

John Paul II and Aquinas on the Eucharist

MATTHEW LEVERING

Ave Maria University

Naples, Florida

IN NUMEROUS recent writings marking the turn of the Millennium, Pope John Paul II exhorted humankind “[t]o contemplate the face of Christ.”¹ In his encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, John Paul II specifies that we should contemplate “the ‘Eucharistic face’ of Christ.”² Such contemplation, he argues, will renew both the Church’s life and the theology of the Eucharist. The contemplative believer will recognize Christ’s “many forms of presence, but above all in the living sacrament of his body and his blood,”³ and thereby be united with him more deeply in the faith, hope, and love that unite and build up the Church. As the pope writes, “*The Church draws her life from Christ in the Eucharist; by him she is fed and by him she is enlightened.*”⁴ The “enlightenment” that the Church expresses in her theological understanding of the Eucharist depends upon the spiritual nourishment gained by Eucharistic contemplation of Christ. Contrasting this contemplative insight with current distortions in Eucharistic theology, John Paul II notes, “At times one encounters an extremely reductive understanding of the Eucharistic mystery. Stripped of its sacrificial meaning, it is celebrated as if it were simply a fraternal banquet. Furthermore, the necessity of the ministerial priesthood, grounded in

¹ *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, §6; cf. *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* (2002); *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (January 6, 2001), especially §16ff.; *Incarnationis Mysterium* (1998), especially §1–4; *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (1994), especially §1–8, 55.

² *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, §7. I should note at the outset that *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* repeats, two decades later, the main points made in Pope John Paul II’s apostolic letter *Dominicae Cenae* (*On the Mystery and Worship of the Eucharist*) which was promulgated on February 24, 1980.

³ *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, §6.

⁴ *Ibid.*

apostolic succession, is at times obscured and the sacramental nature of the Eucharist is reduced to its mere effectiveness as a form of proclamation.”⁵ The pope is thus concerned, among other things, to foster contemplative understanding of the Eucharist as a sacrifice.

Why does he consider the sacrificial aspect central to the “Eucharistic face” of Christ? This article will explore this question by means of three steps. First, I will examine the work of David Power, who advocates modifying the concept of Eucharistic “sacrifice” in light of his understanding of communion. Second, aided by Aquinas’s *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, I will explore the concept of communion in its classic expression in the Gospel of John. In light of this biblical depiction of “communion,” the final section of the essay will argue—drawing upon the *Summa theologiae* and *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*—that understanding the Eucharist as cultic sacrifice illumines the reality of salvation in which we are united with Christ’s Cross in order to join in the Trinitarian communion of his risen life.

The Eucharist as Communion: John Paul II and David Power

In order to highlight the issue at stake, I will begin by comparing the encyclical’s brief comments on the Eucharist as communion with the approach of David Power. In the *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, John Paul II remarks, “The Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 1985 saw in the concept of an ‘ecclesiology of communion’ the central and fundamental idea of the documents of the Second Vatican Council.”⁶ The Church exists to foster the communion between human beings and the triune God. Within this communion, a common love binds together human beings, who love each other in loving their Creator. The Eucharist is the perfect sacrament of communion. In receiving the Eucharist, we are united to the Son and share in his relationship (communion) with the Father in the Holy Spirit. As the locus of our Trinitarian communion with God, the Eucharist contains our common good.

In this regard, the pope quotes the Byzantine theologian Nicholas Cabasilas, who praises the Eucharist because in it “unlike any other sacrament, the mystery [of communion] is so perfect that it brings us to the heights of every good thing; here is the ultimate goal of every human desire, because here we attain God and God joins himself to us in the most perfect union.”⁷ Having mentioned this point, however, the pope

⁵ Ibid., §10.

⁶ Ibid., §34.

⁷ Ibid.

does not linger upon it, although he does return briefly to the Eucharist's power in promoting communion. Rather, he moves on to the implications of the fact that the Eucharist presupposes for its celebration ecclesial communion through baptism and the sacramental priesthood. In contrast to certain overzealous ecumenical or inter-religious endeavors, as well as to efforts within the Church to bypass the ministerial priesthood, the pope affirms that without the outward and visible communion of the Church, Eucharistic communion is impossible, since the latter depends upon the existence of the former.

In contrast to "sacrifice," with its connotations of suffering and blood, "communion" evokes friendship. Why then does the pope prioritize "sacrifice" rather than "communion" for understanding the sacrament of the Eucharist? Writing a decade before the pope's encyclical, David Power makes the argument for the priority of the notion of "communion" in an especially clear fashion. Power first claims that traditional sacrificial understandings of the Catholic priesthood are a mistake. In the biblical writings and the writings of the earliest Fathers, Power holds, one encounters clearly "the metaphorical nature of Christian sacrificial language."⁸ The Christian "sacrifice" is at this earliest period simply a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, like the thanksgiving offerings of the Old Testament.

Christ's "sacrifice," similarly, is understood not in terms of cult but in terms of his embodying praise and thanksgiving to the Father. Christ is the ultimate "sacrifice" not in a cultic sense, but in the analogous sense of bringing an end to cultic sacrifice. Power writes, "Later theology pointed to the death of Christ as the highest sacrifice in which all other sacrifices are fulfilled and for that reason rendered obsolete. That was not the meaning of the word as it was applied to the Eucharist and to the death of Christ in early writers, nor the meaning of taking the language of offering into the thanksgiving prayer itself."⁹ Rather, Christ's self-offering constitutes as an alternative path to the sacrificial system, because in his communion with the Father he embodies a relationship to God more harmonious than the cultic sacrificial system could have imagined. For Power, "All ritual offerings ceased because of the way in which the Word Incarnate had wrestled with humankind's alienation from God in death and sin. Christ's pasch and its Eucharist were not one, albeit the highest form, in a series. They were outside the series, a totally different kind of reality. One could call them sacrifices because they realized superabundantly the end and purpose of

⁸ David N. Power, OMI, *The Eucharistic Mystery: Revitalizing the Tradition* (New York: Crossroad, 1997 [1992]), 320.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 321.

sacrifice. To do this is to take sacrifice apart and to point to a different reality as the way to God. . . .”¹⁰

In tandem with this analogous or metaphorical understanding of sacrifice in early Christianity, the earliest Christian authors did not envision the presider as a cultic priest engaging in a sacrificial act.¹¹ Originally the presider was not called a “priest.” The titles given him—“*presider, supervisor, or bishop*”—gave a “functional designation” to his role of leadership.¹² In leading the community’s celebration of Christ’s triumphant wrestling with human alienation (Christ’s reversal of the sacrificial system), the presider needed no cultic title. In time, however, the title “priest” was applied to the presider—but only, Power cautions, in the metaphorical sense of leading the sacrifice of praise.¹³ Similarly, the development of notion of the “priest” acting “*ex persona Christi*” signified solely that Christ’s power, not the priest’s, brought about “whatever was done by way of sanctification and blessing.”¹⁴ Yet, these developments made possible grave misunderstanding of the priest’s role, as “the minister” came to be seen in terms of (at first metaphorical) cult.¹⁵ By the time of John Chrysostom, Power finds, “sacrifice” and the role of the priesthood were once again being misunderstood in their cultic, “mythological” sense, rather than their proper metaphorical sense of thanksgiving for God’s reversal of humankind’s dependency upon sacrifice.¹⁶

Having briefly narrated this grave historical distortion of sacrificial language in the fourth century, a distortion that has lasted to the present day, Power then proposes that “the language of priesthood and sacrifice needs to be once more demythologized.”¹⁷ In order to accomplish this, he explains the mythic understanding of priesthood and sacrifice: “We have to understand first why Christians, as all other humans, resort so readily to this cultic and mythic world. It is one thing to repudiate the cultic sense and the need for victims that it seems to sanction. It is another to understand what it is in human life that seems to cry out for this mode of commerce with the divine.”¹⁸ As he explains it, rural peoples traditionally imagine a world of spirits—in Christianized countries, this role is taken by saints and the Virgin Mary—who needed to be propitiated in order for the community

¹⁰ Ibid., 321.

¹¹ Ibid., 320–21.

¹² Ibid., 321.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 322.

¹⁸ Ibid.

to survive and thrive. For such peoples, the Mass serves to honor and placate such spirits.¹⁹ Such peoples view Christ's suffering as appeasing God: "Remembrance of Christ himself and of his passion and suffering was often combined with the persuasion that his suffering appeased God and so rendered the surrounding world benevolent."²⁰ Urban and technological peoples experience a similar need, in their case the need to impose order in the face of the confusing presence of injustice and unexpected events.

In light of this (fallen) human desire to impose order and wellbeing by exacting a sacrifice, Power argues that Christians should reclaim the original meaning of sacrificial discourse as metaphorically expressing the solidarity and communion attained by Christ. In contrast to the violence of sacrifice, Christ's Cross signifies the response of loving non-violence in the face of violent oppressors. God, revealed as love, no longer can be seen as in need of appeasement through blood-sacrifice. Power thus holds that "it is the power of the Christian use of the language of sacrifice as a language of reversal that has to be brought again to the fore. It reverses the quest to restore order by preparing victims and appeasing a threatening anger, whether that of God or that of spirits that abide in the universe."²¹ For Power, sacrificial language can be retained in Christianity only once its meanings, distorted in the fourth century, are replaced by solidarity and communion. Properly understood, the Eucharist is "a communion of solidarity in love in God's Spirit that withstands human judgment and prevails in the midst of suffering."²² In the Eucharistic meal, all the fruits of the earth are recognized as sacred:²³ Food and drink now represent "a gift of God and a communion in godly love when it is eaten in faith" rather than something for which the spirits must be propitiated.²⁴

Similarly, Christ's body and blood need no longer appear as the sole "sacrifice," since the recognition of solidarity and communion "reverses the attempt to set aside special times and acts of worship by revealing that the people freed in Christ are themselves 'sacrifice,' that true worship is a life lived in faith and according to the gospel and in Eucharist celebrated as such."²⁵ God emerges, after the distortion of so many centuries, as a

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.; cf. 341, where Power argues against limiting Eucharistic celebration to bread and wine: "It seems to be a matter of institutional ideology that there is still insistence on the use of wheaten bread and grape wine." Bread and wine are appropriate to Mediterranean/western culture, but not to numerous other cultures.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 322–23.

God of communion, love, and solidarity. Christ's manifestation of this reality embodied a complete reversal of the sacrificial religions of the ancient world: "His love proclaimed reverses the order of religion in which the judgment of God demands satisfaction to one in which a communion with a forgiving and loving God is possible."²⁶ Indeed, Power warns urgently that continuing to use the language of sacrifice, without making explicit this reversal, threatens the very heart of Christian faith in a loving God and hope in eternal salvation. In contrast to the earliest Christian practice, the cultic understanding of the Eucharist grossly distorts humankind's relationship with God by causing people to remain wedded to juridical fear, lacking true hope of communion.²⁷ Given these dark shadows cast upon pre-Vatican II Catholicism by a distortion of the meaning of Christian "sacrifice," Power urges that the theology of the Eucharist should focus upon the ritual meal of bread and wine, with its expressions of thanksgiving for God's gracious gifts "in the communion of a common table that knows no discrimination," as "summed up in the symbolic reality of their transformation into the gift of Christ's body and blood."²⁸ Power's language here, of course, is strikingly Protestant in its implications.

The Gospel of John: Communion and Sacrifice

What is the relationship between communion and sacrifice in the New Testament? No greater depiction of "communion" is found in the Bible than the lengthy discourse in the Gospel of John in which Jesus, before washing the disciples' feet, instructs his disciples at the last supper:

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. This I command you, to love one another. (Jn 15:9–17)

²⁶ Ibid., 323.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 324. The referent of "their" is ambiguous in Power's text.

Commenting upon this passage, St. Thomas Aquinas begins by proposing Christ as our model. He states, "For just as the love which the Father has for him is the model or standard of Christ's love for us, so Christ wants his obedience to be the model of our obedience."²⁹ To abide in Christ's love, we must imitate his obedience to the Father's commandments. According to Aquinas, this means two things: submitting to death, and committing no sin. In other words, there must be in us no impediment to God's love. Sin constitutes such an impediment, as does prideful unwillingness to pay the due penalty of sin (death). Aquinas explains that Jesus says, "I abide in his love," because there is nothing in me, as a human being, opposed to his love."³⁰ Yet, how are we to share in Jesus' condition of having no impediment to God's love? As Aquinas notes elsewhere, in commenting upon Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*, "Friendship is destroyed especially when one friend finds in the other something opposed to their friendship. But this is impossible in friendship between the virtuous."³¹ How are we to share in the perfect virtue of Christ's charity?

Drawing upon the Old Testament, Aquinas first affirms an ontological reason for hope that we might share in Jesus' condition: namely, God's causal love, which overflows both in creation and new creation. The Trinity rejoices from eternity in the reality of being participated by human creatures: "Now love is the cause of joy, for everyone takes joy in what he loves. But God loves himself and creatures, especially rational creatures, to whom he grants an infinite good. So Christ rejoices in two things from all eternity: first, in his own good and that of the Father: 'I was delighted every day, playing before him' [Prov 8:30]; secondly, he delights in the good of the rational creature: 'delighting in the sons of men' (Prov 8:31), that is, in the fact that I am shared in by the children of men. He rejoices in these things from eternity: 'As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you' (Is 62:5)."³² Christ has joy in us. Indeed, as Aquinas later states, Christ has an "intense desire for the salvation of the human race."³³ For Aquinas, Christ's words from the Cross, "I thirst" (Jn 19:28), express this intense desire. In urging his disciples to abide in his love, Christ refers to the joy he will have in

²⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, Part I, trans. James A. Weisheipl, OP and Fabian Larcher, OP. (Petersham, MA: St. Bede's Publications, 1999): Chapter 15, Lecture 2, §2003 (398).

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. C. I. Litzinger, OP. (Notre Dame, IN: Dumb Ox Books, 1993 [1964]): Book VIII, Lecture 4, §1592 (490).

³² Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, §2004 (398).

³³ Ibid., §2447 (577).

them if they obey: “that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (Jn 15:11). As Aquinas says, “our Lord wants us to become sharers of his joy by our observing his commandments.”³⁴ God wills to draw us into his Trinitarian life of wisdom and love.

On biblical and metaphysical grounds, then, Aquinas holds that God wills to make us sharers of his joy. Christ’s obedience is the model for ours; in order to share in God’s joy, we too must submit willingly to death and be without sin. This sinless submission is possible for us because of Christ’s Cross. Aquinas states, “Christ loved us in the correct order and efficaciously. His love was orderly because he loved nothing in us but God and in relation to God: ‘I am the mother of beautiful love’ (Sir 24:18), and efficacious because he loved us so much that he delivered himself for us: ‘Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God’ (Eph 5:2).”³⁵ Objectively speaking, Christ has removed the impediment to God’s love in us. He has restored a right relationship between human beings and God, and all human beings can now travel this path in Christ. His charity, embodied by his sacrificial death, which restored the order of justice, opens the path of our charity. Nonetheless, how can we make our own the redemption won by the Cross? Christ has restored the proper order between human beings and God, but how can particular human beings share in this right order? How can we “abide” in him by truly imitating his love as his friends? It will be no surprise that, according to Aquinas, Christ makes possible our conversion (from servants to friends of God) by the grace of the Holy Spirit: “Servitude is opposed to friendship; and he rejects this by saying, ‘No longer do I call you servants.’ It is like saying: although you were formerly servants under the law, now you are free under grace: ‘You have received the spirit of adoption’ [Rom 8:15].”³⁶ The efficacious sign of our reception of grace is that we come to share in God’s wisdom, the wisdom of sacrificial love. Aquinas states, “For the true sign of friendship is that a friend reveals the secrets of his heart to his friend. . . . Now God reveals his secrets to us by letting us share in his wisdom: ‘In every generation she [Wisdom] passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God and prophets’ (Wis 7:27).”³⁷

To abide in Christ—to be able as his friends to obey his commandments and imitate his sacrificial love—is thus a gift of grace whereby we receive the divine Wisdom, the Word of God, that enables us to know and

³⁴ Ibid., §2004 (398).

³⁵ Ibid., §2009 (400).

³⁶ Ibid., §2014 (402).

³⁷ Ibid., §2016 (403).

to love as Christ knows and loves. Aquinas quotes Gregory the Great, “‘All the things he has made known to his servants are the joys of interior love and the feasts of our heavenly fatherland, which he excites in our minds every day by the breath of his love. For as long as we love the sublime heavenly things we have heard, we already know what we love, because the love itself is knowledge.’”³⁸ In receiving the Wisdom of God, we discover that true wisdom is love. This is so, as Aquinas has remarked earlier in the *Commentary*, because the Word of God is not a mere word, but a Word that “breathes forth love.”³⁹ The hearer of this Word truly learns when he or she hears with love: “For that person learns the word who grasps it according to the meaning of the speaker.”⁴⁰

The goal of this receptive learning of the Word consists in our bearing the ecclesial fruit of the eternal life of the community of the blessed. Aquinas interprets Christ’s wish “that that your fruit should abide” (Jn 15:16) to mean “that the society of the faithful would be led into eternal life and their spiritual fruit flourish: ‘He gathers fruit for eternal life’ (Jn 4:36).”⁴¹ Christ desires eternal life for us, and so he gives us his Wisdom—that is, himself—that inspires love. He does this in two ways: through the gift of faith, and through the sacrament of the Eucharist. As Aquinas remarks in his *Commentary on John* as regards the Eucharist, “whatever is an effect of our Lord’s passion is also an effect of this sacrament. For this sacrament is nothing other than the application of our Lord’s passion to us.”⁴² Christ’s gift of himself in the Eucharist flows from his desire to unite human beings to himself; he enables us to “love one another as I have loved you” by enabling us to share Eucharistically in the self-giving love of his sacrifice on the Cross. The Eucharist enables us to abide in the divine Wisdom of his Pasch. Abiding in and with him, in the joy of the life of the Trinity, we accomplish his intense desire, his thirst, that “my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (Jn 15:11).

John Paul II and Aquinas on Sacrifice and Communion

If this “abiding” is also at the same time an obeying of Christ’s commandment to “love one another as I have loved you,” then it is a real sharing

³⁸ Ibid., §2018 (404). The quotation is from Homily 27. Cf. *Catena Aurea*, Vol. 4, Part II (St. John) (Albany, NY: Preserving Christian Publications, 1995 [1842]), 486.

³⁹ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, Part I, trans. James A. Weisheipl, OP and Fabian Larcher, OP. (Albany, NY: Magi Books, 1980): Chapter 6, Lecture 5, §946 (376).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, Part II, §2027 (407).

⁴² Ibid., Part I, §963 (382).

in his sacrificial self-offering. Put another way, if in receiving the Wisdom of God in the Eucharist we are truly and fully participating in his love, then we must be participating in the greatest love of his “[laying] down his life for his friends.” Does this mean encountering Christ in the sacrament, and rejoicing in our communion with him in his Body, without needing to be united with him under a (cultic) sacrificial aspect? Or does this mean participating liturgically in his one sacrifice, and thereby ourselves sacrificially offering up his saving sacrifice (now as the Church’s sacrifice) for our sanctification?

In order to illumine why the “abiding in Christ”—the communion described in John’s Gospel—brought about by the Eucharist depends upon the Eucharist’s character as a cultic sacrifice, the remainder of this essay will explore Aquinas’s theology of the Eucharist in the *Summa theologiae* and John Paul II’s encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*. I will seek to show how the communion brought about by the Eucharist depends upon the Eucharist’s character as a sacrifice, and thereby to show the links between Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross and the unity or communion of the Church.⁴³ I will focus upon four aspects of Aquinas’s and John Paul II’s Eucharistic theology: the sacrificial character of the Eucharist, sacramental representation, the participation of believers in Christ’s sacrifice by means of the Eucharist, and the doctrine of transubstantiation as the foundation of Eucharistic communion. For both Aquinas and John Paul II, our communion or “abiding in Christ” comes about through our sacramental representation of, and thus sharing in, Christ’s cultic sacrifice—a sharing that conforms us to Christ’s image by enabling and including our gift of self within his sacrificial self-offering to God. As John Paul II writes, “The Eucharist is indelibly marked by the event of the Lord’s passion and death, of which it is not only a reminder but the sacramental representation. It is the sacrifice of the Cross perpetuated down the ages.”⁴⁴

The Eucharist as Sacrifice

What does it mean to call Christ’s death a “sacrifice”? According to Aquinas, “[a] sacrifice properly so called is something done for that honor

⁴³ For further development of this thesis, see my *Sacrifice and Community: Jewish Offering and Christian Eucharist* (Oxford: Blackwell, forthcoming).

⁴⁴ *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, §11. The footnote to this text cites *Sacrosanctum Concilium* §47: “our Savior instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice of his body and blood, in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout time, until he should return.” Cf. the Council of Trent, Session 22: “Teaching and canons on the most holy sacrifice of the mass,” chs. 1–2.

which is properly due to God, in order to appease him.”⁴⁵ Why would God be appeased by Christ’s bloody death? The answer is that the Creator–creature relationship involves, on the side of the creature, an “order of justice.” The order of justice is another name for the right relationship of the creature to the Creator. The creature owes honor and love to the Creator, as the Creator’s due in return for the gift of creation. The sin of Adam and Eve violated this order of justice. Instead of loving the Creator above all things, Adam and Eve chose self-aggrandizement (pride) rather than self-gift. In violating the order of justice, Adam and Eve also violated the order of being. Not only were their wills disordered, but also their very being was disordered. Having turned away from the divine Giver of being, they (and all humankind with them) lost being. Their corruption of soul caused bodily corruption, ultimately death. By violating the order of justice, they brought down upon themselves the just penalty of death.

Let us return to Aquinas’s definition of “sacrifice”: “something done for that honor which is properly due to God, in order to appease him.” Because of his supreme love for God and for human beings in relation to God, Christ on the Cross undergoes the penalty of suffering and death and thereby restores the order of justice—the right relationship with God the Creator—that human rebellion had violated. As such, Christ’s sacrifice is pleasing to God, because it shares in the goodness of justice. Elsewhere, Aquinas points out that “[a] *sacrifice*, properly speaking, requires that something be done to the thing which is offered to God, for instance animals were slain and burnt, the bread is broken, eaten, blessed.”⁴⁶ This is so because a sacrifice is an outward sign of inward gift of self to God, and the outward sign must convey the radical nature of the gift.⁴⁷ Not merely the Cross, but also the sacrament of the Eucharist is a sacrifice in this sense, because something is done to the bread and wine.

In answer to an objection that Christ has been sacrificed once and for all and thus is not sacrificed in the celebration of the Eucharist, Aquinas states, “As Ambrose says [commenting on Hebrews 10:1], *there is but one*

⁴⁵ ST III, q. 48, a. 3. Cf. Council of Trent, Session 22, ch. 2: “For the Lord is appeased [*placatus*] by this offering, he gives the gracious gift of repentance, he absolves even enormous offences and sins. For it is one and the same victim him offering himself by the ministry of his priests, who then offered himself on the cross: it is only the manner of offering that is different” (translation in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Volume II, ed. Norman P. Tanner, SJ. [Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990], 733). Trent adopts the scholastic (and Thomistic) understanding of God as “appeased” by Christ’s sacrifice and thus by the Church’s sacrificial sharing in Christ’s sacrifice.

⁴⁶ ST II–II, q. 85, a. 3, ad 3.

⁴⁷ Cf. ST II–II, q. 85, aa. 1–2.

victim, namely that which Christ offered, and which we offer, *and not many victims, because Christ was offered but once: and this latter sacrifice is the pattern of the former.*"⁴⁸ Christ is sacrificed only once, on the Cross. Yet his one sacrifice becomes the Church's sacrifice also, when the Church offers up the one sacrifice. Aquinas notes, "This sacrament is both a sacrifice and a sacrament; it has the nature of a sacrifice inasmuch as it is offered up; and it has the nature of a sacrament inasmuch as it is received."⁴⁹ In the celebration of the sacrament of the Eucharist, through the ministerial priesthood, the whole Church offers sacramentally the sacrifice of Christ to the Father in the Holy Spirit. The whole Church receives his sacrifice as a sacrament. As both a sacrament and a sacrifice, the Eucharist enables the Church to offer up and share in Christ's sacrifice.

As a sacrifice to God, the sacrament of the Eucharist possesses the spiritual sweetness of divine justice. Aquinas affirms that "the soul is spiritually nourished through the power of this sacrament, by being spiritually gladdened, and as it were inebriated with the sweetness of the Divine goodness, according to Cant. v. 1: *Eat, O friends, and drink, and be inebriated, my dearly beloved.*"⁵⁰ Indeed, Aquinas suggests that Christ himself experienced this inebriation or delight in receiving the sacrament. Describing a "delectation of spiritual sweetness" over and above the increase of habitual grace (which Christ did not need), he proposes that "although grace was not increased in Christ through his receiving this sacrament, yet He had a certain spiritual delectation from the new institution of this sacrament. Hence He Himself said (Luke xxii. 15): *With desire I have desired to eat this Pasch with you. . . .*"⁵¹ The "delectation" comes from the joy found in offering oneself to God in self-giving love. Aquinas quotes Ephesians 5:2, "He delivered Himself for us, an oblation and a sacrifice to God for an odor of sweetness."⁵² As a sacrifice (the Church's offering of Christ's sacrifice), the Eucharist enables us to share sacrificially in Christ's expiation for sins; yet since the Eucharist remains ultimately Christ's work, we can enjoy "spiritual sweetness" with Christ rather than despairing over our inadequacy. As a sharing in Christ's sacrifice, the

⁴⁸ ST III, q. 83, a. 1, ad 1.

⁴⁹ ST III, q. 79, a. 5. Cf. the anathematizing by the Council of Trent of the idea that the Eucharist was only a sacrament (Session 22, Canon 1): "If anyone says that a true and proper sacrifice is not offered to God in the mass, or that the offering is nothing but the giving of Christ to us to eat: let him be anathema" (*Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Vol. II, 735*).

⁵⁰ ST III, q. 79, a. 1, ad 2.

⁵¹ ST III, q. 81, a. 1, ad 3.

⁵² ST III, q. 83, a. 1, obj. 2.

Eucharist conveys the life of grace, “spiritual refreshment, and charity,”⁵³ and nourishes the union in charity that is the “union between Christ and his members,” the Mystical Body of Christ.⁵⁴

In *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, regarding the Eucharist’s sacrificial character, John Paul II turns first to Luke 22:19–20, in which we find Christ’s words of institution. Against those who would deny the cultic character of Christ’s sacrifice for sins, the pope notes that Christ “did not merely say: ‘This is my body’, ‘this is my blood’, but went on to add: ‘which is given for you’, ‘which is poured out for you’. . . . Jesus did not simply state that what he was giving them to eat and drink was his body and his blood; he also expressed *its sacrificial meaning* and made sacramentally present his sacrifice which would soon be offered on the Cross for the salvation of all.”⁵⁵ The Eucharist is not merely an offering of thanksgiving and praise, let alone a Christian reversal of ancient cultic sacrificial practices, as David Power suggests. Rather, the Eucharist is a participation in the sacrificial character of Christ’s Cross, his pouring out of his blood as a sin offering to God for the redemption of the world. In making this point, the pope, in sharp contrast to Power, approvingly quotes St. John Chrysostom.⁵⁶

Christ’s Cross is, according to the pope, primarily a gift of self to the Father: a sacrifice offered, as is required by the nature of liturgical sacrifice, to God. The pope explains, “Certainly it is a gift given for our sake, and indeed that of all humanity (cf. Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20; Jn 10:15), yet it is first and foremost a gift to the Father: ‘a sacrifice that the Father accepted, giving, in return for this total self-giving by his Son, who ‘became obedient unto death’ (Phil 2:8), his own paternal gift, that is to say the grant

⁵³ ST III, q. 79, a. 1.

⁵⁴ ST III, q. 79, a. 5. Cf. the Council of Trent, Session 13, ch. 2, describing Christ’s purpose in instituting the sacrament of the Eucharist: “Therefore, our Saviour, about to depart from this world to the Father, instituted this sacrament in which he as it were poured out the riches of his divine love toward humanity, *causing his wonderful works to be remembered* [Ps 110:4], and he bade us cherish his memory as we partook of it and to *proclaim his death until he comes* [1 Cor 11:26] to judge the world. He wished this sacrament to be taken as the spiritual food of souls, to nourish and strengthen them as they lived by his life who said, *he who eats me will live because of me* [Jn 6:58], and as an antidote to free us from daily faults and preserve us from mortal sins. He further wished it to be a pledge of our future glory and unending happiness, and thus a sign of that one body of which he is the head and to which he wished us all to be united as members by the closest bonds of faith, hope and love, so that we should all speak with one voice and there might be no division among us” (*Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Vol. II, 694).

⁵⁵ *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, §12.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

of new immortal life in the resurrection.’”⁵⁷ It follows that the Eucharist, in which the Church offers up Christ’s sacrifice in sacramental mode, is “a sacrifice in the strict sense, and not only in a general way, as if it were simply a matter of Christ’s offering himself to the faithful as their spiritual food.”⁵⁸ John Paul II thus makes clear that the meaning of “sacrifice,” as regards both Christ’s Cross and the Eucharist, is cultic in the sense of a sin offering to God, not metaphorical in the sense of thanksgiving and praise. He concurs, in short, with Aquinas.⁵⁹

Sacramental Representation

In the sacrament of the Eucharist, the Church’s offering of Christ’s sacrifice—her liturgical sharing in Christ’s sacrificial act—occurs through sacramental representation. Aquinas affirms that “the celebration of the sacrament is an image representing Christ’s Passion, which is His true sacrifice.”⁶⁰ A sacrament is a sign. In the sacrament of the Eucharist, what is sacramentally represented is Christ on the Cross, that is, the sacrificial separation of Christ’s blood from his body. Since a sacrament causes (by God’s power) what it signifies, the sacrament causes the change of the bread and wine into Christ’s body and blood. In so doing, the sacrament retains its sign-character: In sacramental representation Christ becomes present not in his natural or “proper” mode of being (in which he is over five feet tall and so forth), but in his sacramental mode of being (in which he exists under the sacramental sign or species).⁶¹

All aspects of the Church’s sacramental sign are therefore important. Aquinas affirms that the altar represents the Cross upon which Christ was sacrificed in his natural mode of being; the sacrifice of the Eucharist

⁵⁷ Ibid., §13; the quotation is from *Redemptor Hominis*, §20.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ As well as with the Council of Trent, whose doctrine here follows Aquinas.

⁶⁰ ST III, q. 83, a. 1.

⁶¹ Aquinas’s views on the sacramental mode of being converge, not surprisingly, with those of the Council of Trent. See, for example, Session 13, ch. 1: “In the first place, the holy council teaches and openly and without qualification professes that, after the consecration of the bread and the wine, our lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is truly, really and substantially contained in the propitious sacrament of the holy eucharist under the appearance of those things which are perceptible to the senses. Nor are the two assertions incompatible, that our Saviour is ever seated in heaven at the right hand of the Father in his natural mode of existing, and that he is nevertheless sacramentally present to us by his substance in many other places in a mode of existing which, though we can hardly express it in words, we can grasp with minds enlightened by faith as possible to God and must most firmly believe” (*Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Vol. 2, 694).

offers up Christ in his sacramental mode of being on the altar.⁶² Likewise, “the priest also bears Christ’s image, in Whose person and by Whose power he pronounces the words of consecration. . . . And so, in a measure, the priest and the victim are one and the same.”⁶³ The priest offers up, *in persona Christi*, Christ’s sacrifice for the people. The people by their prayers join in the sacramental offering of Christ’s sacrifice: The whole Mystical Body, united to Christ by the Holy Spirit, offers up Christ’s sacrifice to the Father. Indeed, the sacrament signifies both Christ and Christ’s Mystical Body: In the offering up of Christ’s sacrifice, the Church (Mystical Body) is built up in the image of Christ’s self-giving charity. As Aquinas explains, “there is a twofold reality (*res*) of this sacrament . . . : one which is signified and contained, namely, Christ Himself; while the other is signified but not contained, namely, Christ’s mystical body, which is the fellowship of the saints.”⁶⁴

Although John Paul II does not undertake the lengthy analysis of sacramental representation that one finds in the *Summa theologiae*, nonetheless he affirms the same tenets throughout. He states that the Eucharist is “not only a reminder but the sacramental representation” of Christ’s Passion and death, and he affirms the substantial change of the bread and wine into Christ’s body and blood (transubstantiation) as well as the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.⁶⁵ By holding that the Last Supper is already the celebration of the Eucharist—Christ’s body and blood in sacramental mode are consumed by Christ and the disciples—John Paul II further underscores the importance of reflection upon Christ’s mode of being in the Eucharist, namely by sacramental representation under the species of bread and wine.⁶⁶ At the Last Supper, Christ can consume his own body and blood only if his Eucharistic body and blood are present through sacramental representation. Christ is present at the Last Supper in two modes, his natural mode and his sacramental mode.

Participation of Believers in Christ’s Sacrifice

When treating of the Eucharist as a sacrifice, Aquinas notes that the discussion has two aspects: “[I]n the celebration of this mystery, we must take into consideration the representation of our Lord’s Passion, and the participation of its fruits. . . .”⁶⁷ The “representation of our Lord’s Passion”

⁶² *ST* III, q. 83, a. 1, ad 2.

⁶³ *ST* III, q. 83, a. 1, ad 3.

⁶⁴ *ST* III, q. 80, a. 4.

⁶⁵ *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, §11, 15.

⁶⁶ This point about the Last Supper is likewise affirmed by both Trent and Aquinas.

⁶⁷ *ST* III, q. 83, a. 2.

is the sacrifice, and the “participation of its fruits” is our communion in charity with Christ and each other. As the note of “participation” makes clear, communion with God (and each other) in Christ through the Holy Spirit cannot be separated from Christ’s sacrifice. It is our offering of Christ’s sacrifice that enables, in the sacrament of the Eucharist, our sharing in its fruits of ecclesial unity and communion.

The Church’s offering of Christ’s sacrifice, her sharing in Christ’s holy sacrificial act, culminates in her reception of, or communion in, the sacrifice. Arguing that the priest who consecrates the sacrament of the Eucharist must also receive the sacrament, Aquinas states, “Now whoever offers sacrifice must be a sharer in the sacrifice, because the outward sacrifice he offers is a sign of the inner sacrifice whereby he offers himself to God, as Augustine says (*De Civ. Dei* x).”⁶⁸ Indeed, Aquinas goes on to say that “it is by partaking of the sacrifice that he has a share in it, as the Apostle says (1 Cor. x. 18).”⁶⁹ When the Church sacramentally represents Christ’s sacrifice, she receives what she has sacramentally represented. Our stature as “participators in His sacrifice”⁷⁰ is fully attained when “through the Eucharist we eat Christ.”⁷¹ In the celebration of the Eucharist we do not only represent Christ and his mystical body; by communing in the sacrificial meal, we are transformed into the Christic image that we have taken on by our sacramental act of representation. Aquinas explains that “the Eucharist is the sacrament of Christ’s Passion according as a man is made perfect in union with Christ who suffered.”⁷² Note that the union accomplished by the sacrament of the Eucharist is not simply with “Christ,” but with “Christ who suffered.” Our union with Christ is found in union with Christ’s sacrifice: “[S]piritual food changes man into itself, according to that saying of Augustine (*Conf.* vii), that he heard the voice of Christ as it were saying to him: *Nor shalt thou change Me into thyself, as food of thy flesh, but thou shalt be changed into Me.*”⁷³ In this union with Christ who suffered, a union that can occur through either sacramental or spiritual eating, the believer is “changed into Christ” and “incorporated in Him.”⁷⁴

What does it mean to be united to Christ by being “changed into Christ”? It means to come to share, through his sacrifice, in his relation-

⁶⁸ *ST* III, q. 82, a. 4.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *ST* III, q. 22, a. 3, ad 2.

⁷¹ *ST* III, q. 73, a. 5, ad 1.

⁷² *ST* III, q. 73, a. 3, ad 3.

⁷³ *ST* III, q. 73, a. 3, ad 2.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

ship to the Father in the Holy Spirit. The Eucharist presses us forward in the imitation of Christ's love. Recalling John Damascene's comparison of the Eucharist to Isaiah's burning coal (Isaiah 6) and Gregory the Great's observation that God's love is continually working great things, Aquinas argues that "through this sacrament, as far as its power is concerned, not only is the habit of grace and of virtue bestowed, but it is furthermore aroused to act, according to 2 Cor. v. 14: *The charity of Christ presseth us.*"⁷⁵ In the sacrament of the Eucharist, we are conformed to Christ both externally, through sacramental representation, and internally, through charity aroused to act—active self-giving love.⁷⁶ This active self-giving love, restoring the relationship of justice between humankind and God, makes Christ's sacrificial death pleasing before God. As Aquinas notes, Christ's "voluntary enduring of the Passion was most acceptable to God, as coming from charity."⁷⁷

In *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Pope John Paul II emphasizes the connection between sacrifice and communion: The communion meal of the Last Supper is already a sacrificial meal. Quoting the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, he states, "The Mass is at the same time, and inseparably, the sacrificial memorial in which the sacrifice of the Cross is perpetuated and the sacred banquet of communion with the Lord's body and blood."⁷⁸ Our communion flows from our sharing in Christ's sacrifice. This sharing is not merely subjective, as if by our thanksgiving and praise we succeeded in sharing in the consciousness of thanksgiving that Christ experienced on the Cross. On the contrary, God makes sacramentally present Christ's cultic sacrifice to us in the Eucharist, and thereby enables us to receive the fruits of Christ's sacrifice. John Paul II remarks, "The Church constantly draws her life from the redeeming sacrifice; she approaches it not only through faith-filled remembrance, but also through a real contact, since *this sacrifice is made present ever anew*, sacramentally perpetuated, in every community which offers it at the hands of the consecrated minister. The Eucharist thus applies to men and women today the reconciliation won once for all by Christ for mankind in every age."⁷⁹ In the sacrament of the Eucharist, the Church offers the one and only sacrifice of Christ. Christ offered himself for our sins at Calvary; the Church daily offers sacramentally this once-and-for-all

⁷⁵ ST III, q. 79, a. 1, ad 2.

⁷⁶ See also ST III, q. 79, a. 4, and numerous similar texts.

⁷⁷ ST III, q. 48, a. 3.

⁷⁸ *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, §12; cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1382.

⁷⁹ *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, §12.

offering on the altars throughout the world, so that humankind may be one in the communion of his risen life.⁸⁰

The pope thus rules out the strictly metaphorical sense of sacrifice that would focus, as Power does, on the memorial meal. The Church's sacramental offering of Christ's sacrifice is her mode, given her by Christ, of sharing in Christ's sacrificial self-offering and thereby being conformed to his image in the unity of his Body. As the John Paul II put it, "In giving his sacrifice to the Church, Christ has also made his own the spiritual sacrifice of the Church, which is called to offer herself in union with the sacrifice of Christ." Here he quotes *Lumen Gentium*: "Taking part in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, which is the source and summit of the whole Christian life, they offer the divine victim to God, and offer themselves along with it."⁸¹ In affirming the sacrificial character of Christ's Cross and of the Eucharist, however, the pope is careful not to cut off the Eucharist from the Resurrection. Christ's self-giving sacrifice bridges the sinful alienation between self-aggrandizing humankind and the self-giving God of love, and thereby opens the path of eternal life. The pope states, "The Eucharistic Sacrifice makes present not only the mystery of the Saviour's passion and death, but also the mystery of the resurrection which crowned his sacrifice."⁸² As the risen Lord, Christ offers himself to us in the Eucharist truly as the "bread of life" (Jn 6:35, 48) in whom we find eternal life.⁸³ The celebration of the Eucharist thus unites the sacrificial aspect of the Cross with the triumphant aspect of the Resurrection. As John Paul II emphasizes, however, the "life" of communion is found only through Christ's sacrifice, because through Christ's sacrifice God restores the relationship between human beings and himself and invites us into the "communion" of divine self-giving love, in the life of the risen Lord.

Transubstantiation and Communion

Recall how David Power, who rejects conceptualizing the change of the Eucharistic elements in terms of "efficient causality" and "substantial change" and who instead prefers to envision the Eucharist as God's special presence mediated through language and ritual,⁸⁴ speaks of the "transformation" of the bread and wine:

⁸⁰ The pope here (§12) quotes with approval Chrysostom's use of cultic sacrificial language. Recall that for Power, Chrysostom represents the fourth-century distortion of the allegedly original metaphorical meaning of sacrificial language.

⁸¹ *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, §12; cf. *Lumen Gentium*, §11.

⁸² *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, §14.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Cf. David Power, *The Eucharistic Mystery*, 320–24.

The acknowledgment of a gracious and gratuitous presence in the midst of the people is what is expressed in thanksgiving and ritual sharing. Such acknowledgment is meant to find its focal point in the bread and wine set on the table in the middle of the assembly. In the bread and wine of the people there is the presence of a God who is revealed by being veiled under these symbols, just as the divine love continues to be revealed under the veil of Christ's suffering. The gratuity of God's presence at the heart of creation, the gratuity of God's advent in Jesus Christ, and the gratuity of the Spirit dwelling in the hearts of the people who convene as one are expressed in thanksgiving over these realities of daily life and in the communion of a common table that knows of no discrimination. All this is summed up in the symbolic reality of their transformation into the gift of Christ's body and blood.⁸⁵

Aquinas, in contrast, places the emphasis upon *Christ's* friendship with us, rather than upon our harmonious expression of thanksgiving at the common table. Christ's charity, as manifested by his bodily presence in the Eucharist, fuels our faith, hope, and love. Referring to John 6, Aquinas states that "in our pilgrimage He does not deprive us of His bodily presence; but unites us with Himself in this sacrament through the truth of His body and blood. . . . Hence this sacrament is the sign of supreme charity, and the uplifter of our hope, from such familiar union of Christ with us."⁸⁶ Aquinas notes that Christ's bodily presence in the Eucharist comes about not by "local motion" of Christ's body and blood from one place to another, but by change on the side of bread and wine, namely substantial change of the bread and wine. Aquinas affirms that "this is done by Divine power in this sacrament; for the whole substance of the bread is changed into the whole substance of Christ's body, and the whole substance of the wine into the whole substance of Christ's blood. Hence this is not a formal, but a substantial conversion; nor is it a kind of natural movement: But, with a name of its own, it can be called transubstantiation."⁸⁷

John Paul II adopts the same Christological emphasis as does Aquinas. Before describing the Eucharistic banquet, John Paul II describes ontologically Christ's real presence brought about by God's power in the "sacramental re-presentation of Christ's sacrifice, crowned by the resurrection."⁸⁸ The pope affirms "the perennially valid teaching of the Council of Trent: 'the consecration of the bread and wine effects the change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ

⁸⁵ Ibid., 324.

⁸⁶ *ST* III, q. 75, a. 1.

⁸⁷ *ST* III, q. 75, a. 4.

⁸⁸ *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, §15.

our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. And the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called this change transubstantiation.’”⁸⁹ Only Eucharistic theology that retains this ontological principle of transubstantiation, the pope suggests, can do justice to the Church’s Eucharistic faith.⁹⁰ This is so because Christ’s sacrifice achieves its “saving efficacy” in us when we commune in his sacrificial body and blood.⁹¹

Transubstantiation is not simply a theoretical doctrine: It has radical import for the Christian life. Sharing in the crucified Lord brings about communion, because his sacrifice takes away sins that destroy communion. The pope writes, “The Eucharistic Sacrifice is intrinsically directed to the inward union of the faithful with Christ through communion; we receive the very One who offered himself for us, we receive his body which he gave up for us on the Cross and his blood which he ‘poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins’ (Mt 26:28).”⁹² We commune in Christ’s sacrifice, and thereby share in his justice as members of his Body. Through his righteousness, we are conformed to his active self-giving charity and are raised by God to share in the Trinitarian life that the risen Lord enjoys. In other words, by communing in the justice of his sacrifice, we commune in his self-giving life, which is the manifestation of the life (love) of the Trinity. The pope states, “We are reminded of his words: “‘As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me’ (Jn 6:57). Jesus himself reassures us that this union, which he compares to that of the life of the Trinity, is truly realized. *The Eucharist is a true banquet*, in which Christ offers himself as our nourishment.”⁹³ It is by sharing in Christ’s cultic sacrifice that we “abide with him” in the communion of the banquet.

Just as Christ’s Cross results in the outpouring of his Spirit, now that the impediment of sin has been removed, so also sharing in the Eucharistic sacrifice brings about an influx of the Holy Spirit, from whom comes true communion in active self-giving love.⁹⁴ In this gift, which is a sharing in Christ’s risen life in the Spirit, we receive a pledge of the eternal “life” that the Son receives from the Father. David Power states, “Eucharistic memorial both obliges us and permits us to live the given moment in eschatological hope. This is not to be translated into a time-plan for the future but

⁸⁹ Ibid.; cf. Council of Trent, Session 13, ch. 4.

⁹⁰ *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, §15.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., §16.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., §17.

it allows us to keep hope alive in the expectation of the unexpected intervention of divine love. Where sin abounds, grace does more abound. Which is to say that in the midst of absurdity we are to look for a saving love.”⁹⁵ Aquinas puts it rather differently. For Aquinas, along with fueling our “eschatological hope,” the sacrament of the Eucharist causes the attaining of eternal life through Christ’s Cross, by giving us spiritual strength, that is to say active charity: “[T]his sacrament does not at once admit us to glory, but bestows on us the power of coming unto glory. And therefore it is called *Viaticum*, a figure whereof we read in 1 Kgs 19:8: *Elias ate and drank, and walked in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights unto the mount of God, Horeb.*”⁹⁶ Similarly, John Paul II argues that the Eucharist gives us more than “eschatological hope,” although it certainly bestows such hope. As a sharing in Christ’s sacrificial body and blood, the Eucharist is also a sharing in risen Lord, who embodies the self-giving wisdom and love of the life of the Trinity. Therefore, the Eucharist gives “real contact,” in Christ’s Spirit-filled body and blood, with the life of the Trinity. Christ is living. The pope notes, “Those who feed on Christ in the Eucharist need not wait until the hereafter to receive eternal life: *They already possess it on earth*, as the first-fruits of a future fullness which will embrace man in his totality. For in the Eucharist we also receive the pledge of our bodily resurrection at the end of the world: ‘He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day’ (Jn 6:54).”⁹⁷

As the book of Revelation teaches, the Eucharistic liturgy unites us to the heavenly liturgy of the triumphant followers of the Lamb. John Paul II says, “The Eucharist is truly a glimpse of heaven appearing on earth.”⁹⁸ Yet, this communion, the glory of heaven, comes about through the sacrificial justice of Christ’s Cross, in which the Eucharist enables us to share. Eucharistic communion (abiding in Christ) is a communion of charity manifested by the willingness to lay down one’s life sacrificially in conformity to Christ (Jn 15). Communion and sacrifice once again are inseparable. As the pope says, “We need but think of the urgent need to work for peace, to base relationships between peoples on solid premises of justice and solidarity, and to defend human life from conception to its natural end. And what should we say of the thousand inconsistencies of a ‘globalized’ world where the weakest, the most powerless and the poorest appear to have so little hope!”⁹⁹ If the Eucharist is a glimpse of

⁹⁵ Power, *The Eucharistic Mystery*, 348.

⁹⁶ ST III, q. 79, a. 2, ad 1.

⁹⁷ *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, §18.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, §19.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, §20.

heaven on earth, this is so because the communion of heaven, in Christ's Body, is radical self-giving love that manifests perfect justice. Christ connects his Eucharistic sacrifice with the sacrificial love of believers by instructing his disciples to wash each other's feet (Jn 13), and St. Paul draws the connection between the Eucharistic meal and charity in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 11).¹⁰⁰ The pope affirms, "Proclaiming the death of the Lord 'until he comes' (1 Cor 11:26) entails that all who take part in the Eucharist be committed to changing their lives and making them in a certain way completely 'Eucharistic.'"¹⁰¹ Going beyond expressions of "thanksgiving and ritual sharing,"¹⁰² such radical Christian action flows from participation in Christ's cultic sacrifice, his self-offering to God. As Aquinas remarks, "The reality (*res*) of this sacrament is charity, not only as to its habit, but also as to its act, which is kindled in this sacrament."¹⁰³

Conclusion

Although much more could be said, I have said enough to show why John Paul II and Aquinas—whose ideas flow from the Church's tradition and are mediated to John Paul II through the Council of Trent and other ecclesial teaching—are agreed upon the necessary conjunction of cultic sacrifice and communion in theological understanding of the Eucharist. In light of an alternative posed by David Power, I have sought to answer the question: Why should union or communion with Christ, in the Eucharist, be a union in sacrifice understood in the cultic sense? In concluding, let us recall our analysis of John 15. Christ calls human beings to abide in his love, and thereby to enjoy the communion of friendship with the Trinity. Specifically, he teaches that we must "love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15:12). Such love is sacrificial, as Christ makes explicit: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13). This sacrificial love is the "love" in which we must "abide." If we do so, we become no longer Jesus' servants, but his friends. Jesus notes that the servant "does not know what his master is doing." In contrast, Jesus' disciples are now his friends because he has revealed to them what their divine Master "is doing," that is to say, God's self-giving love. We can love as Christ loved because the Eucharist inflames our charity and enables us radically to offer our lives to God in

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Power, *The Eucharistic Mystery*, 324.

¹⁰³ ST III, q. 79, a. 4.

Christ, thereby sharing in Christ's (cultic) justice. The knowledge that we gain of Christ through the Eucharist is a knowing of God as self-giving or sacrificial love; it is truly "to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph 3:19). This fulness, which we receive by sharing in his sacrifice, is divine communion. By his communion with us in his Eucharistic sacrifice, Jesus himself chooses and appoints us so that we might bear this fruit of sacrificial love, a community of self-giving love in Christ (Jn 15:16).¹⁰⁴ **NCV**

¹⁰⁴ I am grateful to Therese Scarpelli for comments on earlier drafts of this article.

