an icon could represent Christ, the Son of God, it also denied, by implication, that the divine nature and the divine person were so embodied in the human being of Christ that the further embodiment in an image could represent the God who had become man. The connection between the Incarnation and the icon is expressed by Cardinal Schönborn in his book God's Human Face:

In Christ, our human existence is to be made divine, while it does not cease to be "human flesh and blood." The icon, depicting Christ in his human likeness, serves as a final assurance, a kind of imprinted seal, of this belief.

Iconoclasm was a heresy in the Eastern church. Some 200 years after the iconoclastic crisis in the East, a controversy arose in the West concerning the eucharist. It was provoked by the ideas of Berengarius of Tours, who lived in the first century of the new millennium; he died in 1088. There had been earlier controversies about the eucharist in the ninth century, and Berengarius revived them. He claimed that the presence of Christ in the bread and wine of the eucharist was only symbolic or figurative; the words of Christ in the institution of the eucharist were to be taken metaphorically, not literally. The teachings of Berengarius did not find a following and were rejected by theologians and by the church, but they can be seen as precursors of disputes about the real presence of Christ in the eucharist that came to the fore during the Reformation. One could say, perhaps, that the controversies about the eucharist—and hence about the church that is established around the eucharist—were the way in which the resistance to the Incarnation was carried on throughout the second millennium of the church's history.

There is a single trajectory in the controversies concerning the Incarnation. At first, in Arianism, you deny that the Logos is fully divine and that Christ is fully human; once the church asserts the full divinity and humanity of Christ, you say, with Nestorius, that the divine and the human natures do not make up one being.
one person; once the church says that they do make up one person and one being, you say that the divine nature absorbs the human; once the church says that both natures remain intact, you deny that the human nature has its own will and activity; once the church says that there is a human will in Christ, you deny that there can be an image or icon of the Incarnate God; once the church says that Christ can be imaged, you deny that he is truly present in the eucharist, and you deny that the eucharist extends the Incarnation in a sacramental way. Controversy about the eucharist is thus related to controversy about the Incarnation, and I would add that disputes about the church and about the Blessed Virgin are so related as well.

It would follow, then, that a loss of faith in the eucharist—a loss of belief in the real presence of Christ in the sacrament, and a loss of the belief in the identity of the eucharistic sacrifice and that of Calvary—leads to a loss of faith in the resurrection, which leads to a loss of faith in the Incarnation, which leads to a loss of belief in the Holy Trinity. If you deny the truth of the eucharist, you begin the drift toward Unitarianism. I wonder also if the trace of iconoclasm in the church in recent decades—the removal of statues and pictures, the movement toward abstraction in architecture and decoration—along with antipathy toward the Holy Father and the Vatican (the “anti-Roman affect,” as it has been called) does not also raise difficulties in regard to faith in the Incarnation. The human mind seems persistently unwilling to accept the intense nearness of God incarnate, which confirms creation and makes everything truly real.

Phenomenology

We have been speaking about the eucharist and its relation to the church and to the Incarnation. What shall we say about “phenomenology,” the other term in the title of my talk? What relation does it have to the theology of the eucharist? What is phenomenology?

Phenomenology was the most significant continental European philosophical movement in the 20th century; it dominated European thought for at least the first two-thirds of the century. Husserl, Heidegger, and Scheler were some of its major figures in Germany, and Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Marcel were among its leading representatives in France. It continues to be an active and important philosophical tradition. It is a form of philosophy that pays close attention to the way things appear. It insists that different kinds of things offer us different patterns and structures of appearance. It also claims that one of the major tasks in philosophy is to describe these patterns and structures, to describe the different ways in which things manifest themselves. Appearances are part of the being of things; they are not merely subjective impressions. It is true that things have natures and essences and that philosophy should try to formulate definitions that capture the essentials of things (as it does in scholastic philosophy, for example), but there is also a philosophical intelligibility in the way things manifest themselves, in the way they come to light, and phenomenology attempts to bring out this intelligibility of disclosure. It also pays attention to the human subject, the one to whom things appear; it attempts to describe the human being in his rational activity, which is, of course, the activity that constitutes personhood.

Phenomenology is often interpreted as highly subjectivist and relativistic, as claiming that we never get to the reality of things but remain only with appearances, and that these appearances are merely the way things seem to us, not the way they are in themselves. Some writers in this...
movement may accept this interpretation, but I do not think that phenomenology needs to be understood in this subjectivist manner. Quite to the contrary, I would claim that we can interpret phenomenology in such a way that it can be used to counteract the subjectivism and relativism of much of modern thought. It provides an alternative to the excesses of postmodernism and deconstruction. For example, I think that phenomenology successfully overcomes the understanding of experience found in the British empiricists and that it also overcomes the radical Kantian distinction between phenomena and noumena. Phenomenology claims that the noumenon, the thing in itself, does become a phenomenon, it does become given to us in its own way. I think, and I have tried to show by example, that phenomenology can revive the kind of realism that marked ancient and medieval philosophy, and that it can do so while taking modern science and even modern political philosophy into account. Phenomenology studies the human being as what I would like to call "the agent of truth," which, I believe, is a good paraphrase for the definition of the human person.

I would like to offer a few examples of the kind of things that phenomenology investigates. It addresses the important philosophical distinction between words and images: words express things and images depict things, and the manner in which each of them works is different. It is interesting to explore this difference, to show how images contain the presence of what they depict without having the thing itself there, while words refer to things without seeming to contain them in the way that images do. There is a more radical absence and transparency in words than in images. Both words and images, of course, must be contrasted with the direct perception of the thing itself, with the presence the thing has when it is directly experienced. These philosophical explorations show how the various kinds of presence and absence interweave with one another to constitute the recognizable identity of an object that can be given through all of them: one and the same object can be directly experienced, it can be imaged in a picture or a drama, and it can be referred to and articulated in speech. Such contrasts among words, images, and direct perception were developed in a strategic way in Husserl's first major work, Logical Investigations, and they have remained prominent themes in phenomenology ever since. The philosophical treatment of words and images, furthermore, has important theological implications. In the theology of the Holy Trinity, the Son, the second person, is called both the Image of the Father and the Word that the Father expresses. How have the concepts of word and image been transformed to apply to this theological context? Furthermore, the treatment of words and images also comes into play in eucharistic theology, because the eucharist obviously engages both language and representation.

One might object that other philosophers and theologians have talked about words, images, and things. In the iconiclastic controversy, for example, John Damascene, Nicephorus of Constantinople, and Theodore the Studite wrote about the nature of icons, and Aristotle and the Stoics wrote about the use of words in human reasoning. What is so special about phenomenology's treatment of these topics? I think that phenomenology restores the validity, the truth function, of such forms of presentation. Since the turn to the subject in Descartes and Locke, things like pictures and words and sensory impressions have been reduced to mere psychological impressions. They have
been turned into subjective states that only hint at the real things "out there." But these things—words, pictures, percepts—have a certain ontological status; they have their own way of being. Their primary affinity is with logic, not with feelings or mental states. They are ways in which things manifest themselves, and they have a role in the activities of reason. Phenomenology restores their function in the truth of things, the function that they had, for example, in the work of Plato.

Another important contribution of phenomenology is its description of the manner in which syntactic structures work in human thinking. When we speak and think about things, we articulate them into parts and wholes, and these structures in the manifestation of things are expressed in the grammar of our speech. Speech and syntax can become extremely refined and complex, with all sorts of subordinate clauses, modalities, metaphors, arguments, inferences, and insinuations. All such complexities, however, circle around the elementary and central activity of judgment. When something is asserted about something, when S is said to be p. Judgment is the basic syntactic structure. The convolutions we find in speech, however, are not ends in themselves; they are all subordinated to the manifestation of things, to bringing things to light, to the exchanges that occur between speaker and listener, and even to the activities that take place within the mind of a person who is trying to make things clear to himself in solitary thought. Every articulation is a disclosure. Husserl develops this study of language and syntax in the Logical Investigations under the rubric of categorial intentionality.

One more example of what phenomenology contributes can be found in its analysis of the human subject. It provides a subtle and detailed description of the identity of the human person. The rational human being is described as the agent of syntax, as the one who articulates things in words, and who, in doing so, takes on the responsibility of being truthful in speech and other forms of expression. The human person is also described in his temporal structures, the structures of remembering, imagining, and anticipating: when I remember experiencing something—when, for example, I remember seeing a car run a red light—I do not just have a kind of moving picture in my mind of something that happened earlier. Rather, I displace myself into the past; I, here and now, reactivate the perception I had there and then. I reenact that perception, and I "duplicate" myself into the one who remembers and the one who is remembered. My present self and my past self are played off against one another in memory, and my own self is really the identity between these two profiles.

Also, when I imagine or anticipate something that will happen later, I carry out the same kind of displacement of myself, but now it is projected into a possible future. If I am considering buying a house, I imagine myself living in it; I imaginatively "try it on for size." As conscious persons we live always in the past and in the future as well as in the present; we are interwoven through time, and our conscious identity is established through these temporal displacements. It is this self, established through time and founded on a bodily identity, that can then experience things, make judgments, and take upon itself the responsibility of letting things appear, of telling the truth.

Such an analysis of the human person is interesting and illuminating on its own terms, but it can also be valuable in many of the current debates that have arisen concerning the human person, especially those associated with biology, such as the controversies concerning brain science and human genetics. Phenomenology can help make clear that when I make a claim, when I say that something is true, or when I deliberate about what course of action I should take, it is I as a human person who carry out such activities; it
is not merely my brain or my genes that do so. Such a philosophy can help defend the human being as a responsible agent of truth.

Phenomenology of the eucharist

Phenomenology can also be used in a theological reflection on the eucharist, where it can help us clarify how the eucharist, and the redemptive action that is performed in the eucharist, appear to us. I would like to use the term "theology of disclosure" to name this kind of reflection because the more obvious term, "phenomenological theology," is so cumbersome. This theology would bring out the appearances that are proper and specific to the eucharist and to Christian things generally. It would bring out the patterns and structures of appearance that are essential to the sacramental presence that follows in the wake of the Incarnation. I would like to mention two particular themes that could be developed.

First, according to the faith of the church, the sacrifice that occurs in the celebration of the eucharist is the same sacrifice that was achieved by Christ on the cross. There was only one sacrifice that redeemed the human race and made it possible for man to become adopted into the sonship of Christ; it was the sacrifice on Calvary. Each Mass is also a sacrifice, but it is so not by being a separate, independent action. Rather, it reenacts, it makes present again, the one sacrifice of Christ. But how can this occur if the death of Christ occurred centuries in the past? How can a past event, in its individuality, be made present again? Worldly historical events are fixed at their moment in history. They can be commemorated, but they cannot truly be made to happen again. We can publicly remember and celebrate the founding of our nation, but we cannot make that founding occur once again here and now; we cannot truly reenact it. Time is relentless and inescapable, and it leaves events behind.

The sacrifice of Christ, however, was not merely a worldly historical event. It was such a worldly event, it did happen in human history, but its true meaning, its substance, what happened when it occurred, was not just a worldly occurrence. It was a transaction, an exchange, between Christ and the Father. Although it took place in time, it touched eternity as did no other event in history. It did so because of the person who achieved it and also because of what was done. It was the perfect sacrifice offered to the Father, the perfect act of obedience of the Son, different from all the other actions he performed in his life on earth. Because the sacrifice of Christ touched eternity in this way, it was not just a historical event; it took on the kind of presence that marks the eternal moment, the moment out of time: "For Christ did not enter into a sanctuary made by hands, but heaven itself, that he might now appear before God on our behalf" (Heb 9:24). The sacrifice of Christ is eternally present to the Father; the Lamb in the Apocalypse appears as having been slain (Rev 5:6–12), and the wounds of the passion remain in the Risen Lord.

When the eucharist is celebrated now, it is not turned merely toward the historical past. Its primary focus is not on the past but on the eternal present of God. The entire eucharistic prayer, the Canon of the Mass, is directed toward God the Father. This setting is established by the Preface and the Sanctus, in which the congregation, the church assembled at that time and place, enters into the company of the angels and saints in heaven and sings God's praise with them, in words taken from the beginning of the book of the prophet Isaiah. The eucharistic prayer then continues to be directed toward God the Father, and it enters into the redemptive sacrifice of Christ as it is being presented to the Father in that eternal moment. The reenactment of Calvary in the eucharist enters into the presence of Calvary to the
Father, and the real presence of Christ in the sacrament is that of his glorified body and blood eternally presented to the Father. It is because God is so transcendent, because he is so radically beyond time and beyond creation, that the eucharist can be the reenactment of the redeeming death and resurrection of Christ. The eucharist can reenact an event from the past because it joins with that event in the eternal present of God. This contact with the eternal moment is expressed in the eucharist by the fact that the eucharistic prayer is addressed to God the Father.

The second thing I wish to do in this brief theology of the eucharist is to study more closely the words of consecration. The eucharist reenacts the redemptive death and resurrection of Jesus, but it does so in a manner that is very complicated. It does not immediately refer to Calvary, it does not relate to Calvary in a straight line, so to speak; the eucharist is not like a passion play that depicts or directly recalls that event. Rather, it approaches the death of Christ by a kind of detour, if I may use the term, by first reenacting the Last Supper. At the Last Supper, of course, Christ anticipated his own death. He preenacted his sacrificial offering; he looked ahead to it and accomplished its substance as he instituted the sacrament of the eucharist. Because Christ anticipated and preenacted his death and resurrection, the church can reenact it afterward. The eucharist looks back to the sacrifice on Calvary by going still further back to the Last Supper and looking forward with Christ to the sacrifice on the cross. The consecration in the Mass weaves together these forms of presence and absence; it composes the past, the present, and the future, as well as the moment of eternity, into an intricate and highly sophisticated structure, one that elevates the mind as well as the heart. These complexities in presentation help make the eucharist into what the first eucharistic prayer calls an oblation rationabilis, a rational sacrifice.

The Last Supper is called up, of course, in the brief narrative, the institutional narrative, that introduces the words of consecration. This narrative in turn is embedded in the eucharistic prayer. Consider how the narrative and consecration are placed within the entire eucharistic prayer.

The eucharistic prayer begins with the Preface and continues after the Sanctus. As the prayer proceeds, it gives way to the epiclesis, when the celebrant, in the name of the church, calls the Holy Spirit to descend on the gifts. The epiclesis gives way to the institutional narrative: “The day before he suffered, he took bread into his sacred hands. He broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said...” This narrative, in turn, gives way to the words of consecration: “Take this, all of you, and eat it: this is my body, which will be given up for you.” Thus, there is an elegant sequence in the forms of speech spoken by the celebrant: we begin with prayer, the prayer gives way to epiclesis, which gives way to narrative, which gives way to the words of consecration. As this sequence unfolds, there is a striking change in the personal pronouns that are used by the priest. The first three of these forms, the prayer, epiclesis, and narrative, explicitly or implicitly, all use the first-person plural. The priest says “we” or “us” or “our,” because he speaks as a representative of the church. He speaks in the name of the church, both the church as a whole and the church assembled here and now in this place. But in the words of consecration, the priest begins to use the first-person singular: he says, “my body” and “my blood,” and “Do this in memory of me.”

At this moment and in these words, the priest no longer speaks simply in the name of the church, but in the name of Christ, in the person of Christ. Both grammatically and
spiritually, he speaks in the person of Christ. To put it another way, he now lets Christ become the speaker and the agent. He lets Christ take over the action that is being performed. At this central part of its most central action, the church recedes and no longer speaks in her own name; she lets Christ take over and accomplish what he accomplished at the Last Supper. She lets him do whatever he did there, by simply allowing him to speak in his name, not her own. It is by virtue of the literary form of a quotation that the church allows Christ palpably to take control of her liturgy. Of course, it is somewhat inappropriate to say that the priest or the church "lets" Christ speak, as though he or she gave him permission to do so; rather, the entire liturgy is being performed under the guidance of Christ. The priest and the church merely provide the bodily vehicle by which Christ reenacts what he did at the Last Supper, thereby reenacting his own offering to the Father. And yet, Christ does need and use the church and the voice and gestures of the priest to become present sacramentally in the world, as he once used the words and the body of the Blessed Virgin Mary to become present in the humility of the Incarnation.

When the priest recites the words of consecration, he quotes the words of Christ. Moreover, not only the words of consecration but also the gestures associated with them—taking up the bread, looking up to heaven, bowing to show thanks and praise—are also quotational. The words and the gestures are quotations; they are not part of a drama. The priest does not suddenly perform a little play that depicts the Last Supper before the congregation. The words and gestures are quotational and not dramatic. This is an important phenomenological difference, a distinction in the mode of presentation. Quotation is a distinct form of manifestation. In quotation, we allow our voice to be the vehicle for the thinking and the display that have been performed by someone else. We allow another person to articulate the world through our voice. We subordinate our speech to the authority of someone else, to his authority as an agent of truth. This is precisely what happens at the consecration: the authority of Christ comes into play explicitly, as he becomes the grammatical speaker of the words, and he achieves what is being done. He is the person speaking. The church expresses herself in a palpable way as the Mystical Body of Christ when she enables him to speak and to act at this central point of the eucharist. Christ offers himself not only to us but to the Father at that moment.

The presence and authority of Christ would not come to the fore in this powerful way if the priest were to understand himself as an actor in a drama, as someone who is depicting Christ at the Last Supper. If the priest were to take himself as an actor, he would assume a greater authority than he should, and he would not be as transparent as he ought to be. It would be the priest's interpretation of the drama that came to the fore, not the action of Christ. To consider the priest as engaged in a drama would also, I think, detract from the fact that even in the consecration the primary focus of the eucharist is still toward the Father. To see the action as a drama would make the primary focus directed toward the congregation as the audience or the participants in this drama. Note that in the traditional liturgy, when the altar did not face the congregation, there was no tendency to take the words of consecration as a theatrical reenactment of the Last Supper. It is true, of course, that the words of consecration do also address the community at the eucharist; the body of Christ
will be given up and the blood will be shed "for you," but this is not the primary and exclusive focus, and it should not be made to override the presentation of these actions to God the Father.  

Our remarks about the appearance of the eucharist do not counteract anything in patristic or scholastic theology, but they do add a dimension that may have been underplayed in them, a dimension that is especially appropriate for theology in the cultural situation in which it finds itself now, whether that situation be called modern or postmodern.

The generous of trinitarian life

Finally, the fact that God became man in Christ, that he took on the weakness and suffering of the human condition, and that he even becomes our food in the eucharist, does not diminish his transcendence and power. In fact, these acts of humility enhance his majesty. They show that God can do these things and still remain the all-powerful creator of the world, the one who created not because of necessity or any kind of need, but out of sheer generosity. The generosity of creation is made more evident to us precisely by the majesty of the new creation, which was accomplished by God in humility and suffering, when he became the servant of those he created, the one who took upon himself the most painful and degrading of all human tasks. In this action of death and resurrection, it is not only God's power and glory that are manifested to us, but also the generosity of his own divine life, the life of the Holy Trinity. The eucharist brings us into this action and into this life, and it displays, until the end of time, the one saving action that is the point of the created world.

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2. Ratzinger 26
3. In the Reformation various Protestant churches developed a different theology of the eucharist because they adopted a different idea of the church. Conversely, the Catholic understanding of the church is related to the Catholic understanding of the eucharist and vice versa.
6. Schönborn 216

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7. One of the main points in Besançon's brilliant book *The Forbidden Image* is that abstract expressionism is a modern form of iconoclasm; see chapter 8, "The Russian Revolution," which treats the work of Malevich and Kandinsky.
8. The thought about the nearness of the incarnate God is from Francis Martin. There is a neoplatonic tendency in Christian thought to resolve things into their intellectual or spiritual forms and to explain human cognition not by the natural powers of the soul but by inspiration. This movement toward the spiritual is a reflection of the more general human tendency, found in Plato and corrected by Aristotle, to deny the entity or substance of material objects. On the latter point, see the excellent study by Wolfgang Rainer Mann, *The Discovery of Things: Aristotle's Categories and their Context* (Princeton: Princeton U P, 2000) Cartesian immanence and German idealism are modern versions of this perennial propensity. For a literary statement of the reality of the Incarnation and a critique of the mythological and purely spiritualistic understanding of religious things, see Evelyn Waugh's novel.
Helena Perhaps the reason why the human mind tries to escape from matter and flee to ideas is that it loves itself inordinately.

"For examples of the descriptions phenomenology can offer and for an argument for its realism, see Robert Sokolowski, Introduction to Phenomenology (New York: Cambridge UP, 2000) and Pictures, Quotations, and Distinctions: Fourteen Essays in Phenomenology (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992).


"Schönborn uses the work of St. Athanasius to speak of the Eternal Son as the image of the Father, and says, "Through the revelation of the mystery of the Trinity, a new dimension of the meaning of image has opened up" (God's Human Face 11).

"On categoriality, see Husserl, Logical Investigations, Investigation VI, 40–52.

"In the Old Covenant the sacrifice was made repeatedly "as the high priest enters each year into the sanctuary with blood that is not his own" (Heb 9:25). The priest's actions were subject to the necessities of history. In the New Covenant each eucharistic celebration may be a distinct temporal event, but the thing celebrated is always one and the same: the one sacrifice of Christ, achieved through his own blood, a sacrifice that could not be repeated and is forever present to God.


"One could say that the priest celebrating the eucharist continues to address God the Father, but that Christ speaking through the priest addresses the community, as he did at the Last Supper. The complexities of quotation permit these two forms of address.