

# PLURALISM AND SACRAMENT: EUCCHARISTIC POSSIBILITY IN A POST-ECCLESIAL WORLD

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## *Abstract*

In a post-ecclesial world, the innate human desire for communion is fulfilled in a plurality of ways. This essay explores the possibility of understanding participation in common narrative worlds (via literature, film) and in common suffering as constitutive of post-ecclesial eucharistic community. To acknowledge this correspondence is to recognise the eucharist as something universally and plurally present both in and outwith the Church. Therefore, recognising these communities as cultural incarnations of the body of Christ, I argue that the Christian Church has a necessary responsibility to engage lovingly and redemptively across the always-tenuous boundaries between the sacred and profane, between the Church and the World.

SEVERAL QUESTIONS guide the discussion undertaken in this essay: *Is it possible to understand the eucharist as something that overflows the realm of Christian ecclesial praxis? Is it possible for communities outwith the Church to participate in the eucharist thus conceived, and if so, how? Is it possible to imagine the eucharist as some ineffable force, which invades our world(s), something which generates community, groups bonded together through celebration and communion, through sharing all that is held in common?* A way into this discussion is provided by the final scene of Graham Greene's novel *Monsignor Quixote*, described below and revisited throughout. While this is not an essay *about* Greene's fiction *per se*, this literary work asks the proper questions and, like all great works of fiction, only hints at possible answers. I hope that the possibilities proposed herein will begin to transfigure our notion of communion and what might be meant by 'eucharistic community'.

## I. PRELUDE

We begin at an ending. An old priest staggers into the chapel of a monastery. He is under sedation, having previously suffered an automobile crash.

He approaches the altar as his caretakers rush in after him, rightfully concerned about his condition. They watch as he begins to mumble from his broken memory the remaining fragments of the Mass, the performance of which has so profoundly shaped his clerical life. When the time comes for the eucharist, his delirium prevents him from realising that the communion elements are not present. He consecrates an imaginary wafer and chalice, and then extends this imaginary communion to his companion, an atheist, who kneels and receives in an act not of faith but of friendship. The priest's fingers press against the tongue of his sole communicant, the felt presence of the otherwise absent Host. His final act, this errant eucharist; his dying words, 'By this hopping . . .'—this leap of faith—a phrase he never completes, as he had before: 'by this hopping . . . you can recognize love'.<sup>1</sup> The priest collapses into the arms of his friend, his body broken, his heartbeat now as absent as the literal bread and the wine.

Where is the 'real presence' in this imaginary eucharist, shared between a defrocked, delirious priest and an atheist? One character believes there is none: 'There was no consecration.' But his Cartesian interlocutor challenges him: 'are you sure? . . . [we] *saw* no bread or wine . . . But Monsignor Quixote quite obviously believed in the presence of the bread and wine'.<sup>2</sup> It is not a question of *reality*—'Fact or fiction—in the end you can't distinguish between them—you have just to choose'<sup>3</sup>—but rather of *truth*, as are all questions of theology, a question of truth and fiction, framed within a fiction, a doubly fictional eucharist that somehow becomes a 'true fiction'.<sup>4</sup> At the heart of this event is *love*, the greatest of the three Christian virtues according to the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 13:13). The 'infinite mystery'<sup>5</sup> of this imaginative (which is perhaps not to say *imaginary* after all) eucharist becomes for the unbeliever a true sacrament in his communion with and remembrance of his friend the priest, and in the possibility of salvation extended not *in spite of* but *by virtue of* imagination.

## II. FRAMING THE DISCUSSION

To embrace the truth within imagination is to call for a certain end of realism. Hence our discussion of 'true fiction'—perhaps even the very possibility of such discussion—indicates that we have entered into an historical era that, for our purposes, I will call *post-ecclesial*. Don Cupitt has described our contemporary situation similarly in terms of 'post-Christianity', writing: 'Talk about the end of realism is in effect talk about the end of ecclesiastical Christianity and the arrival of post-Christianity.'<sup>6</sup> Cupitt's thesis is that the Christian Church<sup>7</sup> was only ever intended as a stop-gap, a 'temporary arrangement' while awaiting 'the coming of the Kingdom of God, and the Kingdom was not a form of organized religion'.<sup>8</sup> He concludes, then, that the

gradual disappearance of the Church, or at least its marginalisation within culture, is a sign that the Church has run its course, and should rejoice in its being made redundant—the Kingdom has come, and it has disseminated into every aspect of life. He writes: ‘So in post-Christianity too there are no longer two worlds but only one—*this* world; and there is no longer an objective God, but only a general confusion and merging together of the sacred and the profane. Every thing that lives is holy.’<sup>9</sup>

While we can appreciate what Cupitt’s thought points us toward—a vision that embraces the sacrality of not only *religious* practices but indeed even the practices of ‘everyday life’ (to borrow Certeau’s title)<sup>10</sup>—his conclusion seems premature. Cupitt reads the disappearance of the Church from culture, this shift from an ecclesiocentric to a de-centred (ex-centric? eccentric?) society, as evidence that the Church has fulfilled its mission. But the Christian Church has not disappeared from culture, and while some traditions may have indeed become marginalised in certain world areas, in others the Church flourishes. The world has become ‘post-Christian’ only inasmuch as the ‘post-’ designates not a chronological move *past*, leaving behind the old, but a moving *through*, moving *beyond*, an expansion that impossibly includes and precludes the old, an anamnetic mode for a transient and ever-changing-while-staying-the-same postmodern context.<sup>11</sup> While the distinctions grow blurry, the sacred and the profane have not merged into one, as Cupitt suggests, or at least not fully. Rather it has been revealed that the sacred and the profane each exhibit characteristics of the other so that, as David Klemm has commented, nothing—‘*not even nothing* . . . is intrinsically sacred or profane’.<sup>12</sup> From media-hyped sexual scandals to the rising fervour of fundamentalism,<sup>13</sup> the sacred space of the Church often appears as the epitome of profanity, while at the same time, spaces previously thought profane, from the dance-club to the shopping mall, and their accompanying practices, are being identified for their quasi-religious character.

To be post-ecclesial (I shall leave ‘post-Christian’ to Cupitt and others) is to still be, in one sense, ecclesial, and the question of ‘eucharistic possibility’ posed in this essay’s title presupposes the continuing presence of an *ecclesia*. I wish then to suggest that the innate human desire for communion is fulfilled in a plurality of ways, both in and outwith the *ecclesia*. The religious urge inspires us all to participate in practices that draw us into the presence of the Divine, that which is essentially ineffable, unnameable and incomprehensible, inviting us beyond ourselves into an encounter with the Impossible.<sup>14</sup> Therefore I would like to propose some possibilities for the reconciliation, the *crossing*, of the supposed rift between the Church and the World by thinking about and *through* the eucharist in such a way that does not merely invert but radically overturns and ruptures significance. Rather than treating the eucharist as a measure of power or exclusivity, a qualification of who’s in and who’s out,

the Church should begin to understand the eucharist as the very thing that shatters the boundaries between inside and outside.<sup>15</sup>

### III. EUCHARISTIC COMMUNITIES

As it faces the challenge of pluralism, I believe the Christian Church must recognise the ways in which religious practice appears pluriform. Graham Ward also explores this plurality of religious expression in a eucharistic mode in *Cities of God*, writing: ‘The eucharistic We is a pluralised and pluralising body that overflows defined places, opening up another space... [and] transgresses institutional bodies that assist in defining, but can never confine, the body of Christ.’<sup>16</sup> Ward describes the body of Christ as ‘transcorporeal’, as ‘displaced’, a body which passes from the cradle to the cross, from the cross to the tomb to the heavens, and is finally (re)incarnated as the Church, the universal body of Christ, an erotic community<sup>17</sup> existing to celebrate, to reveal and revel in the mystery of incarnation. I want to suggest something like Ward’s vision, one which is correlational or analogical, one which seeks to place the Christian Church and its practices in constructive, redemptive (which is to say *loving*) engagement with the culture, which the Church so often seems to desire to convert but also, paradoxically, holds contemptuously and defensively at bay.

When Catholic theologian William Cavanaugh suggests that, ‘The Church does not simply perform the Eucharist; the Eucharist performs the Church’,<sup>18</sup> he is certainly taking a cue from John Zizioulas, and Gregory Dix before him, each of whom point out that the eucharist is the constitutive event of the Church’s being—it enables, in the first instance, the Church to *be*.<sup>19</sup> Zizioulas writes: ‘It is in the eucharist, understood properly as a community and not as a “thing”, that Christ is present here and now as the one who realizes God’s self-communication to creation as communion with His life, and in the existential form of a *concrete community created by the Spirit*.’<sup>20</sup> Might we then understand the eucharist not as a prescribed action or set of actions that a particular community performs, but as a sacred *force* that generates community and inspires such creative and reflective practice? By this logic we might understand the sacramental practice of the Church as a response to this creative gift of the Divine—the Church’s participation in the eucharist as a larger, ineffable, even impossible force, a sort of sacred pool into which we dip our cup, an act not original so much as *originating*, for indeed there is only one eucharist, and we all partake of the same bread and the same cup.

But also, in this way, might we see the practices of other, *para*-ecclesial (which is to say, *beyond* and yet *grafted onto*) communities as participating in the same sacred force? Cavanaugh has made an excellent point of seeing ‘the world in a wafer’,<sup>21</sup> locating in the eucharist the entire significance of

the worshipping Church as Christ's body, God's vehicle of redemption in the world. His insight is considerably important, but my interest is slightly different—I wish to explore the possibility of seeing not 'the world in a wafer' but *the wafer in the world*. Are there other communities, outside the walls of the Church, which bear traces or echoes of the body of Christ and which therefore might also be regarded as eucharistic? Although more could be suggested, I propose two broad categories of such cultural incarnations of the body of Christ—the *literary* and the *literal*—which are identified by the sharing of communion and which I assert conform to a eucharistic shape. I hope that what emerges from this discussion will be a glimmer of possibility that what we mean by 'eucharist', both as the Church's sacrament of Holy Communion and as *any* community by which Christ is made present to the world, might be extended to include other voices.

#### IV. INTERLUDE

As a novel, *Monsignor Quixote* functions on several levels: as an intertextual play or homage to Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, as a work of literary fiction in its own right, and as a work of social, political and religious commentary (by a novelist who maintained rather tenuous relationships with each of those three spheres). Similarly, the titular character functions on multiple levels: he is a simple parish priest who nevertheless poses a threat to the ecclesial authorities; he is a faithful follower of Christ who becomes an unwitting radical; he is a saint who regards himself a sinner, and who treats sinners as though they were saints. The good priest is suspended between two realms, the here-and-now (*hic-et-nunc*) and the Kingdom-coming ('here, not yet here . . . now-and-not-yet', to borrow a phrase<sup>22</sup>), between the material and the mystical (*hoc est enim corpus meum*—hocus pocus to some<sup>23</sup>). Wittingly or not, he draws those around him into another world, one that is sacramental, shaped according to the shape of the liturgy. Likewise the novel that tells his story, a work of fiction, draws the reader outside the ordinary and into the extra-ordinary, a fictional realm made no less 'real' by its existence within imagination. This is precisely what poetic language does: it takes that which is ordinary, common words, simple symbols, and imbues it with wholly new significance. This is what Jesus did in the Last Supper,<sup>24</sup> considered to be the institution of the eucharist, when he took bread and wine, common elements at any meal, the most basic elements of human subsistence, and radically transformed their meaning, altering his followers' perception immediately and for centuries to come. We, like they, submit to the power of the poetic through the willing suspension of our disbelief, which constitutes poetic faith.<sup>25</sup> By this leap of faith, 'this hopping . . .', we enter a narrative world where we are transformed. But there is always an element of risk involved: 'Fact and fiction – in the end

you can't distinguish between them . . . [but] when one has to jump, it's so much safer to jump into deep water.<sup>26</sup>

V. LITERARY INCARNATIONS: SACRAMENTAL PRAXIS  
VIA FICTIONAL WORLDS

Let us consider the possibility of communities that converge around and within fictional narrative worlds as an instance of post-ecclesial eucharistic community. I offer two specific examples, each of which Stanley Fish might describe as 'interpretive communities',<sup>27</sup> communities gathered in celebration of *literary* and of *cinematic* artifacts. First, as regards the practice of reading, it occurs to me that outside of the ecclesia, perhaps even more so than within, individuals converge with the common purpose of interpretation. From coffee-shop poetry readings to academic conferences, from the classroom to the Church Bible study, communities of readers proliferate in contemporary society. Communal reading necessitates discussion, communication and communion. But there exists also an invisible community of readers, one that transcends space and time. It has been said that 'we read to know we are not alone',<sup>28</sup> and indeed, when we read a story we join the ranks of all those who have ever participated in its narrative world. We commune with readers past and present, with characters fictional and real (again, the distinctions become difficult to trace). This invisible community is an impossible community, one which can never meet together in the material world but is able to experience a sort of mystical fellowship within the space of the page, which then becomes a sort of sanctuary, not as an escape from reality but as a portal to a parallel reality, a fantastic place barely hidden beneath the veneer of the ordinary.

Our every attempt to capture meaning or truth from a text is ill-advised; we do not capture the text, but rather the text *captures* us, holds us captive. We are not, however, trapped within 'the prison-house of language'<sup>29</sup> or bound within the 'reading gaol'.<sup>30</sup> Rather, we are set free, sent on a journey in the bound-less wilderness of the page. The thrill of entering into the fun-house of reading is precisely the possibility of getting lost within the text, the narrative world wherein certainty disappears. When we successfully *get lost*, what is lost is Self, and with Self, our certainty of anything outside (or inside, for that matter) of the text.<sup>31</sup> As we get lost on this journey of reading, we discover that, in Christian terms, the only way to be found is to be lost (Mat. 16:24–25)—abandoning all hope of ever being found. We wrestle with the text in the wilderness, and like Jacob's encounter with the angel, this wrestling inevitably wounds us. As with every encounter with the Divine, we come away altered, but 'it is no sin to limp', as Valentine Cunningham points out, for the wound we receive is also a blessing: 'Encounters with *this* mystery,

with such mysteries, with stories and texts . . . are the kind of necessary, painful, laming, struggle that . . . can be redemptive, saving, transforming, healing.<sup>32</sup> A hint of violence occurs on both sides—the writer’s pen, which penned the words we read, is a blade that cuts into us, pins us to the page, exposing our weaknesses and leaving us scarred. But we also wield the invasive scalpel of criticism with our interpretive endeavours, tearing into the text, sacrificing it on the altar even as it alters us. Yet, kenotically, the text always invites us: ‘Take, read – this is my body, my corpse, my corpus, broken for you.’<sup>33</sup>

Extending this, let us consider a ritual that others have identified as an instance of quasi-religious activity in the post-ecclesial world, namely, cinema-going.<sup>34</sup> Parallels are quickly apparent: each weekend participants file into a particularly designated, sanctified (that is ‘set apart’) space, one designed solely for this particular activity; are seated so as to coordinate all gazes in a common direction; conform to a certain reverential atmosphere, refraining from certain distractive or disruptive behaviours; respond aloud where appropriate; and exit, returning to the ‘real world’ upon the completion of this liturgy. A similar critique might be made of both the cinematic and the ecclesial community in the sense that both create an illusion of community by allowing the congregation to be *alone together*. The darkness of the theatre emphasises this even more than most sanctuaries, yet the individual prayer books and/or hymnal, the approach to the altar to individually receive communion (or in some traditions, the individual communion cups distributed), these characteristics, too, demonstrate that the Church is equally an *attempt* at or an effort *toward* community, an ideal never fully made manifest.

In each case, also, is found a common gaze, one directed toward that which is essentially elusive, illusory. In the cinema, the gaze directs attention toward the object(s) of worship on the screen, but in reality, *nothing* lies beyond the screen. What we perceive as we gaze upon this projection is the illusion of the movement of life, the illusion of real people involved in real situations, expressing real emotions, etc, when in fact our perception is being altered as our gaze is doubly manipulated by the lens, first of the camera recording the activity and then of the projector reproducing and amplifying it on the screen. We sense movement when in fact we are watching thousands of frames of still images projected at such a high rate of speed that the individual frames are no longer distinguishable—at 24 frames-per-second our natural vision is tricked into accepting as motion that which is actually stasis. Our perception is also tricked as we regard the on-screen images as actually taking place, as if the frame of the screen were actually a window into some parallel universe—the plot unfolds in real time, but at the end, the film is rewound onto its reel and projected again for the next congregation, again as if for the first time. In this way, the illusion that we are coerced, by the medium itself, into believing is only as real as we perceive it and as we submit to its mythic power. If we view

a film with the constant awareness that what we perceive is *false*—in other words, if we fail to willingly suspend our tendency to doubt—the effect is ruined, and the film cannot carry out its illusion. Even more simply, if we close our eyes (and plug our ears), refusing to receive the visual (and aural) input from the movie which seeks to transport us into this elusive, illusory space, the film’s illusion loses its efficacy, and hence ceases to be real.

The narrative worlds generated by literature and film grab hold of us, transport us from the ordinary into the extraordinary. We might describe this in terms of *rapture*, from the Latin ‘raptus’, meaning to carry off, or to be abducted, carried away by force or seized violently (the same root as *rape*), a duplicitous word—the violent sense conjuring up horrific images, of us or a loved one raptured, captured, and brutalised. But this stands in stark contrast to the more common usage of *rapture* in Christian terminology, the dreamy sense, which calls to mind the promise of heaven, our reward for keeping it clean in this life. This is *anamnesis*, a memory of the future, a remembrance of that of which we have no memory.

But I feel a qualification is in order, for not every literary or filmic work is equally sacramental in the sense I am describing. What I wish to claim is that for a literary or filmic work to generate such a eucharistic community it must be what Stanley Fish calls a ‘self-consuming artifact’, one which ‘signifies most successfully when it fails, when it points *away* from itself to something its forms cannot capture’.<sup>35</sup> Fish has elsewhere reminded us that the work (for him, literary, but for our broader purposes, narrative) ‘is not constrained by something in the text, nor does it issue from an independent and arbitrary will; rather, it proceeds from a collective decision as to what will count, . . . a decision that will be in force only so long as a community of readers or believers continues to abide by it’.<sup>36</sup> The status of the work, like the relationship between the interpretative community and the narrative world within which it congregates, is tenuous. It never escapes a degree of risk, the risk of its own (the work’s and the community’s) disappearance. To embrace *poiesis*, then, is to accept risk, and so these literary communities join the ecclesial community to form ‘a community that produces and occupies a space transcending place, walls and boundaries, a liturgical, doxological space opening in the world onto the world’.<sup>37</sup>

#### VI. INTERLUDE

In his dying action, Monsignor Quixote’s body becomes the sacramental element in the absence of the wafer and the wine. It is his body which, throughout the narrative, has been taken (even as it has been forsaken), blessed (even as it has been cursed), broken (even as in death it is restored to eternal life) and finally *given*. His suffering body is a visible challenge to the Powers of

the World, which have sought (but ultimately failed) to strip him of his ecclesial identity, the essence of his persona. Even in his delirium, he breaks their rules and recites (re-sites) the Mass, extending communion to a professing atheist, one who has not confessed his many sins in decades. In the Monsignor's death, redemption draweth nigh, to the discomfort of his unbelieving communicant, who would prefer to discount the efficacy of this strange communion: 'once when I was young I partly believed in God, and a little of that superstition still remains. I'm rather afraid of mystery . . .'<sup>38</sup> And so, at the end of the novel, the Monsignor's lifeless body is taken away, but his atheist companion is haunted, not by the real presence of the risen Christ (in whom he does not believe), and not by the fear that he has eaten and drank of his own judgment (1 Cor. 11:29), unworthy recipient of communion that he is, but by 'the love which he had begun to feel for Father Quixote, [which] seemed now to live and grow in spite of the final separation and the final silence—for how long, he wondered with a kind of fear, was it possible for that love of his to continue? And to what end?'<sup>39</sup>

VII. LITERAL INCARNATIONS: SACRAMENTAL PRAXIS  
VIA BROKENNESS OF BODY

I now wish to suggest the possibility of the 'sacrificial' community, which shares in common physical suffering, as a post-ecclesial eucharistic community. The experience of pain—physical, mental, emotional—is something that all of humankind shares in common, and yet, in our moment of pain, we are the most profoundly isolated. In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry explains that no one can experience the pain of another. 'To have great pain', she writes, 'is to have certainty; to hear that another person has pain is to have doubt. (The doubt of other persons, here as elsewhere, amplifies the suffering of those already in pain.)'<sup>40</sup> In this way, one of the few experiences that unites all of humanity is at the same time the loneliest and most isolated (and isolating) of experiences. We hear the echoes of Jesus' words to his disciples: 'Where I am going, you cannot follow' (John 13:33–36). Pain captures the imagination and excises a part of the sufferer, which is why torture is so effective as a measure of social atomisation. Think of the politically disappeared in Latin America: wives, mothers, children, returning to empty houses where fathers or brothers should be—bodies that have vanished, as if into thin air, usually never to be seen again . . . *what happened? Did the rapture occur? Did we miss it?* No one touched by torture, which touches not only the subject but also every person to whom the subject is connected, is ever left unchanged.

Communities joined by common suffering congregate in emergency rooms and AIDS clinics, in support groups that meet in church rec halls or civic centres. In many cases, this might be a created or even an imposed

community—the l'Arche community, the cancer ward, even the leper colony, as recently portrayed in the film *The Motorcycle Diaries*, in which young Che Guevara breaks the rules and the gloves come off, literally, so as to share, simply by touch, in the broken bodies of these exiles.<sup>41</sup> On one hand, society tends to cordon off such broken bodies into groups, for it is easier to deal with 'the handicapped' or 'the mentally ill' as categories than to personally and lovingly engage with 'the least of these'.<sup>42</sup> But this is a tragic act, for the denial of death, the denial of our mortality, is paradoxically to deny the very thing that makes us human. Scarry notes that the 'unsharability' of pain obliterates language, rendering suffering incommunicable, and yet, as 'the act of verbally expressing pain is a necessary prelude to the collective task of diminishing pain',<sup>43</sup> I wish to suggest that eucharistic language (in word and action) works toward overcoming the isolation and atomisation of pain. It renders the boundaries between our bodies permeable, making possible the impossible act of not just experiencing but also bearing one another's burdens. Because Christ suffered 'once, for all' (1 Pet. 3:18), the impossible is made possible: we are able to share in one another's suffering by our common participation in his suffering, which is memorialised and incarnated in the eucharistic sacrifice.

Further, Christian participation in the eucharist (not to mention the teachings of Jesus) necessarily imposes a responsibility upon the ecclesial community to care for and include such suffering bodies within the scope of its fellowship. Echoing Graham Ward, I assert that communion with suffering communities is necessary, for the 'racked and viral-ridden bodies of the sick'<sup>44</sup> and downtrodden serve as visible symbols of the eucharistic sacrifice, Christ's broken body and spilt blood, which mystically and *real-ly* binds us each to another and together to God. Since we cannot truly experience their pain or share in their suffering, we must 'bear something of their body weight (with something of its pain) within our imaginaries'.<sup>45</sup> The ecclesial community, to be truly eucharistic, must be(come) 'a fractured and fracturing community, internally deconstituting and reconstituting itself',<sup>46</sup> one which continually seeks to discover, as David Toole proposes, 'what it might mean to view suffering through the lens of the Crucified'.<sup>47</sup> Given our common brokenness, we cannot afford to ignore such bodies; indeed, they may have more to offer us than we have to offer them.

#### VIII. CONCLUSION

So finally the question must be posed (if not answered): are the Cineplex, the cancer ward, the lecture hall and the sanctuary equally sacred spaces? The tension that exists between bodies in and outwith the ecclesia, which appears to render such relationship impossible, is *irreconcilable*, but I believe it is not *irredeemable*. It is in the eucharist, in the four-fold shape so poetically laid

out by Gregory Dix in *The Shape of the Liturgy*, that we, too, are taken, blessed, broken and given. In this way we are always becoming Christ's *broken* body, and without fracture we cannot heed the call to *givenness*, to participation in givenness *as community*—a group gathered to commune, to *make common*, converging for communication, ready and willing to be(come) ever-given for the sake of others. By risking everything, which is what love requires, we participate in the process of redemption and so are redeemed. In this way, belief—faith—comes down to action, like Christ's '*do this (poieite)* in remembrance of me', which is a poetic act, a creative injunction to create,<sup>48</sup> to celebrate, to participate in communion with the Divine.

The mediation between Divinity and humanity is found in Christ, not *per se* belief in the death and resurrection of Christ remembered in the eucharist, for we are not commanded to 'believe' or even to 'understand' but simply to 'do'; nor is this mediation found *per se* in the physical body of Christ, which can never finally be nailed down; but rather it is found in the true *and* mystical body of Christ, the *corpus verum* and the *corpus mysticum*, not in opposition but in harmonious tension, like the beautiful dissonance of a jazz chord. This is the 'real presence' of Christ in the eucharist. It is this taken, blessed, broken and given body that unites not just these communities but truly all of humanity under its shadow. The universality of Christ emptied out for humankind enables the irreconcilable tensions between communities with seemingly conflicting narratives to be, in the end, both redeemed and redemptive—in radical, constructive relationships, in the reaching out to cross the boundaries between the I and Thou, between the Church and the Other. As the shape of the liturgy shapes the Church, we are taken over by a certain sacramentality, which allows us to see the universal, 'plurisignificant'<sup>49</sup> body of Christ in its endlessly diverse incarnations. Perhaps we can learn to see the wafer in the world after all.

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#### REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> G. Greene, *Monsignor Quixote* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), pp. 246–51.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.
- <sup>4</sup> See D. Templeton, *The New Testament as True Fiction: Literature, Literary Criticism, Aesthetics* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), p. 29: 'Fiction, while it does not state, nevertheless embodies truth . . . Fiction, the term "fiction", is wider than fact, because it can include fact.'
- <sup>5</sup> *Monsignor Quixote*, p. 254.
- <sup>6</sup> D. Cupitt, *After All: Religion without Alienation* (London: SCM Press, 1994), p. 10.
- <sup>7</sup> Throughout I capitalise Church not to suggest any supremacy of Christianity over other religions, but to emphasise the universality and plurality of the gathered

- Body of Christ, which in the eucharist transcends time and space, rather than any particular Christian sect or denomination.
- <sup>8</sup> *After All*, p. 21.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- <sup>10</sup> M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. S. Randall (Berkeley: California UP, 1984).
- <sup>11</sup> J.F. Lyotard, 'Note on the Meaning of "Post-" in T. Docherty (ed.), *Postmodernism: A Reader* (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), p. 50: 'You will see that when it is understood in this way, the "post" of "postmodern" does not signify a movement of *comeback*, *flashback*, or *feedback* – that is, not a movement of repetition but a procedure in "ana-": a procedure of analysis, anamnesis, anagogy, and anamorphosis that elaborates an "initial forgetting."'
- <sup>12</sup> D.E. Klemm, 'Schleiermacher's Hermeneutic: The Sacred and the Profane' in J.F. Keuss (ed.), *The Sacred and the Profane: Contemporary Demands on Hermeneutics* (Hants and Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), p. 61.
- <sup>13</sup> Take, as examples, priest abuse in the Catholic Church, the sexual misconduct of televangelist Jimmy Swaggart, the recent reinvention of Jerry Fallwell's Moral Majority as the Faith and Values Coalition . . . sadly, the list goes on.
- <sup>14</sup> See J.D. Caputo, *On Religion* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 7–17.
- <sup>15</sup> This essay admittedly comes from the perspective of one looking out from inside the walls of the ecclesia—although I hope that this discussion complicates such distinctions.
- <sup>16</sup> G. Ward, *Cities of God* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 176.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* See ch. 3, 'Transcorporeality: The Ontological Scandal' (pp. 81–96), and also ch. 4, 'The Displaced Body of Jesus Christ' (pp. 97–116), an earlier version of which is published in J. Milbank, C. Pickstock and G. Ward (eds), *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 163–81.
- <sup>18</sup> W.T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 235.
- <sup>19</sup> J.D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), p. 21 (my emphasis). Also G. Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: Dacre Press, 1945), p. 77.
- <sup>20</sup> *Being as Communion*, pp. 213–14.
- <sup>21</sup> W.T. Cavanaugh, 'The World in a Wafer: A Geography of the Eucharist as Resistance to Globalization', *Modern Theology* 15:2 (April 1999) 181–96.
- <sup>22</sup> W.H. Willimon and S. Hauerwas, *Lord, Teach Us: The Lord's Prayer and the Christian Life* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), p. 57.
- <sup>23</sup> M.C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology* (Chicago and London: Chicago UP, 1984), p. 103.
- <sup>24</sup> For the various New Testament accounts, see Matthew 26:26–29, Mark 14:22–25, Luke 22:14–20, and also 1 Corinthians 11:23–29 for St. Paul's instructions to the churches in Corinth.
- <sup>25</sup> S.T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Nigel Leask (ed.) *Everyman Paperback Classics* (London: J.M. Dent, 1997), p. 179. See also C.H. Holman (ed.) *A Handbook to Literature*, 4th edn (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1980), which describes 'suspension of disbelief' as 'The willingness to withhold questions about the truth, accuracy, or probability of characters or actions in a literary work. This willingness to suspend doubt makes possible the reader's temporary acceptance of the vicarious participation in an author's imaginative world' (p. 435).
- <sup>26</sup> *Monsignor Quixote*, p. 238.
- <sup>27</sup> S.E. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 1980), p. 14: 'Indeed, it is the interpretive communities, rather than either the text or the reader, that produce meanings and are responsible for the emergence of formal features.'
- <sup>28</sup> *Shadowlands* (Price Entertainment/Shadlowands Productions/Spelling Films,

- 1993). Screenplay by William Nicholson, directed by Richard Attenborough.
- <sup>29</sup> F. Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A critical account of structuralism and Russian formalism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1972).
- <sup>30</sup> V. Cunningham, *In the Reading Gaol: Postmodernity, Texts, and History* (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994).
- <sup>31</sup> J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G.C. Spivak (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976), p. 158.
- <sup>32</sup> V. Cunningham, 'It is No Sin to Limp', *Literature and Theology* 6:4 (1992) 309.
- <sup>33</sup> The reflections in the paragraph are inspired by Stephen D. Moore and Mark C. Taylor. See S.D. Moore, *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1992), pp. 11–18, and *God's Gym: Divine Male Bodies of the Bible* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 37–9. Also M.C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology*.
- <sup>34</sup> See, for example, R. Holloway, *Beyond the Image: Approaches to the Religious Dimension in the Cinema* (Geneva: Film Oikoumene, 1977), and C. Deacy, *Screen Christologies: Redemption and the Medium of Film* (Cardiff: Wales UP, 2001).
- <sup>35</sup> S.E. Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: California UP, 1972), p. 4. The quality I am attempting to express could also be put in Jean-Luc Marion's terms: to bring about the emergence of a eucharistic community, the work must be an *icon*, that which directs the gaze beyond itself by becoming invisible, rather than an *idol*, that which freezes the gaze on the object. See J. Marion, *God Without Being: Hors-Texte* (Chicago and London: Chicago UP, 1991).
- <sup>36</sup> *Is There a Text in This Class?*, p. 11.
- <sup>37</sup> *Cities of God*, p. 258.
- <sup>38</sup> *Monsignor Quixote*, p. 254.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.
- <sup>40</sup> E. Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1985), p. 7.
- <sup>41</sup> *The Motorcycle Diaries (Diarios de motocicleta)*, FilmFour/South Fork, 2004). Screenplay by Jose Rivera, directed by Walter Salles.
- <sup>42</sup> See Matthew 25:31–46.
- <sup>43</sup> *The Body in Pain*, p. 9.
- <sup>44</sup> *Cities of God*, p. 82.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.
- <sup>47</sup> D. Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo: Theological Reflections on Nihilism, Tragedy, and Apocalypse* (London: SCM, 2001), p. 87.
- <sup>48</sup> See J.F. Keuss, *A Poetics of Jesus* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 205–6.
- <sup>49</sup> *Erring*, p. 163 and 173.