

Real presence under digital conditions?

Gift of presence – transformation of time – real
community

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The “otherness” that enters into us changes
us to become ‘another’. *George Steiner*

The future sometimes already lives within
us without our knowing it. *Marcel Proust*

Abstract: During the Covid-19 pandemic, Christians were prevented from receiving the Eucharist for the first time in history due to the suspension of public church services. Various digital liturgical offers such as live-stream services were developed and improved to compensate for this loss. Discussing the pastoral chances and theological limits of digitalization in religious contexts, the authors conclude that physical participation in the Eucharistic liturgy cannot be substituted by virtual offers. Regarding the often-distorted perception of time during the pandemic, they highlight the therapeutic dimension of the Eucharist, in which the past, present, and future are interwoven (*signum rememorativum, signum demonstrativum, and signum prognosticum*). To realize the gift of the Eucharist and to gain a new awareness of the salutary and transforming presence of Christ, the authors point to the practice of Eucharistic adoration, which nevertheless remains oriented towards the communal celebration of the Eucharist and the real encounter with Christ in Communion.

Keywords: Eucharist – Communion – digitalization – real presence – Thomas Aquinas – Eucharistic adoration.

I

The Covid-19 crisis has confronted us with an incisive experience. Eating and drinking together in restaurants suddenly became impossible already during the first lockdown. Areas of social exchange, which

are important to humans as *animalia socialia*, instantly became inaccessible. The imperative of keeping one's distance and wearing masks made it very hard to remain spontaneous when meeting others. Real, face-to-face communication was limited to the absolutely necessary, or was relocated to the digital realm. These measures towards containment of the pandemic also influenced the sacramental life of the Church. At the onset of the second lockdown in Austria in November 2020, the faithful were denied access to the public celebration of the Eucharist, the "sacrament of sacraments", by the bishops themselves.¹ For the first time ever, the Church leadership was obliged to suspend the Eucharistic liturgy, which the Second Vatican Council had called the "fount and apex of the whole Christian life" (LG 11). Such a measure has never before been taken in the history of the Church. We would therefore describe it as "epochal".

Digital alternatives were developed to compensate for the suspension of public church services. Many parishes began to optimise their internet presence, to try out new liturgical alternatives, and to offer livestream transmissions of their services. Locally streamed services began to appear, additional to those that had previously been officially transmitted via radio and television to enable elderly and infirm persons to partake in Sunday celebrations. These new locally streamed options were meant to help the faithful maintain contact with their local parishes. Overall, these offers were received surprisingly well, even though they often displayed technical deficits and although their camerawork sometimes conveyed a cleric-centred understanding of liturgy. Digital formats may connect people who are physically separated from each other and thus create a virtual community with according possibilities of participation. Through these formats, people may participate in spiritual and liturgical events, irrespective of place and time. They may choose from a whole range of possibilities according to their own individual wishes. That is the strength of digital formats that they offer manifold pastoral opportunities towards the communication and spreading of the Gospel.

The expansion of digital formats did not take place merely as a reaction to the cancellation of public services of worship due to the pandemic. It can also be accounted to the increasing digitalisation of all areas of life, a process that also affects people's spiritual lives. Even prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, prayer apps, online prayer chapels,

1. Thomas Aquinas sees the difference between the Eucharist and the other sacraments in the fact that it is the only sacrament that contains Christ Himself, cf. *S.th.* III, q. 73, a. 1 ad 3: *Haec est autem differentia inter Eucharistiam et alia sacramenta habentia materiam sensibilem, quod Eucharistia continet aliquid sacrum absolute, scilicet ipsum Christum.* Cf. *S. th.* III, q. 75, a. 2 ad 2.

religious chatrooms, live-stream worshipping services from brick-and-mortar congregations, and sanctuaries in virtual rooms had conquered the market niche of online religious offers. The Church has come to acknowledge the need of developing the relevant “language proficiency” in the digital age and of responding to the realities particularly of the lives of younger people through online offers.² Pope Francis, who encourages us to use digital media, had already decreed plenary indulgence for participation at the 28th World Youth Day in 2013 for those who participated via television, radio or the new means of social communication if they were legitimately prevented from attending in person.

It cannot be denied that religious online offers may enrich the spiritual lives of individuals and create the possibility of encountering the divine mystery, which communicates itself in manifold ways. However, the strengths of virtual impartation are also countered by reservations and limitations that become particularly clear with reference to the Eucharist. Technical advancements allow digital formats to increasingly become oriented towards interaction and active participation.³ Furthermore, the bodily reality of participants is not dismissed, but rather taken into account.⁴ Yet, the question remains whether the principle of “active and conscious participation” (*actuosa participatio*) can truly be realised effectively in digital services of worship, which virtually connect two completely separated localities.⁵

2. Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, Address to participants in the plenary assembly of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, February 28, 2011: “The digital culture presents new challenges to our ability to speak and listen to a symbolic language that talks about transcendence. (...) Today we are called to discover also in the digital culture symbols and metaphors which are meaningful to people and can be of help in talking about the Kingdom of God to contemporary man”.

3. Cf. Daniella Zsupan-Jerome, “Virtual Presence as Real Presence? Sacramental Theology and Digital Culture in Dialogue.” *Worship* 89 (2015): 526-542, here 527: “Digital presence is experienced in interaction, in some form of synchronous or asynchronous act of communication with another; it is a relational experience”. Teresa Berger points out that even the questionable practice of online Eucharistic adoration does not reduce the worshiper to a mere passive beholder of the monstrance on a screen, but that, on the condition of the availability of suitable technical equipment, means of active liturgical participation are available here, too; cf. Teresa Berger, “*Participatio Actuosa* in Cyberspace? Vatican II’s Liturgical Vision in a Digital World.” *Worship* 87 (2013): 533-547, here 536.

4. Berger 2013, 536. Cf. *ibid.*, 535: “online worship is neither accessible nor inhabitable as an entirely disembodied, dematerialized world. Like offline worship, online worship relies on and cannot do without the actual bodies of worshippers.” Cf., similarly, Teresa Berger, *@Worship. Liturgical Practices in Digital Worlds*, New York: Routledge 2017, 21-23.

5. Cf. Winfried Haunerland, “Participatio actuosa. Programmwort liturgischer Erneuerung”. *Internationale katholische Zeitschrift Communio* 38 (2009): 585–595.

Even if one takes part in digital church services “with devotion and full collaboration”, which doubtlessly is possible during broadcasts over the radio and television, these services lack the bodily co-presence of participants as well as the possibility of physically receiving Communion. Digital services may offer beautiful rites to see and edifying words to hear, but one cannot smell, touch, or taste anything. *Visus* and *auditus* are served well, but *tactus*, *odor*, and *gustus* are lost in cyberspace. There is no Baptism without water, no Confirmation without chrism, no Eucharist without bread and wine. Virtual formats display a tendency towards disincarnation. Of course there are real people behind the screens, who react to that which is heard and seen, not only cognitively, but also emotionally and physically. And of course it is correct not to draw a strict line between that which is “analogue” and that which is “digital”, because the transition between the two concepts is fluid.⁶ However, the option of digital church services is devoid of the physical co-presence of the faithful within the same sacral space. That which is called “intercorporeality” in French phenomenology, is absent.⁷ The spectrum of phenomena of resonance that are grounded in the responsiveness of the body is completely obliterated in digital formats.⁸ Additionally, this deficiency may encourage an overly individualised, user-generated form of piety. It also is of ecclesiological importance.⁹

The liturgical constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* has maintained, with a view to the Eucharist, that the faithful, “when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators; on the contrary, through a good understanding of the rites and prayers they should take part in the sacred action conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration. They should be instructed by God’s word and be nourished at the table of the Lord’s body; they should give thanks to God; by offering the Immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him, they should learn also to offer themselves” (SC 48). According to Martin Stuffer, participants in services that are broadcasted through television or the internet, are arguably forced into the role of “strangers or silent spectators”, which is exactly what the Fathers of the Council wished to avoid (cf. Martin Stuffer, “...nicht wie Außenstehende und stumme Zuschauer” [SC 48]. *Die Feier der Eucharistie 50 Jahre nach der Promulgierung des Missale Romanum 1970 unter den besonderen Bedingungen der Corona-Pandemie*. In *Eucharistie und Erneuerung. Aufbruch aus der Mitte des Glaubens*, ed. George Augustin, 146-172. Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag 2021, here 164).

6. Cf. Thomas Söding, “Sakramente virtuell?” *HerKorr* 75 (8/2021): 40-43.

7. Maurice Merleau-Ponty speaks of “intercorporeité” regarding the relation between human bodies, cf. id., *Phänomenologie der Wahrnehmung*, Berlin: de Gruyter 1976.

8. Cf. Helmut Hoping, *Mein Leib für euch gegeben. Geschichte und Theologie der Eucharistie*, Freiburg i. Br. Herder ³2022, 495.

9. Cf. Antonio Spadaro, *Cybertheology: Thinking Christianity in the Era of the Internet*, Translated by Maria Way, New York: Fordham University 2014, 76: “The

One may compensate for the deficiency of the lack of the co-presence of the faithful through the virtual administration of the sacraments, for instance by having digital Avatars consummate the Eucharistic gifts representing the participant of a service that is streamed online, as was suggested in the Church of Fools (2004, re-established as St Pixels 2006), in virtual churches in the world game “Second Life”, or by the British Baptist Paul S. Fiddes, who has propagated the option of a “Cyber Eucharist”.¹⁰ This solution might convey the experience of community, but it would not be free of the aftertaste of Gnostic hostility towards the body. Not only would the corporeality of the faithful lose its real meaning, its material relevance, but so would the bread and wine.¹¹ From the viewpoint of Catholic theology, the suggestion of “do-it-yourself” worship at home, as it was expressed at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, is problematic. Instead of receiving the gifts that are handed out at the Communion (*Abendmahl*) or Eucharistic service, one autonomously takes whatever is needed to still the own spiritual needs.¹² The celebration of Communion or the Eucharist needs an ordained minister who pronounces the *verba testamenti* over bread and wine, not in his own name but in the name of Jesus Christ.¹³ The compromise that bread and wine are sanctified at home to become the body and blood of Christ synchronically to the liturgical celebration on-screen again contains theologically questionable elements. Here too, the materiality of what happens at Communion is faded out and the physical co-presence of the faithful is omitted, while the greater context of the

Church cannot be reduced to the ‘ultimate social network’, a sort of definitive social web, because it is not just a web of immanent relationships.”

10. Cf. Randolph Kluver & Yanli Chen, “The Church of Fools. Virtual Ritual and Material Faith.” *Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 3.1 (2008): 116-143; cf. Paul Fiddes, *Sacraments in a Virtual World* (2009), Online ressource: <https://www.frsimon.uk/paul-fiddes-sacraments-in-a-virtual-world/> (accessed 4.4.2022).

11. Cf. Spadaro 2014, 75.

12. Cf. Veronika Hoffmann, *Christus – die Gabe. Zugänge zur Eucharistie*, Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder 2016, 140f: “Both the act of giving between God and man, and that of giving and receiving between humans are enacted at the celebration of the Eucharist. ... Without a priest, the celebration of the Eucharist is impossible. Without someone who hands out the Eucharist, be it the priest or a minister of Holy Communion (or of Communion to the sick), its addressees cannot be reached.” Originally: “Ohne Priester kann keine Eucharistie gefeiert werden. Ohne jemanden, der die Eucharistie austeilte, sei es der Priester, sei es ein (Kranken-) Kommunionsspende, erreicht sie ihre Adressaten nicht”. On the Eucharist as a gift, cf. id., *Skizzen zu einer Theologie der Gabe. Rechtfertigung – Opfer – Eucharistie – Gottes- und Nächstenliebe*, Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder 2013.

13. Translator’s note: The masculine singular pronoun is used in a generic sense throughout.

presentation of the offerings at the altar (the Offertory), the prayer of thanksgiving, and of Communion itself is distorted.

The limitations of digital worship described here:

concern the real, digitally irreproducible presence of God in the “here and now” of the sacramental elements as well as the bodily, tangible dimension of the co-presence of all who partake in the service. Blurring these dividing lines through a new set of liturgical and medial dynamics (for instance, by assuming that virtual sacraments exist at all) might lead to the denial of the *incarnatory* profile of the Christian faith in future. Likewise, it might lead to the virtualisation of the mediality of Christ.¹⁴

As mentioned, virtual services of worship therefore display a tendency towards de-incarnation.

In reality, the liturgical event is never technologically reproducible, because it incorporates in its *hic et nunc* – in which is celebrated in an unreproducible way the action of the Holy Spirit – which makes the Mystery of Christ present and actualizes it (Spadaro 2014, 79).

In accordance with the logic of the incarnation, liturgy needs “a precarious and transient context, a spatio-temporal situation, a corporal tangibility.”¹⁵ Therefore, the Vatican has already precluded the idea of cyber communion in 2002. “Virtual reality is no substitute for the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the sacramental reality of the other sacraments, and shared worship in a flesh-and-blood human community. There are no sacraments on the Internet.”¹⁶

If digital spaces therefore will never be able to attain the full form and content of the celebration of the Eucharist, the following ques-

14. Bernd Irlenborn & Stefan Kopp, “Der Media-Turn als Herausforderung für die Liturgie.” *Theologie und Glaube* 108 (2018): 356-373, here 371. Original German: “betrifft die reale, digital nicht reproduzierbare Präsenz Gottes im Hier und Jetzt sakramentaler Zeichen und auch die leiblich-konkrete Dimension der Kopräsenz der Mitfeiernden. Die Verwischung dieser Grenze im Rahmen einer liturgisch-medialen Eigendynamik (etwa in der Annahme, es gebe *virtual sacraments*) könnte in Zukunft zur Verkennung des *inkarnatorischen* Profils des christlichen Glaubens und zur Virtualisierung der Medialität Christi führen”.

15. Spadaro 2014, 80. Cf., similarly, Zsupan-Jerome 2015, 529: “The corporeal/physical is intimately bound with the spiritual, psychological, communal, and relational dimensions of the event, taking place at a certain time and location.”

16. Pontifical Council for Social Communications, “The Church and Internet”, 9. (https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pccs_doc_20020228_church-internet_en.html; accessed 29.3.2022).

tions arise: What – or more precisely, *who* – is absent when the Eucharist is absent? What can be recognised anew during times in which physical, public services of worship are suspended? What constitutes the therapeutic dimension of the Eucharist in times of crisis, when isolation and resignation are generally on the rise?

II

Enquiring about the therapeutic dimension of the Eucharist presupposes that many forms of human suffering are associated with the fact that our human perception of time tends to become distorted. It is our thesis that the Eucharist can assist in opening up perspectives that have grown narrow as a consequence of shifts in temporal awareness, which darken and burden people's lives.

People's experience of time has changed in an ambivalent way under the conditions caused by Covid-19 and its consequent lockdowns.¹⁷ Important events took place less frequently and it was difficult to set positive or significant markers for the passing of time. Many people reported a loss of their sense of time. They felt torn between tedious boredom, the excruciatingly slow passing of long, empty days and weeks, and simultaneously, in hindsight, a contracted, swiftly passing "lost year". People however have also recorded positive effects: the experience of suddenly having more time at hand and of being able to structure and use the freedom that they had gained autonomously. The questioning of previous experiences of time as well as new ways of dealing with time and with our own transience can be counted as one of the side effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.

When *future* perspectives are clouded and shattered, the *present*, too, is shrouded in resignation and lethargy. Furthermore, when people can no longer catch up with lost chances, when they cannot reverse earlier wrong decisions and pay their moral debts of the *past*, when their fixation on that which used to be causes their lives to turn into a pillar of salt (cf. Gen 19:26), their consciousness of the present becomes impaired. Our human awareness of time must reconfigure each of the dimensions of that which was, which is, and which is to come. People each stand in relation to their personal history, to that which they encounter in the present, and to that which they antici-

17. Cf. the survey conducted by the German weekly *DIE ZEIT* of 3 April 2021: Tülay Karakus & Janis Dietz, "Das vergangene Jahr fühlt sich wie 12 Jahre an", Online resource: <https://www.zeit.de/zeit-magazin/2021-04/zeitgefuehl-corona-pandemie-orientierung-zeitrechnung-psychologie> (accessed: 30.3.2022).

pate. In the eleventh book of his *Confessions*, Augustine had already enquired after the essence of time and stated that there are neither times past (referring to that which *no more* exists) nor times future (referring to that which does *not yet* exist). Nevertheless, humans are conscious of the presence of things past in the form of memories (*memoria*) as well as of the presence of things to come in the form of expectations (*expectatio*). In human consciousness of time, the dimensions of past, present, and future are interwoven. The presence of present things, which is determined by things immediately past as well as by things immediately to come, is attentiveness (*contuitus*),¹⁸ which Malebranche once called “the natural prayer of the soul”.¹⁹ Compared to cosmic time, human consciousness of time follows its own course, in which there are protractions and accelerations, phases of boredom and of intensified experience. Marcel Proust arguably provided us with a better and more nuanced description of these in his novel *In Search of Lost Time* than did Edmund Husserl in his *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*. Husserl, however, had modified Augustine in conceiving of the immediate point of the present as a “continuity of expiredness”. Like the tail of a comet, a whole continuum of retentions stretches into the consciousness of the continuous present.²⁰ If this had not been the case, we would have been able to grasp individual notes, but not the meaningful structure of a melody. Furthermore, there are often fluctuations in the consciousness of time, in which the retentions and protentions, that is, images of the memory or future cares, superimpose themselves upon human attention.²¹ It may happen that human consciousness of time loses itself in memories, becoming so deeply occupied with an attempt to regain events of the past for the present, that it can hardly observe the chances offered by the present. It may also happen that diffuse fears of or cares about the future take control of the consciousness of time, causing the present to be passed over in a frantic race towards tomorrow and the day after. Thus, again, the chances lying at hand in the present are missed. Finally, there is the obsessive search for immediacy, which wishes to seize the moment at all costs in order to

18. Cf. Kurt Flasch, *Was ist Zeit? Augustinus von Hippo. Das XI. Buch der Confessiones. Historisch-philosophische Studie*, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann 1993.

19. Quoted in Paul Celan, *Der Meridian und andere Prosa*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1988, 52.

20. Originally: “Kometenschweif von Retentionen”, Edmund Husserl, *Vorlesungen zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 32000, 125.

21. Cf. Michael Theunissen, *Negative Theologie der Zeit*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1991.

experience more and yet more. This is illustrative of a pathological disturbance of the consciousness of time, which adopts features either of forgetfulness of tradition or of hopelessness in its continuous hunt for new opportunities. “People living ‘in attendance’ are a rarity”.²² Such people would be able to continuously readjust the three temporal dimensions that permeate human consciousness. They would succeed in balancing the presence of that which is past in memory as well as the presence of that which is to come in expectation, while remaining conscious of that which is happening in the present. It is no coincidence that Peter Handke, whose works display a Eucharistic, poetical quality marked by heightened attentiveness, reminds us to “practise the present”.²³

How though, may this distraction be overcome in order to pay better attention to the present? How may our clinging to lost Covid-19 years, devoid of memories, as well as our resignation about lost opportunities and our blurred vision of the future be wholesomely refocused onto the present? Could the Eucharistic *memoria* be helpful to enter into the *time of Christ*? We know of Jesus that he was *the* person who lived completely in the presence of God and unconditionally allowed the will of the Father to determine his life. “I came down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me” (John 6:38).²⁴

III

Catholic and Lutheran theologies agree that the real presence that is celebrated in the Eucharist is not the product of a human feat of memory.²⁵ If a community gathered to call a deceased person into

22. Originally: “Gegenwärtige Menschen sind selten”, Botho Strauß, *Der Untenstehende auf Zehenspitzen*, München: Hanser 2004, 54.

23. Originally: “Über die Gegenwart”, Peter Handke, *Mein Jahr in der Niemandsbucht. Ein Märchen aus den neuen Zeiten*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1994, 444. Cf. Jan-Heiner Tück, “Wandlung – Urform der Wirklichkeit”. Spuren einer eucharistischen Poetik in Peter Handkes Werk.” In *Verwandeln allein durch Erzählen*. Peter Handke im Spannungsfeld von Theologie und Literaturwissenschaft, eds. Tück & Andreas Bieringer, 29-51. Freiburg i. Br.: Herder 2019.

24. Hans Urs von Balthasar has developed the fact that Jesus has radically declined securing his own future, as well as his centring his awareness on the will of his Father as the proprium of his awareness of time. Cf. von Balthasar, *Theologie der Geschichte. Kerygma der Gegenwart*, Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag 2004, 24-26.

25. Martin Luther, who has upheld the idea of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist as long as he lived, emphasizes the efficacy of the divine Word that bestows the real presence of Christ in bread and wine. It is not a feast of memory on

mind for a short while through an act of communal commemoration, it would be an act of anamnestic solidarity, saving the deceased person from the second death of falling into oblivion. In such a case, the presence of that which had passed would be dependent on the degree of heedfulness practised by the bearers of remembrance. Such a form of presence would be temporally limited. The presence of Christ in bread and wine is different. It distinguishes itself from acts of collective commemoration. Regardless of human achievement, his presence is a gift of the Other. It derives from the Pneumatic self-representation in the gifts of bread and wine of him who was crucified and is risen. It guarantees that which humans could not bring forth: *his* presence, which, according to Thomas Aquinas, lingers even when no-one thinks of it anymore²⁶ – and the encounter with *his* presence transforms the present. Doubtlessly, those who partake of Communion or who, as it is practised in Catholic Eucharistic piety, behold the Most Blessed Sacrament contemplatively, must be actively willing to receive the gift of his presence or to expose themselves to the same. It is not sovereign agents, who act and bring about, that are required here, but much rather receptive people who allow the presence of the Other to affect and change them. To receive Communion during the liturgy of the Eucharist or to venerate the Most Blessed Sacrament in a sanctuary implies that they step into the time of the Other and allow their own reality to be determined by that of Christ. Consciously centring one's personal awareness on the hidden real pres-

the side of the congregation, but the divine promise, which can be understood as the *promissio* of Christ and which is anchored in the words of Jesus at the Last Supper, that guarantees his real presence at communion. In his work “*Von Anbeten des Sakraments*” (On the veneration of the Sacrament) (1523) Luther declares that the “living, everlasting, almighty Word” (*das lebendig ewig almechtig wort*) contains “everything that it refers to, namely Christ with his flesh and blood and everything that he is and has. For it is such a Word that can do all such things. Therefore it wishes to be understood as such” (*alles, was es deutet, nemlich Christum mit seym fleysch und blutt und alles was er ist und hatt. Denn es ist eyn solch Wort, das solchs alles vermag unnd thutt, darumb wills auch dafür gehalten seyn*) (WA 11, 433, 25-30). Cf. furthermore Luther's catechetical sermon of 1528: “*Certe homo non facit corpus et sanguinem etc. Non sunt humanum opus. Vide, quis instituat, faciat*” – Certainly, it is not man that makes body and blood, etc. Those are not human works. See, He who institutes it, accomplishes it (WA 30/1, 24, 7-8).

26. Cf. *S. th.* III, q. 80, a. 3, where Thomas Aquinas emphasizes that the body of Christ does not cease to be present in the elements as long as they exist. Here we may observe a distinction from Martin Luther's Eucharistic Theology. As the Marburg Colloquy with Ulrich Zwingli has made clear in 1529, Luther does emphasize the real presence of Christ in bread and wine (“*est*”), but limits this to the duration of the church service. He thus implicitly rejects the form of Eucharistic piety that provides for the veneration of the Most Blessed Sacrament beyond the celebration of the liturgy.

ence of Christ may help a person to find a way out of the isolation and into community and regain one's own presence in and through the presence of Christ.

IV

Uniquely, the sacraments interweave the three dimensions of time: past, present, and future.²⁷ According to Thomas Aquinas, the celebration of the Eucharist first constitutes a sign of remembrance, a *signum rememorativum*. The Eucharistic rite, which corresponds to Jesus' bequeathal to "do this in remembrance of me", is reminiscent of a specific event of the *past*: Jesus Christ's gift of himself, which reaches unto death and is the reason for our salvation (*sacrificium*). The sacramental representation of the *Christus passus* in the gifts of bread and wine can be beneficial for our dealing with the burdensome dimensions of the past such as suffering, guilt, and grief. The person who believes that the Eucharist leads to a sacramental contemporaneity with Christ does not need to suppress the *guilt and failure* that might burden the course of his life, or to shove these onto others. Such a person can transcend the "provoking climate of having to have the last word" (Martin Walser) and concede to the painful truth about himself.²⁸ This is possible, for in the presence of the crucified, resurrected One, who has redemptively associated himself with all sinners, he encounters the grace of God, which invites him to repent. "In Christ Jesus, the sinner (...) can stand with God against himself, because God has already taken a stand with him".²⁹ That which is true in the event of grievous sin for the sacrament of penance likewise is generally true of the Eucharistic encounter with Christ: his presence can help one to come to terms with the oppressive aspects of one's own past. For intersubjective relations, this includes being determined by Christ's attitude of willingness to forgive: "In Christ Jesus, man however also is able to stand with his sinful brother – and this is

27. Cf. *S. th.* III, q. 60, a. 3 as well as q. 73, a. 4. For further background information, cf. Hoping ³2022, 465-491; Jan-Heiner Tück, *A gift of presence: the theology and poetry of the Eucharist in Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Scott G. Hefelfinger, Washington: The Catholic University of America Press 2018, 23-54, 155-159.

28. Originally "Reizklima des Rechthabermüssens".

29. Cf. Peter Hünermann, "'Erlöse uns von dem Bösen'. Theologische Reflexion auf das Böse und die Erlösung vom Bösen. *Theologische Quartalsschrift* 162 (1982): 317-329, here 325: "In Jesus Christus vermag der Sünder [...] mit Gott gegen sich selbst zu stehen, weil Gott sich schon zu ihm gestellt hat".

the other side of the relation – because in Christ and with Christ, he is able to bear the sin of the brother”.³⁰

The salutary power of the hidden presence of Christ also touches upon our dealing with the open *wounds of the past*. The *Christus passus* becomes evident in the *memoriale passionis* of the Eucharist. He is the one who, in his suffering, gave the utmost from his own, free will and thus knows pain, powerlessness, and forlornness from within. Calling to mind the *Christus passus* sacramentally may also help to deal with painful experiences of death and grieving, which often have had to take place quietly during the pandemic. Due to quarantines and lockdowns, it was often impossible to say farewell to terminally ill close relatives or to find consolation in the company of others who have gathered to pay their last respects to the deceased at a funeral.³¹ Whoever has furthermore experienced traumatic injuries at the hands of others and finds himself unable to forget and incapable of forgiving, encounters the crucified and risen one in the Eucharistic *communio*. He, in turn, had himself been betrayed and denied. He had suffered mockery, scorn, injustice, and torture and through his passion has identified with all who suffer. Standing before Christ, the victims of exclusion, discrimination, torture, and violence do not need to fight for acknowledgement. He knows about their suffering and can restore their injured dignity from within, leading to their being accepted and strengthened in their active agency. The person who believes and thus experiences being recognised and acknowledged, even in his hidden suffering, can change his perspective to see fellow humans in need of forgiveness in those who have sinned against him. Stepping into the presence of Christ here means encountering that paradigmatic victim of violence who, already dying, still prayed for those who tortured him (cf. Lk 23:34). This encounter may become a gift of transformation for the person who experiences the hidden

30. Ibid: “*In Jesus Christus vermag der Mensch aber auch, und dies ist die andere Seite des Verhältnisses, sich zu seinem sündigen Bruder zu stellen – weil er in Jesus Christus und mit ihm die Sünde des Bruders zu tragen vermag*”.

31. Cf. furthermore Stuffer 2021, 161: “The brokenness of our earthly existence, our continuously being confronted with global danger looming from an invisible virus, the numerous deaths being mourned across the globe, shocking images of coffins mounting up and of anonymous mass graves, certainly have contributed to a renewed consideration of the aspect of the passion of Christ and his vicarious suffering and death ‘for us’, which is theologically engrained into every Eucharistic celebration.” (“*Die Gebrochenheit irdischer Existenz, das ständige Konfrontiertsein mit der weltumspannenden Gefährdung durch einen nicht sichtbaren Virus, die vielen zu beklagenden Toten auf der ganzen Welt, einprägsame Bilder von sich stapelnden Särgen und anonymen Massengräbern haben hier sicher dazu beigetragen, auch den Aspekt der Passion Christi, seines stellvertretenden Leidens und Sterbens ‚für uns‘, das jeder Eucharistiefeyer theologisch in den Kern eingeschrieben ist, noch einmal neu zu bedenken*”).

presence of Christ in the transformed gifts of bread and wine. Such a gift, in turn, may lead him to refrain from looking with unforgiving eyes at those who harass and torture him. This may be a long and painful process, but it can ultimately lead to the “transubstantiation” of his own view of the past.

V

The healing of memories through a transformed and reconciled view of the past may lead to a new, deeper insight into the *present*. According to Thomas Aquinas, the Eucharist is a *signum demonstrativum*, that is, the telling sign of a community (*communio*) that did not constitute itself but that makes recourse to Christ in gratitude. In the act of partaking in Communion, the person is *reincorporated* into the Body of Christ, which is pluriform and has many members. Far from limiting the Eucharist to the somatic real presence of Christ, Thomas thus characterised it as the sacrament of church unity (*sacramentum ecclesiasticae unitatis*).³²

Scholastic theology moreover was alert to the sensory-corporeal dimension of the sacramental signs and has pointed out that the Eucharist is the only sacrament that involves the sense of taste (*gustus*).³³ Because it does not merely convey itself externally, the latter distinguishes itself from the other senses – *visus, auditus, odor, tactus*. The sense of taste much rather accomplishes direct unification with its object. It is this act of unification through incorporation (*incorporatio*) of the consecrated gifts that is essential. In contrast to the satisfaction of the basic physical need for food, expressed in the stilling of hunger, the ingestion of the consecrated gifts does not remain within the horizon of the self. The ingestion of the “spiritual nourishment” (*cibus spirituale*), which was suspended under the conditions of lockdowns, brings about a significant inversion, which has repeatedly been referred to in Eucharistic theology since Augustine: when we receive Communion, it is not we who assimilate the body of Christ into the biochemical processes of our organism. It is much rather Christ and his Spirit who incorporate us into the mystical organism of his

32. *S. th.* III, q. 73, a. 2 sed contra as well as a. 4, which interrelates the vertical participation in the body of Christ (*participatio*) and the horizontal community among the faithful (*communio* or *unio*). *S. th.* III, q. 82, a. 2 ad 3.

33. Tüek 2018, 331f.

body.³⁴ Thus we are enabled to become the embodied “medium of God’s presence” (Eckhard Nordhofen). We however must take note of a further difference. In the Eucharist, Christ does not approach in his own form, but in a sacramental form. His presence is hidden and is communicated through the sacramental sign. The accusation raised occasionally by ecumenically rather insensitive voices against the Catholic understanding of the Eucharist that “sarcophagy” or cannibalism would take place, fails to acknowledge that *sacramental* presence should not be confused with *physical*, face-to-face encounter.³⁵ In the era of the Church, that interim of salvation history situated between the Ascension of Christ and his Parousia, Jesus Christ is absent as far as his physical presence is concerned. This absence is the precondition for a new and different presence: the pneumatic presence in us and with us.

During the pandemic, when spontaneous encounters in public spaces were sharply reduced though the requirement of wearing masks and keeping distance and in which, consequently, the experience of loneliness became a burden for many people, the dimension of *communio* illustrates what it is that we lose when we lose the Eucharist. This dimension of community is already ingrained into the materiality of the signs: as the single piece of bread has been ground from many grains of wheat and the wine has been gained from many grapes, the individual partaking in Communion is not isolated but is a member of the pluriform Body of Christ, which is the Church (cf. I Cor 12: 12–31). It is, however, not the commemorating community of the faithful that brings forth the presence of Christ through a collective act of commemoration. Had that been the case, Christ’s real presence would be no more than a self-fabricated idol. No, it is the exalted Christ himself who grants his pneumatically bestowed presence through the words of Holy Scripture and the gifts of bread and wine. The proclamation of his Word cuts through the many words of everyday life. It calls the hearers of this Word away from the mani-

34. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *S. th.* III, q. 73, a. 3 ad 2: “Corporeal food is changed into the substance of the person nourished ... but spiritual food changes man into itself”. Similarly: Bonaventura, *Breviloquium*, VI, 9,6, übertragen und eingeleitet von Marianne Schlosser, Freiburg: Johannes Verlag 2002, 266. Cf. Augustine, *Conf.* VII, 10, 16: *Cibus sum grandium: cresce et manducabis me, nec tu me mutabis sicut cibum tuae carnis, sed tu mutaberis in me*. For further texts, cf. Henri de Lubac, *Corpus mysticum. Kirche und Eucharistie im Mittelalter*, übers. von Hans Urs von Balthasar, Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag 1995, 219–222.

35. *S. th.* III, q. 75, a. 1: *In hoc sacramento carnem suam nobis exhibet invisibili modo*. *S. th.* III, q. 75, a. 5, which expressly states, with reference to the accidents of bread and wine, that it would be *horribile, carnem hominis comedere et sanguinem bibere*. Vgl. auch *S. th.* III, q. 82, a. 4 ob. 3.

fold distractions of life and assembles them anew, centred around the Gospel. The Eucharistic gifts, in which the *Christus passus* bestows himself, should likewise not be partaken of by each individual either, but much rather should be taken in hospitably by the celebrating community. Instead of attempting to correct the supposed contemporary loss of a Eucharistic culture of discernment and the practice of thoughtless participation in the Eucharist through admonishing words of threat or judgement (cf. 1 Cor 11:27-29), it seems more fitting to propagate a culture of *cortesía* and self-examination. The person who realises that he is indisposed or prepared insufficiently can partake of spiritual Communion.³⁶ That, too, is a means of participation that leads into the presence of Christ. Moreover, it is ecumenically advisable, should non-Catholic Christians hold partial reservations against the Catholic understanding of the Eucharist. Whoever prepares himself in a spirit of *cortesía* and then realises that Christ, who hosts the meal, does not come with a gift but bestows Himself, should accept the invitation and draw close to the table of the Lord. Other than is the case with fast-food options, which undermine the communal dimension of the meal and are aimed at hasty consumption, the celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy can re-awaken our attentiveness to others, to those who share in Communion. Letting another person go first or waiting patiently are small gestures belonging to a Eucharistic culture of diligence. These should not only determine the worship service, but life as a whole. Other, furthermore, than is the case with finely selected culinary delights that address the palate, the simple, unleavened wafer reduces the palatal experience to zero. The host thus becomes the conveyor of meaning, carrying a “nimbus of alterity”.³⁷ Here, we have the heavenly bread before us, spiritual nourishment that distinguishes itself from everyday fare: *Per Eucharistiam manducamus Christum*.³⁸

Whoever engages in an attentive and thankful manner with this gift, which is characterised by its alterity, and thus invests time for Christ, the hidden Other, will experience that time itself starts to change. When daily cares cause difficulties – as is the case during the Covid-19 pandemic – and obscure the present, community with the hidden, present Christ may provide strength, encouragement, and consolation. This, in turn, may grant him greater ability to deal with the troubled present. Peter Handke asks: “What is essentially

36. Cf. George Augustin, “Geistliche Kommunion. Zur Wiederentdeckung eines verlorenen Glaubensschatzes.” In Augustin 2021, 75-96.

37. Eckhard Nordhofen, *Corpora. Die anarchische Kraft des Monotheismus*, Freiburg i. Br: Herder ³2020.

38. Cf. *S. th.* III, q. 73, a. 5 ad 1.

Christian? Friendly attentiveness?”³⁹ In contrast to forms of ecstatic religiosity that promise a momentary escape from the burdensome present; in contrast, furthermore, to pious practices of “the mysticism of closed eyes”, which wishes to push the world away in order to approach the divine One, participation in the Eucharistic gifts invites us to comprehend the incarnatory movement of Christ, the Giver of the gifts. This movement leads us more deeply into the presence of others. Therefore, it is appropriate when participation in the body of Christ is conjoined with a “mysticism of opened eyes”,⁴⁰ which does not shy away from commitment to others that expresses itself in the sharing of bread. Thanking the Giver here means acknowledging his presence in the gift. It also means, however, handing down the legacy of his love, which empties itself for others, and testifying to this very love with one’s own life. This expressly includes practical solidarity with the poor, the lonely, the sick, and the outcast, which became particularly necessary during the Covid-19 pandemic. A Eucharistic way of life that supposes that it is possible to do without caritative engagement, betrays the *communio* with Christ, who has committed himself to others unreservedly.

VI

Finally, the Eucharist is the *signum prognosticum* and a pledge of future glory (*viaticum*). It opens a horizon that transcends the anxiety that is associated with bare survival and teaches the art of living that helps us deal with vulnerability, illness, and mortality. Whenever we lose our view on the ultimate, our perspective on the penultimate likewise becomes narrowed down. Doubtlessly, medical advancements have caused life expectancy to rise. Many diseases can now be warded off effectively, which is something that we can only be grateful for. Nonetheless, excessive concern about the sustenance of good health quickly causes us to forget that illness and death ultimately belong to life itself. If the constant hum of death, which becomes louder as age increases, is quieted artificially or suppressed systematically, life itself starts to suffer. The Eucharist, however, holds a supera-

39. Peter Handke, *Am Felsfenster morgens (und andere Ortszeiten 1982–1987)*, München: Dt. Taschenbuch-Verlag 2000, 335. Originally: “Was ist das Christliche? Die freundliche Aufmerksamkeit?”

40. Cf. Johann Baptist Metz, *Mystik der offenen Augen. Wenn Spiritualität aufbricht*, ed. Johann Reikerstorfer, Freiburg i. Br.: Herder 2011.

bundance of promise that arouses “longing after glory”.⁴¹ It reminds us that the future of the *homo viator* does not lie in the past, but in the culmination with God – *in patria*. The Eucharist as “being raised for a new day”, as “feasting over to YOU”⁴² may therefore aid the process of finding a healthy relationship towards illness and death. It furthermore aids the process of realising that human life is subject to creatureliness. “Where is the Life / we have lost in living?” T. S. Eliot asks in one of his poems.⁴³ Instead of trying frantically to procure life and prolong it through artificial measures taken in the phase when the horizon of time starts to recede in old age, the Eucharistic *viaticum* can release man into a relaxed relationship with his own mortality. Although the *homo viator* yet must face death, the “medicine of immortality” (Ignatius of Antioch) places his future within him. This future is still unknown to him, but he is already connected to that life that knows no death. The Eucharist, as the foretaste of coming glory, promises nothing less than that the seemingly lost lifetime of each human will be found again in the memory of God: “All forgotten thoughts emerge, at the other end of the world”.⁴⁴ Regarding the consoling and promising dimension of the Eucharistic *viaticum*, it was a crucial loss that many of the patients hospitalized worldwide with Covid 19 were prevented from receiving pastoral care and the sacraments: the Eucharist, Confession, and the Anointing of the Sick. For the first time in modern history, many Catholics died in hospitals without access to these rites.

VII

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Eucharist could be celebrated either with sharp restrictions or not at all. This experience of want may draw our attention back to an old discipline of piety, of which Karl Rahner once said that the Church of tomorrow would lose some-

41. Cf. Erik Varden, *Heimweh nach Herrlichkeit. Ein Trappist über die Fülle des Lebens*, Freiburg i. Br.: Herder 2021.

42. Peter Handke, *Wie ein Gewecktwerden für einen neuen Tag*, in: Tück & Bieringer 2019, 17. Original German phrasing: “Gewecktwerden für einen neuen Tag” and “Hinübermahlzeiten zu DIR”.

43. T. S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909–1962*, New York: Harcourt, Brace 1963, 147.

44. Elias Canetti, *Nachträge aus Hampstead. Aufzeichnungen*, München: Hanser 1994, 50. German original: “Alle vergessenen Gedanken tauchen empor, am anderen Ende der Welt”.

thing crucial if it was to abandon the practice: Eucharistic adoration.⁴⁵ This practice currently plays a secondary role, if any, in ecumenical discourse, because it is reminiscent of a confessional difference that one would gladly see removed. And yet, many religious orders and spiritual communities are experiencing a renaissance of the practice of Eucharistic adoration.

The practice of Eucharistic contemplation however is suspected of veiling the character of the Eucharist as a meal and of promoting an idolatrous practice of pious escapism. Is this not a case of objectifying a person and advising the faithful to venerate lifeless matter? Are these not idolatrous pious practices – conserving the body of Christ in a tabernacle, which is moreover marked with an eternal light as a sign of alterity; the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in a monstrance on the altar, solemnly accompanied by the burning of incense; the public presentation of the consecrated host at processions of the Blessed Sacrament on Corpus Christi? Were these practices not sustained during the Contra-Reformation as markers of Catholic identity and have they not been made obsolete today in favour of ecumenical accord?⁴⁶

We do not think that this is the case, and we wish to plead against unfairly comparing the practices of Eucharistic adoration and the celebration of the Eucharistic meal. Let us rather see them as complementary expressions of piety that both are to be observed abidingly and contemplatively. This can hardly be attained in the few short moments of communal participation: that Christ wishes to come close to us and be really present in the *transformed gifts* of bread and wine and thus personally become *the Gift of transformation* for us. Hegel already saw himself obliged to criticise Catholicism:

And, first of all, God is in the ‘host’ presented to religious adoration as an external thing. (In the Lutheran Church, on the contrary, the host as such is not at first consecrated, but in the moment of enjoyment, i.e. in the annihilation of its externality, and in the act of faith, i.e. in the

45. Karl Rahner, “Eucharistische Anbetung”. In Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie* 16, 300-304. Zürich: Benzinger 1984). Here, Rahner describes “quiet individual prayer before the tabernacle” as something that “must not be lost in future. Although this belongs to the past, it must be recaptured for the future, if the latter wishes to be great.” German original: “... das stille Gebet des einzelnen vor dem Tabernakel ... [ist ein Gut] was auch in Zukunft nicht untergehen sollte, was zu der Vergangenheit gehört, welche die Zukunft, soll sie groß sein, sich neu erwerben muss” (302).

46. Jean-Luc Marion, *Gott ohne Sein*. Aus dem Französischen von Alwin Letztkus, Paderborn: Schöningh 2014, 252.

free self-certain spirit: only then is it consecrated and exalted to be the present God).⁴⁷

In contrast to Luther, who had qualified the real presence of Christ as a gift – “*Certe homo non facit corpus et sanguinem etc. Non sunt humanum opus*”⁴⁸ – Hegel seems to believe that it is the free spirit of the congregation that produces the presence of Christ in communal prayer. This presence can “no longer be distinguished from the collective consciousness. To be precise, the two are identical as long as this presence lingers in the collective consciousness”.⁴⁹ Jean-Luc Marion, in contrast, has identified a definite advantage in the very *externality* of the gift, in its “irreducible exteriority”. The advantage lies in the fact that the presence of the Blessed Sacrament cannot be confused with the achievement of collective consciousness by the congregation. The alterity of the Other, who draws near and is presented in the consecrated bread, is marked in the form of a sign, and guarded through distance. Eucharistic presence simply is not the product of shared mindfulness. Eucharistic presence is the gift of Christ, the Other, who gives himself so that we in turn may become a gift to others: a gift that affixes and gathers the attention of the imitating consciousness; a gift that invites others amid their accelerated life situations to linger and to contemplate – *adoro te devote ...*⁵⁰

In our present, digitalised world, which captures our attention and increasingly fragments it, the Most Blessed Sacrament, in its exteriority, may arouse a transcending form of attentiveness, which can lead

47. Georg W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie*, § 552, in: Händel, *Sämtliche Werke* (Jubiläumsausgabe in zwanzig Bänden), ed. by H. Glockner, Stuttgart: Frommann 1927-1940, Bd. 10, 436. English translation: [Hegel's Philosophy of Mind \(sfu.ca\)](https://www.sfu.ca/~hegel/) (accessed 22.09.2021).

48. Cf. n. 26.

49. Marion 2014, 256. German original: “*Die Gegenwart ist hier ‘nicht länger mehr vom kollektiven Bewusstsein zu unterscheiden, sondern fällt genau genommen mit diesem zusammen, und zwar genau solange, wie in diesem Bewusstsein die Gegenwart andauert’*“. Transignification as reinterpretation or transfinalisation as “changed objectification” of the signs of bread and wine by the congregation in celebration are in danger of failing to appreciate the mystery of the Eucharistic presence if carried out along this line. The real presence of Christ in the Eucharist is based on the substantial transfiguration of the gifts of bread and wine. On the reformulation of the dogma of transubstantiation in light of a relational ontology, cf. Hoping ³2022; Tück 2018, 286-300.

50. The power towards cultural production generated by the Eucharistic hymns may be illustrated against many examples from literature and musicology. Cf., e.g., Dorothee Bauer, *Olivier Messiaens Livre du Saint Sacrement. Mystierium eucharistischer Gegenwart: Dank – Freude – Herrlichkeit*, Paderborn: Schöningh 2016.

us back into the present of the existing world. In her book *Digitale Theologie*, Johanna Haberer asks:

What is to become of people who never experience transcending wonder, but rather remain captured by the strategical dramaturgy of the digital world, every day, for hours on end? What is to become of mindfulness and respect for the person of the other and for their feelings? How do digital aesthetics influence the ethics of our human communication?⁵¹

Contemplative Eucharistic piety may interrupt an overly intense connection to digital worlds and revive our attention to the real world. But do we realise the real presence of Christ? Do we truly do justice to the Gift of the Ultimate, which is presented to us to contemplate and to abide in? Surely only incompletely and fragmentarily. Whenever we however truly engage with this presence of Christ in Eucharistic contemplation, we may rediscover ourselves in the presence of the Other and become attentive to others.⁵²

In the situation of suspended Eucharistic celebrations and of a blurred sense of time, spending time in the presence of the Most Blessed Sacrament is a precious way of gaining a new awareness of the salutary and transforming presence of Christ. During lockdowns, the Eucharist was exposed in the side chapels of many parish churches for individual prayer, and parishes furthermore maintained offers of online Eucharistic adoration. In the Roman-Catholic Archdiocese

51. Johanna Haberer, *Digitale Theologie. Gott und die Medienrevolution der Gegenwart*, München: Kösel 2015, 162. Somewhat later she writes: “For people who disappear into virtual worlds, there is no celebration of the real presence of their bodies. They begin to despise the corporeal world when they are forced by the need for sleep or by other bodily needs to leave their virtual spaces. The body becomes a hindrance (...), real experiences of the senses recede behind virtual experiences” (165).

52. Furthermore, cf. Jean-Luc Marion, “Realisieren wir die Realpräsenz? Vom Sinn der eucharistischen Anbetung.” *Internationale katholische Zeitschrift Communio* 46 (2017), 33-40. With reference to Jean-Luc Marion, Daniella Zsupan-Jerome points out that a deepened understanding of sacramental presence in digital contexts may sharpen our attentiveness to the other person behind the screen. When understood as an icon, the Eucharistic gifts lead our attentive beyond the material signs of bread and wine towards the mystery of the Eucharistic presence. Accordingly, the whole person behind the screen, whose presence is conveyed medially and in the form of a sign, should be observed. The digital encounter remains oriented towards the true encounter: “For digital communication, then, the screen must remain an icon that creates space for such a true encounter: an inexhaustible sense of the other whom we behold in love, offering ourselves for encounter while extending hospitality to the other in their otherness” (Zsupan-Jerome 2015, 541).

of Vienna, Cardinal Christoph Schönborn for instance pleaded in favour of open churches for individual prayer during lockdowns. In this context, he explicitly encouraged priests to offer Eucharistic adoration. Yet, a contemplative Eucharistic piety remains oriented towards the communal celebration of the Eucharist as the “fount and apex” (cf. LG 11), towards the real encounter with Christ on partaking in Communion. “Gazing upon” the elements remains connected to “partaking in”⁵³ them. The character of the Eucharist as a gift only begins to reveal itself completely in the act of partaking.⁵⁴

Social distancing, together with the numerous screen-locked, digital events and meetings that took place during the Covid-19 pandemic have heightened the human need of bodily closeness, physical co-presence, and mutual eating and drinking in restaurants, cafes, bars, pubs, and inns. Likewise, Eucharistic adoration may re-awaken our longing after participation in Communion, in the celebration of the Eucharist. It calls forth our spiritual hunger after real, direct encounters with Christ, who is hidden in the signs of bread and wine. The communal celebration of the Eucharist remains a centrepiece of Christian existence. It facilitates that which transforms us: the encounter with Christ.

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53. Cf. Marianne Schlosser, “In dem Glauben, der Augen verleiht. Zur Theologie der eucharistischen Anbetung.” *Geist und Leben* 86/4 (2013): 374-384, here 378: There is a deep inward connection between ‘partaking’ and ‘gazing upon’, that is, between the liturgy as a celebration of the Church and the spiritual appropriation in personal prayer of the mystery that is celebrated. (“*Zwischen der Liturgie als Feier der Kirche und der geistlichen Aneignung des gefeierten Mysteriums im persönlichen Gebet, also zwischen ‚Essen‘ und ‚Schauen‘, besteht ein tiefer innerer Zusammenhang*”); cf. furthermore Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 25.

54. Christ gives himself, thus Jean-Luc Marion, as “sustenance of the community, in order to call forth in her the fruits of love, not to be venerated sterilely and magically as a living relic, but rather to be stripped of its own gift-like quality” (Jean-Luc Marion, “Splendeur de la contemplation eucharistique”. *La politique de la mystique. Hommage à Mgr Maxime Charles*, eds. Société nouvelle Firmin-Didot. Limoges: Edition Critérior 1984, 17-28, here 17).

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