

EATING CHRIST

Recovering the Language of Real Identification

Alvin F. Kimel, Jr.

In A.D. 1059 Pope Nicholas II required the theologian Berengar to publicly denounce a mere symbolic understanding of the Holy Eucharist and confess that the consecrated bread and wine are the true body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ and "are in truth sensibly and not only sacramentally touched by the hands of the priests and are broken and chewed by the teeth of the faithful."

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From this it is given to be understood that the breaking, and parts which here seem to be made, are being done in sign (*in sacramento*), that is in the visible species. And for this reason those words of Berengar that the Body of Christ is said to be handled by the hands of the priest, truly broken and crushed by teeth, not sensually in the mode of a sign (*non modo in sacramento*), but in truth, are to be distinguished; something truly (is done), but in sign alone (*in sacramentum tantum*).²

Peter posits a clear separation between the sensible sign (the consecrated bread) and the reality signified by the sign (the body of Christ). It is the sign that is physically chewed and eaten by the communicant, not the body of Christ.

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1. Cited in James T. O'Connor, *The Hidden Manna* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), pp. 177.

2. Cited in Gary Macy, *Treasures from the Storeroom* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1999), p. 26.

This solution would later be adopted by St. Thomas Aquinas. The risen body of Christ is not present locally in the sacrament. It is present in the manner of substance, the substance of Christ's risen body having replaced the substance of the bread and wine.³ It is thus invisible, untouchable, imperceptible, having no contact with its material surroundings, and can only be intellectually apprehended. The accidents of the bread and wine persist; but miraculously they do not inhere in any substance.⁴ After the consecration, therefore, two *particulars*, though not two *substances*, rest on the altar.⁵ This distinction allows Aquinas to maintain that certain predications have the accidents, and not the body of Christ, as their subject. Moreover, the glorified humanity of Christ is impassible and cannot be affected by the accidents nor be altered to receive the properties of bread and wine.⁶ "The confession made by Berengarius," writes Thomas, "is to be understood in this sense, that the breaking and the crushing with the teeth is to be referred to the sacramental species, under which the body of Christ truly is."⁷ On this one point, Peter and Thomas, as well as William of Auxerre, Albert the Great, and Bonaventure, are in agreement with Berengar: The body of Christ cannot be physically touched, chewed, and crushed with the teeth.⁸

Our liturgies may well identify the eucharistic elements as the body and blood of Christ—the sacrament is typically given to the communicant with words such as "The Body of Christ," "The Blood of Christ"—but we interpret the meaning of the ritual words through our dualistic hermeneutic.

Built into the Western Catholic understanding of the Eucharist, therefore, is a dualistic experience of the sacrament. This becomes apparent in the heavy use of the spatial prepositions *in*, *with*, and *under* to qualify and define the sacramental presence. The body and blood of Christ are present *under* the appearances of bread and wine; the glorified humanity is contained *in* the signs of bread and wine; the risen Christ is given *with* the elements. Our liturgies may well identify the eucharistic elements *as* the body and blood of Christ—the sacrament is typically given to the communicant with words such as "The Body of Christ," "The Blood of Christ"—but we interpret the meaning of the ritual words through our dualistic hermeneutic. We confess the real presence of Christ in the sacrament; but we know, and therefore experience, this presence as a presence under the species and in the species and hence distinct from the species.⁹

3. *Summa Theologica* 3a.76.5; 3a.76.6; 3a.76.7.

4. *Summa Theologica* 3a.77.1; 3a.77.2.

5. Michael Dummett, "The Intelligibility of Eucharistic Doctrine," in *Rationality and Religious Belief*, ed. William J. Abraham and Steven W. Holtzer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 259.

6. *Summa Theologica* 3a.77.1.

7. *Summa Theologica* 3a.77.7.

8. Macy, p. 28.

9. To the degree that this dualism is actually experienced, if at all, by believers will depend on many cultural, religious, and theological factors. I think it is fair to say that the personal experience of the disjunction of sign and reality is significantly more emphatic in 21st century North America than in 13th century Europe.

One consequence of this dualistic hermeneutic has been the almost total loss of physical language within the discourse of faith to describe the believer's sacramental encounter with the glorified Lord.

"Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink." The language is rich, vital, earthy, evocative.

One consequence of this dualistic hermeneutic has been the almost total loss of physical language within the discourse of faith to describe the believer's sacramental encounter with the glorified Lord. If we clearly understand that when I physically eat the Host I am physically eating only the sacramental sign, it obviously becomes more and more difficult to justify language that is corporal and graphic. The risk of misunderstanding would seem to be great. Who wishes to be numbered among the dreaded Capernaïtes?

But what do we do with the language of the Lord? "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink" (John 6:53-55). The language is rich, vital, earthy, evocative. The Greek word *trogein* might be translated as "chew," "crunch," "munch," "gnaw on." The Johannine Christ is not embarrassed to speak of the eucharistic communion with corporeal vividness, even though his hearers are offended and many leave his service. The realism of the Eucharist is but an expression of the realism of the Incarnation. As St. Germanus declared, "But our Lord is not only an object of sight, but he may be touched through the awful and sacred mysteries, because he has taken our nature, and bears it forever."¹⁰

Consider the following homiletical passage from St. John Chrysostom. Would a twenty-first century preacher dare to speak such words from the pulpit?

Wherefore this also Christ hath done, to lead us to a closer friendship, and to show his love for us; he hath given to those who desire him not only to see him, but even to touch, and eat him, and fix their teeth in his flesh, and to embrace him, and satisfy all their love.¹¹

How many modern celebrants would feel comfortable taking the holy bread into their hands and addressing this remarkable fifth century prayer to the eucharistic Christ?

I carry you, living God, who is incarnate in the bread, and I embrace you in my palms, Lord of the worlds whom no world has contained. You have circumscribed yourself in a fiery coal within a fleshly palm—you Lord, who with your palm measured out the dust of the earth. You are holy, God incarnate in my hands in a fiery coal which is a body.... As you have made me worthy to approach you and receive you—and see, my hands embrace you confidently—make me worthy, Lord, to eat you in a holy manner and to taste the food of your body as a taste of your life.¹²

10. Cited in Robert I. Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* (London: Mozley, 1853), p. 263.

11. Chrysostom, *Homily on John 46.3*; cf. *Homily on Matthew 82.4*.

12. Cited in Aelred Cody, "An Instruction of Philoxenus of Mabbug on Gestures and Prayer When One Receives Communion in the Hand, with a History of the Manner of Receiving the Eucharistic Bread in the West Syrian Church," in *Rule of Prayer, Rule of Faith*, ed. Nathan Mitchell and John F. Baldovin (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996),

Who believes strongly enough in the real presence to pray the following words to the sacred elements?

Hail forever, most holy flesh of Christ, before all else and above all else the highest sweetness! Hail forever, heavenly drink, before all else and above all else the highest sweetness!¹³

It is precisely in language and devotional practices like these that a lively faith in the eucharistic presence is engendered and nourished.

My intent in this essay is to argue for the recovery of a nondualistic understanding of the eucharistic presence that authorizes the homiletical, liturgical, and devotional use of physical language to speak of the believer's communion in the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

WHAT IS THE EUCHARISTIC DOGMA?

It is remarkable that for hundreds of years the church did not find it necessary to formally dogmatize a particular definition of the holy eucharist. Despite real differences of expression conflict between theologians and churches simply did not arise. The one church was able to comprehend Ambrose, John Chrysostom, and Gregory Nyssen, as well as Tertullian, Origen, and Augustine. At the deep level of liturgy and prayer the church was united in a common confession and enactment of the sacramental promises of Christ: "This is my body. This is my blood." That is to say, the church was united in the *real identification* of the consecrated bread and wine with the body and blood of the Savior.¹⁴ It is this sacramental identification that serves as the eucharistic dogma of the church catholic. Through the supernatural power of consecration, the eucharistic bread and wine not only represent and symbolize the body and blood, they not only convey and communicate the body and blood, but they *are*, mystically and ineffably, the body and blood. The mystery of eucharistic identity is, as Francis J. Hall writes, "the ultimate affirmation of catholic doctrine in every age."¹⁵ How such a wondrous miracle is possible the church cannot fathom, but relying on the words of Jesus the church professes the mystery of faith.

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p. 63. Cf. this prayer from the West Syrian liturgy: "Thee I am holding who holdest the bounds, thee I am grasping who orderest the depths, thee, O God, do I place in my mouth." *Liturgies Eastern and Western*, ed. F. E. Brightman (Oxford, 1896), I:102.

13. Cited in Nathan Mitchell, *Cult and Controversy* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1982), p. 106. This prayer come from the Sarum Missal. The dating is uncertain—perhaps the 11th or 12th century.

14. The term *real identification* is employed by Francis J. Hall, *Dogmatic Theology*, vol. IX: *The Sacraments* (New York: Longmans, Green & Company, 1921), pp. 114-26. The classic historical study is Darwell Stone, *A History of the Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, two vols. (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1909).

15. Hall, p. 119.

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The dogma of real identification must be distinguished from the doctrine of the real presence. The latter is often expounded as if it were the revealed premise of the holy eucharist.¹⁶ But as Hall explains, "Our Lord did not say, 'My body is present in, with and under this,' but 'This is my body.'"¹⁷ The real presence is an inference from the eucharistic dogma. The risen Christ is present in the Eucharist because his body and blood are present, and his body and blood are present because the consecrated bread and wine are his body and blood. "Christ is in that Sacrament," affirms St Ambrose, "because it is the Body of Christ."¹⁸

In the Eastern Church the mystery of real identification came to dogmatic expression at the Second Council of Nicaea (787). The Council was convened to address the heresy of iconoclasm—the denial that images of Jesus and the saints may be properly venerated and revered.¹⁹ The iconoclasts argued that a true icon is identical (*homoousios*) with its prototype. In both holy Scripture and the theological tradition, Jesus Christ is named the image of the Father. Jesus is able to serve as the perfect image of the Father because he is consubstantial with the Father. Only thus may he be given the worship, adoration, and devotion that is properly given to the Almighty Creator. A material painting of Jesus, on the other hand, does not and cannot enjoy a oneness of being with the object it depicts. It will always be inadequate. The iconoclasts did recognize one proper image of the incarnate Son, however—the image instituted by the Son himself, his eucharistic body and blood. The eucharist perfectly images Christ, they said, because it is identical in essence with Christ and is therefore worthy of worship and reverence.

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The iconodules did not take issue with the iconoclastic claim that the holy gifts are *homoousios* with the body and blood of the risen Christ. The iconodules and iconoclasts shared a common liturgy and a common understanding of the eucharistic presence.²⁰ But clearly the iconodules could not allow the iconoclasts to appropriate the Eucharist as an icon, the one legitimate icon, of Christ. At Nicaea II the deacon Epiphanius read a document that was gladly received by the orthodox bishops:

Thus, it has been clearly demonstrated that nowhere did either the Lord, or the Apostles, or the Fathers call the bloodless sacrifice, offered through the priest, "an icon," but rather "this very body" and "this very blood."... These noble ones, however, in their desire to abolish the sight of the venerable icons, have introduced indirectly another icon—which is not

16. Hall, pp. 88, 103, 137-38.

17. Hall, p. 138.

18. Ambrose, *De mysteriis* 9.58.

19. On the iconoclastic controversy, see John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1979), pp. 42-53, 203; Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, five vols (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971-1989), II:92-145.

20. Pelikan, II:93-94, 109-10.

an icon but body and blood.... Afterwards, leaving aside falsehood, they touch for a moment upon the truth, saying that the bread does become the divine body. But, if the bread is an icon of the body, it is impossible for it to be the divine body itself.²¹

To speak of the Eucharist as icon implies a distinction between the sacramental forms and Christ's glorified body, a distinction between image and prototype. But the two are not distinct. The Eucharist *is* the flesh of Christ. "These we do not understand [as being] two," St Nicephorus explained, "but we believe that they become one and the same [body of Christ]."²² With the dogmatic assertion that the consecrated elements simply are the body and blood, the use of *symbol*, *figure*, and *image* to characterize the holy gifts virtually disappears in Byzantine Christianity.²³

In the Latin West the dogma of real identification was clarified via a more complicated route. Through the writings of St. Augustine it had become firmly established to speak of the consecrated elements as signs through which we are given access to spiritual realities.²⁴ What is unclear, however, is whether Augustine's symbolic approach allows for a direct, realistic affirmation of identity between the sanctified bread and wine and the body and blood of the Lord.²⁵ The Western dogmatic definition of the Eucharist, culminating in the Council of Trent, might well be understood as the church liberating itself from the inadequacy of Augustine's eucharistic formulations.

The Tridentine eucharistic dogma is summarily expressed in the statement that "through the consecration of the bread and wine a conversion is made of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood" (Chapter III).²⁶ Precisely what did Trent define? Contemporary interpreters generally agree that Trent did not formally impose a specific philosophy. Colman O'Neill, for example, asserts that the Tridentine understanding of "substance" should be interpreted pre-philosophically. At the level of commonsense, substance answers the question "What is that thing?" Thus: What is the wafer before the consecration? Bread. What is it after the consecration? The body of Christ. "By her dogmatic statement," O'Neill writes, "the church makes clear the sense in which she reads the scriptural report

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21. Cited in *Icon and Logos*, trans. and ed. Daniel J. Sahas (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), pp. 95-96.

22. Cited in John Travis, *In Defense of the Faith* (Brookline, Massachusetts: Hellenic College Press, 1984), p. 117.

23. Meyendorff, pp. 203-4.

24. David Power, *The Eucharistic Mystery* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), pp. 152-53.

25. Pelikan, I:304-305. See the critique of Augustine by Hermann Sasse, *This is My Body*, rev. ed. (Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Publishing House, 1977), pp. 19-25, esp. n. 10.

26. Cited in O'Connor, p. 214.

of Christ's words at the Last Supper: the word 'is' indicates, as a result of Christ's power, real identity between what lay on the table and his body."²⁷ When the Council declares that the whole substance of the bread is converted into the whole substance of the body of Christ, it is simply insisting that the bread has become the body of Christ.²⁸ It is reiterating, in a more sophisticated fashion, the eucharistic dogma as held by the church since the apostles, the dogma of real identification.

However, we must also note, as we observed earlier, the frequent use of the preposition *under* in the decrees: The body and blood are contained *under the appearances* of bread and wine. In Chapter III alone this phrase is found ten times. The Western explication of the eucharistic dogma is constructed on an opposition between external appearances and invisible reality, precisely at the point where they can be separated.²⁹ Christopher Conn has recently argued that Trent does not teach sacramental identification. It is metaphysically impossible for a piece of bread to become "*identical* with a distinct, pre-existing substance (the body of Christ)."³⁰ The substances of bread and wine must be replaced by the substances of body and blood. A fundamental dualism is therefore integral to the Tridentine definitions. After the consecration there is the bread and wine, or more specifically, their appearances, and there is the body and blood of the Lord—and these realities are separate. Yet must this dualism be given dogmatic status?

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In the early twentieth century a little known debate on this question occurred among Greek Orthodox theologians.³¹ Chrestos Androutsos defined the Eucharist as "that divinely instituted sacrament in which Jesus Christ is present actually and really *under the forms* of bread and wine."³² Constantine Dyobouniotes attacked this formulation:

This expression ... is based on the Roman doctrine ... of transubstantiation, and cannot be accepted in the Eastern Church, whose Fathers teach that the bread and wine are changed (converted), into the Body and Blood of Christ ... (Our Lord) said: "Take eat, *this* is my body," not

27. Colman O'Neill, *New Approaches to the Eucharist* (Staten Island, New York: Alba House, 1967), p. 98. Cf. E. Schillebeeckx, *The Eucharist*, trans. N. D. Smith (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968), chap. 1.

28. Anthony Kenny, "The Use of Logical Analysis in Theology," in *Theology and the University*, ed. John Coulson (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1964), p. 232: "According to scholastic theory, substance is not an imperceptible part of a particular individual. It is not a part of an individual; it *is* that individual."

29. Paul Evdokimov, "The Eucharist—Mystery of the Church," in *In the World, of the Church*, ed. and trans. Michael Plekon and Alexis Vinogradov (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), p. 246.

30. Christopher Conn, "Transubstantiation and the Real Presence," *Philosophy and Theology* 15, no. 2 (2003).

31. See Frank Gavin, *Some Aspects of Contemporary Greek Orthodox Thought* (Milwaukee: Morehouse Publishing Company, 1923), pp. 330-36.

32. Cited in Gavin, p. 330.

"under this is my body" The Eastern Church does not recognize that the *substance* of the bread and wine is changed into the Body and Blood of Christ while the *accidents* remain, under which the Body and Blood of Christ exist, but simply says that the bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Christ by the descent of the Holy Spirit, through whom these things surpassing reason and understanding are achieved.... All of the bread and wine is changed into the Body and Blood of Christ, and not only a part of them.³³

It is evident that Dyobouniotes is seeking here to expound a nondualistic understanding of the real identity, an understanding that is not dependent on the separation of accident and substance. The body and blood of Christ do not exist "in" or "under" the consecrated elements. "Each particle of bread and wine," he states, "is Christ."³⁴ This affirmation recalls the Greek fathers who envisioned the eucharistic transmutation as a "cultic and sacramental incarnation of Christ."³⁵ Bread and wine are appropriated by the Spirit and changed, in their totality, into the body and blood. Dyobouniotes' contemporaries, however, sided with Androutsos and reaffirmed the language of transubstantiation to describe the eucharistic presence. I think it would be accurate to say that Orthodox theologians today would be more sympathetic to the concerns of Dyobouniotes, as they seek to restate the doctrine of the Eucharist apart from traditional Western categories. But surely both Catholic and Orthodox theologians would agree on the fundamental dogmatic assertion: The eucharistic gifts are, in truth and reality, the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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THE ANGLO-CATHOLIC CONCEPTION OF SACRAMENTAL IDENTITY

Robert Isaac Wilberforce is acknowledged, next to John Henry Newman, as the premier theologian of the Tractarian movement in England. He published his book, *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, only a year before his conversion to Rome. In it we find an emphatic assertion of the objective presence of Christ in the Eucharist, but without appeal to the distinctions of scholasticism.

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Wilberforce asserts that by consecration, effected through the Word of God and the power of the Spirit, the bread and wine are identified with the glorified humanity of the eternal Son of God. This is neither a material identity nor a personal identity. The identity established through eucharistic consecration is unique and peculiar, *sui generis*. "For it depends," he explains, "upon the mysterious law of consecration, of which

33. Cited in Gavin, pp. 331, 333.

34. Cited in Gavin, pp. 341-42, n. 7.

35. Schillebeeckx, p. 68; see pp. 65-70.

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we have no other example; and by virtue of this act, the Subject and Predicate make up together a real, but heterogeneous whole."³⁶ The only appropriate name for the union is *sacramental identity*. The sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, therefore, consists of two parts, a subject (the bread and wine) and a predicate (the body and blood of Christ), which are *united into one* by a singular act of identification. These two parts are related to each other, within this compound whole, as sign (*sacramentum*) and reality signified by the sign (*res sacramenti*).

Eucharistic heresies, for Wilberforce, can be understood as explications that either omit, confuse, or unduly separate one of the two parts of the sacrament. Hence the following model:

Zwinglianism (symbolical presence) = the omission of the *res sacramenti*

Capernaitism (carnal presence) = the omission of the *sacramentum*

Calvinism (virtual presence) = separation of *sacramentum* and *res sacramenti*

Lutheranism (consubstantial presence) = confusion of *sacramentum* and *res sacramenti*

Wilberforce does not include the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation among the eucharistic heresies. For Wilberforce transubstantiation is acceptable *if* it acknowledges the *sacramentum*, that is, if it respects the material reality of the bread and wine, which are the outward and visible signs of the inward and spiritual grace. The continuing existence of the appearances, in the integrity of their properties and potentialities, is crucial to the maintenance of the sacramental principle.³⁷

The risen Lord's presence in the Eucharist is imperceptible and supernatural. The *res sacramenti* is apprehended exclusively by faith and intellect. Only the *sacramentum* is an object to the senses. The eucharistic presence, therefore, is most accurately described as sacramental. But is Christ present in the Eucharist under a definite form and place? Wilberforce's answer to this question is critical for our purposes:

And yet there is one way in which Our Lord's Body may be said to be present with form and place in the Holy Eucharist. For there is a connexion between the *sacramentum* and *res sacramenti*, and form and place belong to the first, though they do not belong to the second. So that though the *res sacramenti*, in itself, has neither place nor form, yet it has them in a manner through the *sacramentum*, with which it is united. Christ's Body therefore may be said to have a form in this Sacrament, namely, the form of the elements, and to occupy that place, through which the elements extend. As the spirit may be said to be present in that place where the body is situated, and as a light may be said to assume the shape of the orifice through which it passes, so it may be said that the *res sacramenti* borrows place and shape from the *sacramentum*, with which it is united by consecration.³⁸

36. Wilberforce, p. 117.

37. Wilberforce, pp. 126-28.

38. Wilberforce, pp. 164-65.

Because of the twofold nature of the sacrament, the visible sign (the outward part) and spiritual reality (the inward part), Wilberforce acknowledges the rhetorical legitimacy of borrowing one attribute from one part when speaking of the other part. Thus one might, for example, speak of breaking the body of Christ, though it is the *sacramentum* about which one speaks.³⁹ But this sharing of attributes is of only rhetorical force, and Wilberforce certainly disapproves of speech that might misleadingly suggest a carnal presence of Christ in the Eucharist. It is not clear if Wilberforce takes us any further than Lombard and Aquinas.

Francis J. Hall was one of the foremost Anglo-Catholic theologians in the United States during the early decades of the twentieth century. He advances an understanding of sacramental identity very similar to that of Wilberforce. Like Wilberforce he wishes to emphasize the objectivity of Christ's presence in the Eucharist, while avoiding the Latin separation of substance and accident, which he believes is speculative and philosophically untenable.⁴⁰ But Hall improves upon Wilberforce by a greater stress on the unity of *sacramentum* and *res sacramenti*.

The Eucharistic sacrament is said to consist of two parts; but the phrase ought not to be taken as meaning that the inward *res* is separate or separable from the outward elements. A distinction of aspects and relations is involved, rather than a demarkation between mutually discrete substances. The sacrament is one and indivisible, although substantially representative of two worlds. From the standpoint of this world, it is natural bread and wine to which an extraordinary thing has happened, unsusceptible of verification by our senses. From the standpoint of the spiritual world, the self-same thing is the body and blood of Christ, marvelously accommodated to, and identified with, the forms and figures of bread and wine. The thing which we ought to avoid supposing is that, when our Lord declared the consecrated bread and wine *to be* his body and blood, he meant merely that his body and blood were present in them. In the *communicatio idiomatum* in which the consecrated sacrament is called either bread and wine or body and blood, we must not conceive of a substantial dualism. The sacrament has two relations and two proper descriptions, but the substantial reality is one in both.⁴¹

The approach that Hall outlines here sounds almost Cyrillian. While we can, according to St. Cyril, intellectually distinguish between the two natures of Christ, these distinctions are indistinguishable in the concrete hypostatic reality that we meet in Jesus. There is simply the God-man in one incarnate nature.⁴² Similarly, Hall directs us to the historical actuality of the holy gifts. We may, in our minds, distinguish between the *sacramentum* and the *sacramenti res*; but what is actually

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39. Wilberforce, pp. 242-43.

40. Hall, p. 133.

41. Hall, pp. 136-37.

42. Cyril of Alexandria, *To Eulogius; First Letter to Succensus* 7.

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presented to us at the altar, placed into our hands and given to us in the chalice, is the body and blood of the risen Jesus. Hall excludes all theories of co-presence (consubstantiation). His insistence that we must simultaneously look at the consecrated elements from the perspective of two different worlds, the world of history and the world of the risen Christ, opens up the possibility of an eschatological interpretation of sacramental identity. "It is not that the bread has become a new kind of thing in this world," writes Herbert McCabe; "it now belongs to a new world."⁴³

The eucharistic body of Christ is the same body that was nailed to the tree and now reigns in heaven (Rev 5:6). Just as the church, as the body of Christ, is a mystical extension of Christ's glorified body in heaven, so the eucharistic body of Christ is a sacramental extension of the glorified body and numerically identical to it. We may thus speak of three "modes of existence" of the resurrected Lord — his natural mode in glory, his sacramental mode in the Eucharist, and his ecclesial mode in the church. The body that exists in each is one and indivisible.⁴⁴

How far might we push Hall's proposal for a eucharistic *communicatio idiomatum*? In Christology the communication of idioms authorizes the attribution of both human and divine activities and characteristics to the one divine subject. Hall seems to be entertaining something similar here. Just as the eternal Word of God became flesh without either humanizing the divine nature or compromising the human nature, so the sacramental union effected by consecration neither nullifies the creaturely properties of the bread and wine nor alters the divine properties of our Lord's glorified humanity.⁴⁵ Although, strictly speaking, we may not speak of the risen body of Christ as being broken, immolated, or crushed with the teeth, and although, strictly speaking, we may not speak of the body and bread as immortal, imperishable, or supernaturally enlivening, yet we may ascribe both sets of attributes to the sacrament itself.⁴⁶ Hall's *communicatio idiomatum* provides the basis for a grammatical formulation of the eucharistic dogma that would authorize the homiletical, didactic, and devotional use of physical language in speaking of our Lord's sacramental presence.⁴⁷

MARTIN LUTHER AND THE *UNIO SACRAMENTALIS*

Who would have guessed that Pope Nicholas II would have found such a good friend in the reformer from Wittenberg. St. Bonaventure may

43. Herbert McCabe, "Eucharistic Change," *Priests & People* 9 (June 1994), p. 220.

44. Hall, pp. 124-25.

45. Hall, pp. 134-35, 142.

46. Hall, p. 142.

47. An earlier presentation of the eucharistic *communicatio idiomatum* is found in the 16th century Catholic theologian Leonard Leys. See Stone, II:371-372.

have criticized the Berengarian oath of 1059 as excessively sensual, yet the man who broke the unity of the Western Church found himself applauding Pope Nicholas's imposition of this confession: "Would to God that all popes had acted in so Christian a fashion in all other matters as this pope did with Berengar in forcing this confession."⁴⁸ Why is Martin Luther not scandalized by this oath, as so many other Western theologians have been? The answer is simple: *Hoc est corpus meum*. Hence the approval of Berengar's oath. "For this is undoubtedly the meaning, that he who eats and chews this bread eats and chews that which is the genuine, true body of Christ and not mere, ordinary bread."⁴⁹

How is it possible for the bread of Eucharist to be the body of Christ? Do we not have before us two substances, bread and body? Luther will not follow Aquinas and deny the substantial presence of bread. He acknowledges both bread and body, wine and blood. This is, of course, beyond logic; but Luther must follow the word of Christ. "So against all reason and hairsplitting logic," he writes, "I hold that two diverse substances may well be, in reality and in name, *one substance*."⁵⁰ "For now it is no longer ordinary bread in the oven, but a 'flesh-bread' or 'body-bread,' i.e., a bread which has become *one sacramental substance*, one with the body of Christ."⁵¹ If God can be three persons in one divine being, if the eternal Son can become man in personal union without annihilating his human nature or diminishing his deity, if an angel can appear as wind or fire, if the Holy Spirit can manifest himself as a dove, then Jesus can enter into *sacramental union* with the bread and communicate his body. "Therefore," Luther concludes,

it is entirely correct to say, if one points to the bread, "This is Christ's body," and whoever sees the bread sees Christ's body, as John says that he saw the Holy Spirit when he saw the dove, as we have heard. Thus also it is correct so say, "He who takes hold of this bread, takes hold of Christ's body; and he who eats this bread, eats Christ's body; he who crushes this bread with teeth or tongue, crushes with teeth or tongue the body of Christ." And yet it remains absolutely true that no one sees or grasps or eats or chews Christ's body in the way he visibly sees and chews any other flesh. What one does to the bread is rightly and properly attributed to the body of Christ by virtue of the sacramental union.⁵²

Here we have the boldest statement yet of the sacramental *communicatio idiomatum*. Whatever we do to the species is done to the body and blood. The flesh of Christ is "in" the bread and "is" the bread. If we see the bread, we see the body of Christ. If we touch the bread, we

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48. Martin Luther, *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper*, trans. Robert H. Fischer, *Luther's Works*, vol. 37 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), pp. 300-1.

49. Luther, p. 301.

50. Luther, p. 296. Emphasis added.

51. Luther, p. 303. Emphasis added.

52. Luther, p. 300.

So strongly does Luther believe in the sacramental union that he is even willing to attribute to the glorified Christ the sensible qualities of the bread.

Christ's real, natural body is present in the bread of the Supper in such a way that the form of the bread — its thickness, breadth, length, and color — has now become, through his Word, the form, thickness, length, and color of Christ's body.

What does the risen Jesus look like? He looks just like the bread and wine on the altar!

touch the body of Christ. If we break the bread, we break the body of Christ. If we move the bread, we move the body of Christ. If we eat and chew and crush the bread, we eat and chew and crush the body of Christ. "This, in short, is our opinion," states Luther; "that the Body of Christ is truly eaten in and with the bread, so that everything which the bread does and suffers, the Body of Christ does and suffers; it is divided, eaten, and chewed with the teeth."⁵³

So strongly does Luther believe in the sacramental union that he is even willing to attribute to the glorified Christ the sensible qualities of the bread. Exegeting Tertullian's statement "The bread which Christ took and divided among his disciples he made his body, when he said, 'This is my body,' i.e., the form of my body," Luther approvingly explains:

Tertullian's meaning is that Christ's real, natural body is present in the bread of the Supper in such a way that the form of the bread — its thickness, breadth, length, and color — has now become, through his Word, the form, thickness, length, and color of Christ's body, when he says, "This is my body."... Certainly, then, Christ's real body must be truly present where its form is, which has been made its form by the Word, out of the bread.⁵⁴

This is an extraordinary claim. No one in the Western tradition has seriously entertained the sacramental identity in terms as strong as these. What does the risen Jesus look like? He looks just like the bread and wine on the altar!

Luther's nondualist understanding of the real presence is made even more evident when he discusses the question, What does the evil person eat when he eats the Blessed Sacrament? Luther's answer is blunt. He eats Christ. But this eating is an act of sacrilege and only brings judgment. When Luther speaks of the faithful spiritually eating Christ, he does not envision an eating that is parallel to the physical eating. To eat Christ spiritually is to hear and believe in the promise of Christ embodied in the sacrament that we eat and drink.⁵⁵ The sacramental food contains and speaks the gospel and is thus apprehended by faith in the act of oral consumption: "Take, eat, this is my body." Our eating of Christ is an act of the whole person, body, mind, and soul. The body physically eats the flesh of Christ, but it cannot recognize what it is eating and therefore cannot partake spiritually of the promise. The heart understands the sacramental promise and thus recognizes the flesh of Christ, but it cannot physically partake of this flesh and thus receive its blessings. Hence body and heart need each other to properly feed on the Lord. The mouth physically eats for the heart; the

53. Cited in Wilberforce, p. 131.

54. Martin Luther, *That These Words of Christ, "This is My Body," etc., Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics*, trans. Robert H. Rischer, *Luther's Works*, vol. 37 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), p. 111.

55. Luther, *This is My Body*, pp. 86-87.

heart spiritually eats for the body; and thus the whole person is saved by the holy bread of the gospel.⁵⁶ Like many of the Greek Fathers, Luther believed that the faithful sacramental feeding on Christ is a feeding that benefits both soul and body: "If we eat him spiritually through the Word, he abides in us spiritually in our soul; if one eats him physically, he abides in us physically and we in him.... For he is not digested or transformed but ceaselessly he transforms us, our soul into righteousness, our body into immortality."⁵⁷

The difference between Luther's understanding of the real presence and the traditional Western understanding is radical and profound. Small wonder that the church has not followed him, even many of his followers. But why has the church balked? No doubt there are many reasons, but let me tender the following unoriginal suggestion. Since St Augustine the Western Church has taught that the body of Jesus is circumscriptively and locally present in heaven and thus spatially distanced from us. For Zwingli, Calvin, and their followers, this meant that Jesus cannot be bodily present on our altars. For St. Thomas and the Fathers of Trent, this meant that he can only be bodily present on our altars through the metaphysical miracle of transubstantiation. But consider the dramatic difference if we instead agree with St. John of Damascus and Martin Luther that heaven is not a place but the "glory and honor of the Godhead."⁵⁸ What are the implications of the exalted Lord not being an object within the cosmos, of not being restricted by space and time? Surely, for example, it is inappropriate to speak of the resurrected, transfigured body of the man Jesus in terms of substance and accidents.⁵⁹ Christ now transcends the categories of the present world. If his glorified body belongs to that wondrous future that we call heaven, then we must no longer think of ontological competition between the present world and the *eschaton*. The Lord's eucharistic presence need not be conceived as requiring the annihilation or displacement of a creaturely substance. By the power of resurrection, the God-man can now tabernacle with us as bread and wine.

This raises the vexed question of the ubiquity of our Lord's risen body. Luther was roundly denounced by both Swiss and Roman theologians for proposing the omnipresence of Christ. It was heard as asserting the pantheistic extension of glorified human nature throughout the cosmos. This is contrary to Luther's meaning and intent. But if heaven is not a locatable location, how then are we to understand the relationship of the body of Jesus with the world? Robert W. Jenson offers the

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56. Luther, *This is My Body*, p. 93.

57. Luther, *This is My Body*, p. 132.

58. John Damascene, *De Fide Orthodoxa* 3.4.2; Luther, *This is My Body*, pp. 55-69. Evdokimov speaks of the glorified humanity of Christ as transcending space and all cosmic ontology (Evdokimov, p. 250).

59. Evdokimov, p. 249.

Christ is thus free to make himself bodily available to the world at any given location, at any given time, for all of the world is but one place to him. And the specific place where he has chosen to make himself present, the place where he has promised to be found and available to his people, is the holy gifts of the eucharist.

following interpretation of Luther and ubiquity.⁶⁰ In his transcendence God stands before all of creation as if it were "one place." He apprehends the world as one place, he addresses the world as one place, he is present to the world as one place. By incarnation and resurrection Christ Jesus now also enjoys this divine relationship to creation. He has ascended to God's "place," and God's place is wherever God is.⁶¹ Christ is thus free to make himself bodily available to the world at any given location, at any given time, for all of the world is but one place to him. And the specific place where he has chosen to make himself present, the place where he has promised to be found and available to his people, is the holy gifts of the eucharist. "In this way, says Luther, Christ's body is where the bread and cup are, and this place can be any place, in that all places are one to Christ."⁶² Heaven is wherever Jesus is, and where Jesus is, there is the throne of God and all the heavenly hosts.

Luther was able to creatively re-envision the Western Church's eucharistic paradigm and transcend our dualistic assumptions. As we have seen, the typical Western formulation of the eucharistic presence is characterized by the use of the prepositions *in*, *with*, and *under*. I suggest that we begin using the preposition *as*. Just as God has come as man, so the risen Jesus now comes among us *as* bread and wine. But ultimately we will always return to the simple declarative sentence: The eucharistic bread and wine *are* the body and the blood.

THE MYSTERY OF EUCHARISTIC IDENTITY

*Send down thy Holy Spirit upon us and upon these Gifts here spread. And make this bread the precious Body of thy Christ. Amen. And that which is in this cup, the precious Blood of thy Christ. Amen. Changing them by thy Holy Spirit. Amen, Amen, Amen.*⁶³ The transmutation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit. By the Spirit the oblations are lifted into the Kingdom of God and incorporated into that heavenly liturgy which is the body of Christ. In the entirety of their being they become and are the sacred humanity of God. The transformation does not involve chemical or molecular change of the bread and wine. It does not involve any change at all of the empirical world. Even to speak of substantial change is misleading, as

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60. Robert W. Jenson, "The Sacraments," in *The Christian Dogmatics*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), pp. 359-60. Also see Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, two vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), I:201-206; II:219-220, 251-57.

61. See Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1976), pp. 127-33.

62. Jenson, "The Sacraments," p. 359.

63. Liturgy of St John Chrysostom.

St. Thomas himself understood.⁶⁴ The conversion of bread and wine into the body and blood is akin to the divine act of creation. It is an act that takes place, not at the level of accident or substance, but at the level of existence itself.⁶⁵ It is the union of world and glory. The eucharistic transmutation is an eschatological event, the future taking possession of the present. The laws of the cosmos do not apply. Thus bread and wine are claimed and assimilated by the risen Christ, yet recognizably continue in their material existence. Paul Evdokimov describes the miracle of consecration as “a metaphysical transcensus which identifies the two different ontological realities.”⁶⁶ It is precisely because the glorified human nature of Christ belongs to a transcendent and thus different realm of being that the elements can be supernaturally converted into the deified body and blood while retaining their reality as food and drink.⁶⁷ From the perspective of the present world, the bread and wine remain bread and wine. Their empirical natures endure intact. But from the perspective of the Almighty Creator, from the perspective of the church celebrating the eucharistic liturgy of the kingdom, from the perspective of faith, what now exists on the paten and in the chalice is nothing less than the transfigured body and blood of the Savior, now given to us for communion in the life of the triune God. Contrary to the traditional formulation of transubstantiation, the species are not “discarded husks,” as if the bread and wine had to step aside to make room for the body and blood, leaving “their mortal remains behind.”⁶⁸ Rather, the bread and wine—substance, accidents, and all—have been incorporated into and now are the risen Nazarene.⁶⁹

Are the Holy Gifts still bread and wine? Utilizing the criteria of the world, the answer is *yes*. But as Herbert McCabe observes, “the consecration is God’s quite public announcement that here these criteria no longer apply.”⁷⁰ The bread and wine now belong to the *eschaton*. They are the bread of life and the wine of eternal gladness. To view the eucharistic elements as mundane nutriments would misdescribe what in fact now really exists. Even at the level of sensible properties, they have ontologically become more than they were. The accidents no longer function as appearances of bread and wine; by divine ordination they now efficaciously signify body and blood.⁷¹ We will still use

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64. *Summa Theologica* 3a.75.4; 3a.75.8.

65. Herbert McCabe, “Transubstantiation,” *New Blackfriars* 53 (December 1972), p. 550.

66. Evdokimov, p. 252.

67. Sergius Bulgakov, “The Eucharistic Dogma,” *The Holy Grail and the Holy Eucharist*, trans. and ed. Boris Jakim (Hudson, New York: Lindisfarne Books, 1997), pp. 109-10.

68. Dummett, pp. 246-47.

69. Bulgakov, pp. 109, 115-16. Cf. Terence Nichols, “Transubstantiation and Eucharistic Presence,” *Pro Ecclesia* XI/1 (Winter 2002), pp. 69-75.

70. McCabe, “Transubstantiation,” p. 552.

71. McCabe, “Eucharistic Change,” pp. 218-19.

We will still use the words bread and wine to refer to the sacramental gifts, as Scripture and liturgy do—for it is as bread and wine that our Lord gives himself to us as our food and drink—but such linguistic usage is perhaps best characterized as figurative or analogical.

the words *bread* and *wine* to refer to the sacramental gifts, as Scripture and liturgy do—for it is *as* bread and wine that our Lord gives himself to us as our food and drink—but such linguistic usage is perhaps best characterized as figurative or analogical.

We eat the body of Christ and sink our teeth into his flesh. Our argument has been leading us to the point where we can actually say this without blushing. Should this be any more difficult to say than “The eternal and infinite God died on the cross on Calvary”? The latter statement we justify by appeal to the christological communication of attributes. Even though the infinite deity cannot die, we may and must speak of God dying because of the personal union of deity and humanity in Jesus Christ. How this is possible we do not know and need not know. Is the mutual communication of attributes merely verbal or is it real? Again, we do not know and need not know. What we do know is that Jesus is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity and he died on the cross for our salvation. *’Tis mystery all: th’ Immortal dies.* Paradox belongs to the speech of the Incarnation. Paradox also belongs to the speech of the Blessed Sacrament.

Not all medieval theologians sought to explain away the 1059 oath of Berengar. Zachary of Besancon, a contemporary of Peter Lombard, wrote, “The body of Christ is incorruptible, but on the other hand, the body of Christ is crushed by teeth and gulped down.”⁷² We see here the embrace of the sacramental mystery. An anonymous twelfth century theologian thoughtfully commented on the Berengarian oath. He notes that some say that the fraction only occurs in the sign, because the Body of Christ is impassible; but how, he wonders, does one reconcile this with Berengar’s confession?

The Body of Christ is in truth what is seen, what is broken, and what is crushed by the teeth of the faithful. But how, you ask, is the impassible broken, how is the undivided divided? I answer: how was God able to die if He was immortal, how is He to be understood if He is incomprehensible? You say according to one in one way, another in another way, yet it is one and same. Thus one and same Body is impassible and still broken, according to one in one way, another in another way and yet both in truth.⁷³

Instead of resolving the mystery by divorcing the body of Christ from the sign, the author holds together the mystery presented in the sacrament. The body of the Lord is seen and broken and eaten, and yet it is not seen and broken and eaten. Guitmond of Aversa states that in the Eucharist the body of Christ is indeed touched by our hands and truly eaten; but he is not wounded or hurt.⁷⁴ Lanfranc posited two modes of

72. Cited in Macy, pp. 26-27.

73. Cited in Macy, p. 28.

74. O’Connor, p. 108. O’Connor prefers Guitmond’s paradoxical solution to the cleaner, nonparadoxical solution of St Thomas (p. 178).

being for the risen Christ—his eucharistic flesh and his heavenly body. The eucharistic flesh is broken by the hands of the priest and physically eaten; the heavenly body remains intact, impervious to suffering and death; yet they are identical.⁷⁵

Centuries earlier St. John Damascene had advanced a quasi impanation view of the eucharistic transformation, in which he too entertained two modes of being for the resurrected Son. As the Spirit once came upon the Virgin Mary and formed the body of the incarnate Word in her womb, so the Spirit comes upon the bread and wine and forms them into the same body. This eucharistic body is distinct from the glorified body, for the former may be broken, eaten, and drunk, whereas the latter is immutable; but both are one through hypostatic union.⁷⁶ In the eleventh century St. Theophylact wrote, "That which the Lord suffered not on the cross (for not a bone of him was broken) now he endures, being broken for our sake."⁷⁷ In the Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil, the celebrant speaks these words at the fraction: "Broken and divided is the Lamb of God, which is broken and not disunited, which is ever eaten and never consumed, but sanctifieth those that partake thereof." The body of Christ is divided and distributed to the holy people of God, yet in every particle there is given the risen Son of God in fullness, body, soul, mind, and divinity.⁷⁸

In its tangible, concrete actuality, the Blessed Sacrament is one reality. The intellectual distinctions of *sacramentum* and *res* evaporate before the awesome truth that *this* "bread" and *this* "wine" are the body and blood of God. If dogma may be conceived as grammatical rules of speech, then the dogma of real identification invites and authorizes us to speak of our eucharistic communion in physical and graphic terms. We eat the body of Christ and we drink his blood. We see the Lord on the altar. We take him into our hands and our mouths. This is a whole area of discourse that has been lost to us and needs to be recovered. Preachers may preach and preach about the real presence of Christ under the signs of bread and wine; but in today's world it will be heard as merely an incorporeal, ethereal, or symbolic presence. If we wish our congregations to recover a lively faith in the Eucharist, we must begin praying, speaking, and acting as if Christ is truly enfleshed as bread and cup.

Will not our congregations, however, assume that we are proclaiming that the body of Jesus is cut up and distributed, in the words of

If dogma may be conceived as grammatical rules of speech, then the dogma of real identification invites and authorizes us to speak of our eucharistic communion in physical and graphic terms. We eat the body of Christ and we drink his blood.

75. Mitchell, *Cult and Controversy*, pp. 148-49.

76. Constantine N. Tsirpanlis, *Introduction to Eastern Patristic Thought and Orthodox Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), pp. 134-38.

77. Cited in Stone, I:158.

78. Michael Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, trans. Seraphim Rose (Platina, California: St Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1983), p. 282.

We must allow the liturgy to teach us what it means for a risen body to be impassible.

St. Augustine, just like “meat from a butcher shop”?⁷⁹ Fortunately we have the Apostle Paul to teach us that there is a qualitative difference between a *soma psychikon* and a *soma pneumatikon*, between a body animated by the breath of natural life and a body transformed, animated, and controlled by the Spirit of God (1 Cor 15:42-53). The glorified flesh of Christ is immortal, imperishable, incorruptible, impassible. Does the nature of the risen body therefore rule out the possibility of our physical consumption of Christ? St. Thomas certainly thought so. Here we must allow the liturgy to teach us what it means for a risen body to be impassible. And in the liturgy we learn that the glorified body of Jesus may be touched and broken and chewed and eaten and drunk.

The renewal of eucharistic belief and piety requires that we make one key intellectual and spiritual step. Perhaps this is a step that we can only make in the very act of Eucharist.

The renewal of eucharistic belief and piety requires that we make one key intellectual and spiritual step. Perhaps this is a step that we can only make in the very act of Eucharist. We kneel at the altar and hold out our hands. The Host is placed into our palm and we hear the words “The Body of Christ.” We must now believe, with our hearts and with our minds, that we are looking at and touching and are about to eat the flesh of the risen Savior. Not flesh under the bread or in the bread but flesh as the bread—God Incarnate in our hands! Yes, the sacramental form is sign and symbol; but it is also embodiment. It does not exist in opposition to or separation from the spiritual reality it signifies, for it has been seized by the coming kingdom and made the vehicle of the Lord’s eucharistic presence in his church. The bread and wine are the objectivity of the risen Christ’s presence to us—the risen Christ making himself available to us and addressable by us. “This is my body. This is my blood.” We need not fear reifying the risen Jesus. He objectifies himself in every celebration of the Holy Eucharist. Between the cross and the *parousia* there are the humble sacramental embodiments of the ascended Christ. In the kingdom we will see the Lord in all of his glory. Today we enjoy him as bread and wine. □

79. Cited in Nathan Mitchell, *Real Presence* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1998), p. 108.



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