

## PAROUSIA AND REAL PRESENCE

Real presence, though a doctrine forged in the West, seems to have really been grasped by but few even in the West. It appears, from a recent study by Dr. Peters in Germany that, in the Reformation controversy at least, real presence was not opposed ~~to~~ either <sup>to</sup> a real absence or to an unreal presence. ~~The opposition was formally very much as many consider it today, between real presence and~~ <sup>but rather to</sup> a 'spiritual presence'; the word spiritual had, for some at least, a meaning opposed to "corporeal" or "<sup>ell</sup>real". For the medieval controversy Real Presence meant presence in re, i.e. in a thing, which could be better understood if distinguished from presence in persona rather than from a spiritual presence.

Berengar, in the 11th century, seems to have initiated the controversy, though a quasi-manichean or docetist denial of all sacramental reality appears to spring up in some pockets of the Church all through the ages. St. John Damascene in the early 8th century had to write against the heresy that the bread and the wine is a figure (Tupos) of the body and blood (On the Orthodox Faith, 4.13 Pg. 94:1144). Even earlier, St. Ignatius in the second century had to attack doctrines of "real absence" or a mere "appearance to faith" as taught by docetists.

Medieval scholasticism did develop an extreme type of sacramental realism which alone can explain the vehemence of the reaction of certain groups in the Reformation to the doctrine of the Real Presence. For some medieval

theologians and their credulous disciples, the host with its whiteness, roundness and fragility was the pallid, solid and fragile body of Christ; in breaking it the priest broke Christ's own physical body; in consuming it the Christian cannibalistically fed on Christ's flesh. (1) They took such a sordid delight in pressing a doctrine of real identity between the Eucharistic host and the crucified body, that even Ratram (ca. 850) a conservative Benedictine monk in Corbie, N. France, had to register a mild protest, to say that if the identity was that real, then it would no longer be a mystery at all. (2)

This was the background for Berengar's "heresy" in the 11th century. He denied transubstantiation. And the first confession of "true doctrine" which he was forced to sign already bears the seed of real heresy, in its distinction between "sacramental" and "real". This confession was later retracted and a new one formulated in 1079, under Pope Gregory VII, which uses the curious expression that the host and the wine were Christ's true body and blood, which were on the cross, "not only by way of symbol and by the power of the Sacrament, but in their natural properties, and in truth of substance..." (3) The great English prelate, Lanfranc of Canterbury, who reacted violently ~~against~~ <sup>he</sup> Berengar's ~~reaction against~~ <sup>partly justified criticism of</sup> the extreme realism of the

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(1) See note in P.L. 121:123

(2) Bettenson exaggerates p. 210 - the doctrine is fully Augustinian, figure and verity, see Palmer pp. 221ff

(3) DB 355. Palmer 228

majority, gave with characteristic English moderation, the balanced formula of compromise: "To tell the truth, the same body that was taken from the Virgin we receive, and yet, not the same".

"The same... not the same" - that was St. Augustine's position, and with Lanfranc we come back to that unscholastic paradox, that affront to Aristotelian logic - "identity, in non-identity".

If medieval theology could have rested on that paradoxical statement the controversies of the 16th century could perhaps have been avoided. Even St. Thomas tried to stay with Lanfranc, but his scholarly propensities got the better of his saintly discretion, and led to that elaborate working out of the doctrine of transubstantiation. An equally scholarly but hardly mystical mind in the country where I now live, Huldreich Zwingli, was to work out the opposite side of the rational description of the mystery.

In the Marburg Colloquy (1529), Luther stayed with Lanfranc and the Fathers: "When God says something, let little men pay attention; when God commands anything, let the world obey, and let us all listen to the word, without further curiosity". But Oekolampadius and Zwingli would not let him stay there; for Zwingli, "the Spirit needs no vehicle"; "that the body of Christ is either really present in the supper by way of essence - I mean the natural body itself - or that it is orally taken and eaten

by the teeth, as the Papists and certain ones (Lutherans) who are nostalgic for the fleshpots of Egypt hold, we not only strenuously deny, but steadfastly assert to be an error contrary to God's word". (1)

But today, does the controversy mean anything to us? Do we simply take sides in this unfortunate debate, or seek a deeper and more meaningful understanding? I submit that the latter is the only way open to us. And for that we must go beyond the medieval debate to consider a twofold problem:

(a) the Presence of Christ in the Incarnation and his promised Parousia

(b) the Presence of the Body of Christ in the world.

"A little while, and you will see me no more; again a little while and you will see me". "I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice" (Jn. 16:16 and 22). The little while has passed. Our hearts rejoice today because He is with us. "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more. but you will see me." We are not orphans. Dr. Dodd is partly right; He has come again, though He is yet to come. The world sees him no more; but we do. In the Eucharist we are again met by the parousia-presence of the Lord. We rejoice because we see him there face to face. The Eucharist is the joyous Sacrament of realized eschatology. The logic of non-contradiction is transcended here; for the world of space and time to which that logic belongs is itself transcended.

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(1) An account of Faith. DCR No. 225, p. 474. Palmer pp246-247.

The world knows Christ only as the Historical Jesus, and so the world sees him no more. He belongs to the past. For us, He is the Risen One who encounters us in the breaking of bread, the Ascended One who becomes present in the Eucharist. As St. Maximos the Confessor says, when the Deacon says in the Byzantine liturgy: "The doors, the doors", he is asking the faithful not simply to keep the doors closed against the Catechumens. He is asking the worshippers, according to St. Maximus' <sup>rather</sup> fanciful but exciting exegesis, to close the doors of history behind them and to enter into the eschaton, where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father. What a shame it is then to concentrate on the "Real Presence" in the "elements" instead of focussing, with fear and trembling, as the deacon exhorts in the Syriac St. James, on the august and majestic presence of the Holy Trinity Himself. The Presence is not simply of Christ who comes; it is also the presence (parousia) of us before the Holy Trinity. It is a presence with parresia, with boldness, that sacred boldness which is never devoid of awe and fear but which by grace becomes the privilege and liberty of the children of God. This boldness, a gift of the Spirit, can never be dissociated from the Presence. The Parousia is experienced by the children of the Spirit in Parresia.

Parresia characterizes our approach to God in the Eucharist. As St. Paul says in the Ephesia Epistle: "In Christ Jesus our Lord we have parresia and prosagoge, boldness and access in confidence, through His faith" (3:12).

Yes, as the writer to the Hebrews says in superb liturgical language "So, brethren, as we have both boldness of entry into the sanctuary in the blood of Jesus, which he has renewed for us as a freshly opened and living path cutting through the veil, that is to say his flesh, as well as a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with an honest heart, with full assurance and confidence, our hearts cleansed from every taint of guilt and our bodies washed clean with water" (Heb. 10:19-22). Or as St. John puts it in a more future-eschatological context: "And so, little ones, stay abiding in him, so that when He is manifested, we can have boldness (parresia) and not shrink away from Him in shame at His presence (parousia)" (I Jn. 2:28).

That I submit is the real presence. Without attempting to detract one bit from the profound mystery of the transposition or metousia of the elements of which our Fathers wrote with great awe and wonder, let me submit that in our new age we need to recover this sense of the numinous, this sense of the Lord immediately present in the Eucharist, this sense of entering beyond the doors of history into the eschaton. There in the Eucharist we should meet the real presence, hè parousia aletheias of our Regnant-Lord.

But this parousia and parresia have a world-directed side as well. The Spirit has a function not only in worship but also in God's facing the world through the word and work of the Son and of the members of His Body. As St.

John says in that profound passage which has been so tragically under-interpreted in a recent best-selling paper-back:

"God - He is Love; anyone living in love is living in God, and God lives in him. Amidst us love is consummated in this, namely that as He is, so are we in this world, so that in the day of judgment we may have assurance and confidence." *(parousia)*

Fear does not exist in love; fulfilled love, on the contrary, drives out fear; fear has to do with apprehension of punishment; he who is afraid does not know fulfilled love".

(Jn. 4:16-18). And the passage continues to speak of the love for one's visible neighbour which is the invariable concomitant of genuinely fulfilled love of God. Love fulfils itself in that intimate encounter at the Eucharistic altar.

If that does not remove from us all fear of man and the elements and break the barriers on our side in our relations with all men including unbelievers, the consummation of love has not taken place. *(fulfillment) (parousia) in the world with between (presence)*

As He enters without fear with his own blood into the Holy Presence of the Father, we enter by the Spirit with boldness and freedom. So also that same boldness and freedom with which He encountered the world, in love and concern, but also unto the cross, should characterize our presence in the world - for "as he is, so are we in the world".

The Holy Spirit leads us into the Parousia of the Father with Parousia. The same Holy Spirit makes us stand in the world as His parousia, in boldness and freedom, in love and concern also unto the cross. That is the other side of the Real Presence - divine-human Eucharistic entities,

present in the world of science and technology, of war and peace, of politics and economics, of literature and the arts, face to face with secularism and other religions, always in the open freedom of Eucharistic boldness. "The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come"... Amen, Come, Lord Jesus... Amen, archon, Kyrie 'Iesou, ... Amen, Tho, Maran 'leahus".