

Douglas Knight

Pope Benedict XVI on Liturgy and Sacrifice

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His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI is a pastor. He preaches and teaches around the Church year, his homily at every feast telling us something about Christ and something about us. Through his Easter and Corpus Christi homilies in particular he teaches us how to relate the passion, crucifixion, resurrection, the eucharist and body of Christ.

His very impressive little book on Jesus of Nazareth takes us through the ministry up to the transfiguration. We come to it in the knowledge that there is second book dealing with the passion and resurrection to follow. But a work of Christian teaching theology would not put incarnation and ministry in one book, which would then look very like a work of biblical studies, and the resurrection in another, and the Church and eucharist in a third. That would attempt to divide the indivisible, Jesus in one book, Christ in a second, and so divide Christ from his people, take away his anointing, until 'Christ' becomes the corpse over which the dogs of biblical studies have fought these many years. So it is a joy to find that the passion, resurrection and worship and eucharist are everywhere in this volume.

In this paper I am going to look at Benedict on sacrifice. The central question here is what is sacrificed, to which the answer must be given in terms not of *what* but of *whom*. Two things have to be said. Christ is person and Christ is thing; giver and gift. Christ is the one who serves us, without limit and forever, and thus he is irreducibly and eternal *person*, and this is covered by the conceptuality of priest and giver. But this giver also gives us his *body*. In case we found that too easy to get down he also gives us his blood. 'Unless you eat my body and drink my blood you shall have no part in me' (John 6). Left on its own this very gnomic statement is baffles and offends and turns many disciples away. It has to be unpacked. We need a christological account of sacrifice informed by the whole evangelical narrative as this comes to us through the liturgical year. So we must beg every teacher not only to pass us such doxological statements but to open the toughest of them for us. This requires that we talk, secondly, about who *receives* this gift, and at different moments in the evangelical narrative this is variously the world, the Church and God.

When it comes to talking about Christ in terms of his service and priesthood of Christ, Benedict is wonderful. Sometimes he produces the best answers the tradition has given, often by quoting Augustine. But at other moments he fails to give them to us

so when it comes to the 'body' of Christ we are left with a black box – we don't know what this body means. He repeats confessional statements from liturgy or Scripture like so many formulae the meaning of which has been forgotten.

So I am going to give you some theological context, using Benedict's own words as much as possible, from this book, from his homilies and from his 'The Theology of the Liturgy' in *The Spirit of Liturgy*. Then I will look at some issues to do with the body, the eucharist and time. Then I will say that this body is the many bodies and many persons of Christ's Church.

I want to show that we need two accounts of sacrifice – one than terms of ascension and the other in terms of salvation. When it comes to Sacrifice, we must continually distinguish these accounts – show how they differ – and then relate and thus unify them again. In our worship we pile one Scriptural statement on another. But in our theology and in sermons, we have to unpick things a little to show how they cohere in a single narrative of Christ-and-his-people, which is to say Christ and us. Since this is Christian theology, it must always be theology of the Whole Christ, never Christ without us and never us without Christ.

1. Prayer and liturgy

What is Sacrifice? Sacrifice is prayer. 'God himself is speech, word... in Johannine theology where Son and Spirit are described in terms of pure 'hearing' ('The Theology of the Liturgy' in *The Essential Pope Benedict XVI: His Central Writings and Speeches* ed. John F. Thornton and Susan B. Varenne, San Francisco: Harper Collins 2007, 162). The first thing we learn about Jesus in this book is that he prays and this prayer is the secret beneath everything else that is going on. Even 'The forty days in the desert...and the agony in Gethsemane – are both essentially moments of prayer.' (Homily for Ash Wednesday 2008). In prayer Jesus is always with the Father, together and united, and so in good company, thus prayer means communion with God. 'Jesus...is dialogue – a living relationship with the Father' (Jesus of Nazareth 268). 'The liturgy is God's work ...the primacy of christology is decisive' (Liturgy 172).

Prayer is person-person conversation and communion. 'In the act of prayer the totally personal and communal must always pervade each other... the 'we' of the praying community and the utterly personal intimacy that can be shared only with God are closely connected' (JN 129). So this not individual prayer but worship, together, with others. The Church is able to say this because it has been caught up into this prayer and liturgy which is the work of Christ. And so man prays. He does not pray alone, but with God as his conversation partner.

'God... himself provides the words of prayer and teaches us to pray. Through the prayers that come from him he enables us to set out towards him'... The psalms are words that God has given to men; they are God's Spirit become word. We thus pray 'in the Spirit' with the Holy Spirit' (JN113)

Christ prays and he includes us in this prayer, and the result is 'Man at prayer is the true sacrifice' (Liturgy 152).

So the primary definition of sacrifice is prayer and liturgy; this prayer is both individual and corporate – the sort of prayer we might more readily call worship. Benedict uses

prayer, worship, liturgy, sacrifice and service as synonyms. The liturgy is the work and service of Christ. It consists of two works, one of which is his prayer and conversation with God the Father, the other is his service to us. Christ's service to us is also two distinct works, of salvation and sanctification. Benedict combines these under the concept of purification. Christ purifies us so we may participate in his prayer and worship of the Father.

But when this is not made clear that sacrifice means prayer to the Father which results in the purification of man, the term 'sacrifice of the mass' is open to other interpretations. Without theological definition, sacrifice means a coerced exchange, in which something is given up in order to gain something else, or something killed so that other lives can be saved, or even that a life is the punishment and penalty sought as reparation by some power terrible enough to enforce such a demand. If the Christian account of sacrifice as liturgy that purifies us is not emphatically stated, other such sinister and pagan meanings appear, and the result, Benedict laments, is that sacrifice has become a dirty word.

Who still today talks about the 'the divine Sacrifice of the Eucharist'? ... Even if people want in one way or another to rediscover the concept of sacrifice, embarrassment and criticism are the end result' (Liturgy 142)

Our anthropology is too individualistic to make sense of vicarious substitution (Liturgy 148).

This debate 'show how confused and muddled is the idea of sacrifice among almost all authors, and clearly shows how much work there is to be done here' (Liturgy 145).

I wonder who can possibly do such work? Could we ever find someone, in Britain, who could give us this renewed theological account of sacrifice in that takes into account all the biblical studies work of the last fifty years, and relate it to an ontology of persons and eschatology? And more to the point, could that someone ever find a readership?

The work of Christ is two distinct works, of salvation and sanctification. He tells us that:

'The phrase 'the work of Christ' seems to have been used in two different senses... in reality however, the two meanings are inseparably linked' (The Spirit of the Liturgy (141)

Indeed they are linked and we must link them, *but only when we have distinguished them*. In any event, we need this is the doctrine of God that secures this other more Christian account of sacrifice.

But if we stick to this account of sacrifice as liturgy that brings about our purification we can achieve much. We have to pray and enter conversation, to offer ourselves for relationship with others beyond ourselves: such reaching out to others is inevitable, it is what all conversation and all prayer is. But man reaches out and offers himself in all directions; he cannot hold that adoration in. When he does not identify the true God, he directs his love elsewhere, and so gives himself away: he constructs substitutes and compensations, and idols and pagan religion, or consumer culture as

we now call it, are what results. Our conversation and worship have to be re-directed and purified therefore. Christ directs all our offering to the Father and so purifies our prayer and self-offering so that the love of God that enters us purifies us of false loves.

‘The fact of being loved is a process of purification and transformation, in which we are not only open to God but united to each another’ (Liturgy 150).

Baptism for which the cross stands purifies more inexhaustibly as any river or sea can wash us. The cross is a ‘fountain of purification’ (JN 275). We need the permanent provision and disposal (‘purificatory’) service. As water brings life Christ *give* us what we don't have. But we also need him to *take away* what we cannot cope with, our sin, and thus this water also cleanses us.

‘The basin in which he washes us is his love...Only love has that purifying power which washes the grime from us and elevates us to God's heights...He is ceaselessly this love that cleanses us; in the sacraments of purification – Baptism and the Sacrament of Penance.’ (Homily for Corpus Christi (2006).

‘The poverty that Jesus means...presupposes above all inner freedom from the greed for possession and the mania for power. This is a greater reality than merely a different distribution of possessions, which would still be in the material domain and thereby make hearts even harder. It is first and foremost a matter of purification of heart, through which one recognizes possession as responsibility, as a duty towards others, placing oneself under God's gaze and letting oneself be guided by Christ, who from being rich became poor for our sake (2 Corinthians 8.9). Inner freedom is the prerequisite for overcoming the corruption and greed that devastate the world today. This freedom can only be found if God becomes our richness; it can only be found in the patience of daily sacrifices, in which, as it were, true freedom develops.’ Homily for Palm Sunday (2006)

In the ‘sacrifice of the mass’ Christ purifies us, removing us sin, making us holy and presenting us as such to the Father. But we are left wishing for clarity.

‘The seemingly profane episode of the crucifixion of Christ is a sacrifice of expiation, a saving act of the reconciling love of God made man. The theology of the Passover is a theology of the redemption, a liturgy of expiatory sacrifice.’ (Liturgy 147)

But when this is not made clear that this sacrifice is Christ's work of making us pure and perfect, the term ‘sacrifice’ is open to other incomprehensively bloody interpretations. If only Benedict would allow us to distinguish these two sacrifices.

Is ‘sacrifice’ understood as purification really the only way of giving an account of our salvation? If Passover means that Israel is torn out of Egypt's grasp, Christus Victor give us a much better account, which Benedict produces.

‘The paschal haggada was an integral part of the Passover meal based on lamb: the narrative commemoration of the fact that it had been God himself who set

Israel free by "stretching out his hand". He, the mysterious and hidden God, had shown himself to be stronger than Pharaoh, in spite of all the power that Pharaoh could muster'. (Homily for Corpus Christi 2007).

If we allow that Christus Victor accounts primarily for Passover and salvation, the long slow purification of the following years in the wilderness can properly be called expiation. Then we could distinguish between salvation on one hand, and subsequent purification or sanctification, which we could call the expiation of sin. Salvation is Israel's removal from Egypt; sanctification is the longer process in which Egypt is taken out of Israel. These two may of course be regarded as one, but if we are not able to distinguish them we are left with the impression that pharaoh or death receive the sacrifice and are paid off. Such confusion could be avoided if we distinguished these two sacrifices. One way of doing so would be to say that are always two liturgies, the Christian and the pagan, and all our life and conversation is belongs to the pagan liturgy until it is purified by inclusion in the liturgy and prayer of Christ.

2. Passion and resurrection

Now before we can show what is at stake here we need a lightening sketch of some theology. In the next section I will show how that helps us with the body and blood of Christ.

The Son opens that communion and liturgy to us, and we come into being within them. The liturgy of God calls us into existence, within the Son. We are being made perfect by the Holy Spirit, presented as holy by the Son and received as such by the Father. The liturgy becomes the worship we hear and can participate in: our participation in this liturgy is not eternal or perfect, but we have the promise of God that he will sustains us in it. So we are coming into being, and specifically into the holy being and holy communion of God. God makes his people holy. The very etymology of the word 'sacrifice' points us in this direction – *sacri-* (holy) *ficere* (to make). Sacrifice does not mean to kill or to give away, but to make holy. Along with 'sacrament' and 'sanctification', 'sacrifice' refer to work of the persons of God in giving us and receiving us, and so making us holy and sustaining us in their communion. It is we and all creation who are brought into being and being made holy. In this dogmatically Christian sense, we have to say that *we are the sacrifice of God*.

What holds this together is the idea of the coming-into-being, or ascension of man. This ascension is accompanied by the sanctification process of formation and transformation. Israel goes through this process of sanctification for the world and in Christ the world follows Israel through the same process. Israel is the first instalment of the redeemed world, and Christ is the first instalment of Israel.

Irenaeus and Augustine

We can put this quite simply by contrasting the theology of two saints, Irenaeus and Augustine. Irenaeus tells us that God always intended come to man and stay with him, and that in the course of this coming, man would grow up and this process is delayed, but not halted, by our fear and rebellion. Irenaeus says that man begins as an infant and therefore innocent, who is called up into maturity in God's communion; man has to undergo an apprenticeship, and that Christ is the one who has undergone this to the end and is now mature, the finished form of man to whom no

part of God's creation is alien. Irenaeus gives us the ascension account, the rise of man into communion with God. Perhaps from pastoral concerns, Augustine starts with the givenness of sin and the immediacy of our need, and so he gives us the salvation account – in which sin and guilt are prominent. Irenaeus is more apparent in the Eastern Church, Augustine in the West, but each account needs the other. We have to talk about salvation and about ascension-and-sanctification: we cannot neglect one and make the other do all the theological work. If God always intended that man should be with him, ascension is the main plot, salvation that overcomes man's reluctance and resistance, is the sub-plot, but each is the context in which the other makes sense.

The task is to show that the resurrection is really the truth of the passion, and even that it is the resurrection that creates the passion, so we may not talk about Jesus' passion without understanding it as the work of the resurrection. We have to give two accounts, in which one of which the passion is followed by the resurrection – the humanity of Jesus reveals his divinity. In the other it is the resurrection that enables and causes the passion: his divinity enables this perfect humanity in communion with God, so eternity enables the good performance of this incarnation. The account in which the resurrection precedes and enables our passion is just as fundamental as the more familiar account in which our crucifixion of Christ precedes God's raising of him. That Christ is divided and incarnate is significant for us only because he is the indivisible one, who joins us in the indivisible communion of God.

When we only give the account in which salvation comes before sanctification and the cross before the resurrection we set the eucharist out primarily in terms of the passion of Christ, so of the agony of crucifixion. The crucifixion is about the agony of the world: it shows us the division, antagonism and self-rending of the world is *stopped*. Resurrection is reversion to the ascension. So as the ascension precedes the cross, the resurrection causes and gives issue to the cross. The resurrection restores us to the ascension, the sub-plots puts us back on the main road again. The ascension, the main plot, precedes the sub-plot, salvation and of course succeeds it.

Passion

We need to say three things about the passion: its is ours first, and Christ's second, and ours-in-Christ third.

First the passion is ours. The world suffers, we suffer and we inflict suffering on one another. We are thumped and helplessly we thump back, repeating and passing on what is inflicted on us. So we suffer our passion badly, repeating it without hope and so we suffer pointlessly, nevertheless coming through it to our goal.

Secondly, Christ takes on this suffering and makes it his own. He becomes incarnate in the world, and the whole incarnation is passion. He takes what all the rest of us lash out, receives what is inflicted on him, but does not pass this punishment on. Christ's passion is the passion and chaos of the world, not evaded, not repeated, but suffered well and fully to the goal. Our determination to take life away from him was outmatched by his ability to take the beating and stripping we gave him, and to grow up through it into the true form of man. He used our violence for his up-building. Since he suffered what we inflicted on him, purposefully and effectively, and arrived at the true form of humanity, this passion turns out to be entirely purposeful. He is able to bear and accompany us, and entirely content and free as he does so.

So *thirdly*, in the body of Christ, and therefore inseparably with him, we are now able to undergo this passion that removes all false and partial relationships from us. Through the stripping the world inflicts on us, Christ allows all the false relationships with which we have dressed ourselves up to be taken away, and he clothes us again in all other persons and all creation (2 Corinthians 3). Our passion is therefore inseparably *his-and-ours* together, for it is by the Holy Spirit that we receive so purposefully what the world gives violently and aimlessly. His presence changes our passion from pointless to purposeful. Together with him our suffering is purposeful because it forms us into those who now able to bring the world as a whole into the communion of God. The body of Christ is the passage opened for the world through which it may proceed into its redemption. This body is the body that appears at the eucharist.

The point is not simply that Jesus became incarnate to us, but that he enables us to enter this incarnation, which is the communion of God for man, and within which we can allow ourselves to become fully present and incarnate to one another. As he comes to us, Christ brings all men with him, and when we can receive them all and can give thanks to him for them, the incarnation of all creation in Christ will be complete. We look forward to becoming properly present to one another and this is what our hope of the resurrection is.

Now I have suggested that Western theology tends to introduce the cross first and then add the resurrection as though it were further information, and that it introduces salvation and then to add sanctification. In terms of Jesus of Nazareth, this means that Jesus is identified before and apart from Christ, his anointing and glorification with the whole people of God, Israel and the Church. When cross comes before resurrection and unformed by it, we will see Jesus as the isolated individual with incomprehensible passion and see we will the eucharist out in terms of this baffling agony. But the passion belongs to the main story *only with the sub-plot*: it belongs to the ascension of man to God only as man is restored and sustained on that path through his salvation, and thus through resurrection-and-cross.

3. Our high Priest

Christ is at work. His service of the Father includes service to us. He is the ever-living sacrifice, the servant (and shepherd) who serves and provides for his people, giving them without limit what is his to give, which is his own uninterrupted life and communion with God and with all creation. His eternity with the Father empowers his service and enables him to be the eternal servant of mankind, entirely and inexhaustibly available for us. He does not get tired, or have to turn to his own concerns before turning to ours. He does not merely give us the *thing* that we presently need and so provide a merely temporary relief. He does not fob us off with anything that is not himself. He himself comes: he does not come and then go again, but comes, and remains and dwells with us without limit, eternally. He is our provider, and he is what he provides, the priest and the sacrifice.

Benedict gives a strong account of the priesthood of Christ.

God descends and becomes a slave, he washes our feet so that we may come to his table. In this, the entire mystery of Jesus Christ is expressed. In this, what redemption means becomes visible...He is ceaselessly this love that cleanses us; in the sacraments of purification – Baptism and the Sacrament of Penance – he is continually on his knees at our feet and carries out for us the service of a slave, the service of purification, making us capable of God. His love is inexhaustible, it truly goes to the very end.’ (Homily for Corpus Christi 2006)

But there are questions. First, is Benedict able to show that Christ is the mediator of humanity. We can find examples, but they are not developed. Here is one.

‘Through Baptism each child is inserted into a gathering of friends who never abandon him in life or in death because these companions are God’s family, which in itself bears the promise of eternity.’ (Homily on the Baptism of Christ 2006).

It would be nice to see a theology of the Whole Christ and thus of the Church as the people of God being set out at this point. We want to know that Christ calls, gathers and ushers all humanity along towards the Father, overcome those who want to take us in different directions, and bringing the whole human body together, so that no part is any longer at war with any other. He is able and prepared to mediate between each and all of us, through whom all other men are related and able to face one another and who brings all persons into communion and makes them incarnate and present to one another.

Secondly, can he show that it is not only because we are given but because we are received, and received by the Father, that our existence is confirmed, and so is what it is? As demonstration of his good stewardship the Son presents us to the Father as though we, and all creation, were integral to himself. Christ raises us continually to God, and will do so finally and as the Father receives us from him, our existence is affirmed. The eucharist is presented by Christ and it is received by the Father and so we are received and our existence is established.

He makes us holy and presents us as such, so we are *his* sacrifice. Christ its head *sacrifices his body*, by making it holy and presenting to the Father. We are the gift, Christ is the giver and God receives us from him. In all this the gift is a person, Christ, and many persons, all those whom Christ brings with him. Not only are the giver and receiver persons, but so is their gift and sacrifice. Christ is doing all the work. So ‘the only work that God demands is the work of believing in him... it can only come to us as a gift, as *God’s work*’ (268). Because it is Christ’s work, it is finally God’s work.

Christ is *our* sacrifice in the sense that, in giving thanks to the Father for him, we lift him up in acknowledgement what we receive through him. We are able to lift him up in thanks and praise because he lifts us up in reality. As Benedict makes brief resort to Augustine to establish a point without having to develop it, so will I.

‘The whole redeemed community, that is to say, the congregation and fellowship of the saints, is offered to God as a universal sacrifice, by that great Priest who offered himself in his suffering for us – that we might be the body of so great a head. (Augustine *City of God* 10.6 (Harmonsworth: Penguin 1972 p.380)).

'He is both the priest, himself making the offering, and the offering. This is the reality, and he intended the daily sacrifice of the Church, being the body which he is the Head, learns to offer itself through him. This is the true sacrifice' (*City of God* 10.20).

As he comes to us Christ brings all men with him, and when we can receive them all and can give thanks to him for them – that is, offer and sacrifice them – the incarnation of all creation in Christ will be complete. All other persons will be our sacrifice to God. Thus we may also raise and offer one another to God. God does not wait to receive *things* from us, but *persons*, who in freedom give and return themselves to him. since they do so in time, they may give themselves in instalments, and thus they may give material *things*, as tokens or instalments of themselves. To say this we need a pneumatological christology which establishes that in Christ we may become fully material and present to one another, embodied persons.

4. Temple sacrifice Embodied prayer and the materiality of sacrifice

I want to take issue with Benedict in two places where I fear that he has pitched cross and resurrection as opposites, and the result is that Spirit and createdness appear to become opposites. Here is the first:

'At the moment when the Son makes himself the lamb, that is freely gives himself to the Father and hence to us, an end is made of the old prescriptions of a worship that could only be a sign of the true realities. The temple is 'destroyed'. From now on his resurrected body – he himself – becomes the true temple of humanity, in which adoration in spirit and truth takes place.' (JN151)

Here surely Benedict draws the wrong conclusion. Jesus' resurrected body does not *become* the temple, for it has always been that. Christ has always been the true meeting place of man and God, and thus true worship and every form of true worship derives from him. Jesus is the true temple, and the world is to participate in this temple of God for man. The temple in Jerusalem is an embodiment of the true temple, and in its time *the* embodiment.

In Jesus Christ, the God of Israel has made himself palpable as the 'temple', and as the criterion and judgment of Israel's leadership, the regime of the Second Temple. This regime had failed to pass on this purification from God to the whole people of Israel, with the result that the poor, the whole nation and finally the temple regime itself had become unclean. The revelation of the true temple comes with the judgment and therefore at the expense of the destruction of the temple regime in Jerusalem. The true temple, Christ, is not destroyed but stands forever, impregnable. We put him to death and so Christ dies, but death could not hold on to him, and in all truth it is death that dies. Christ turns out to be the one who cannot die; only the resurrection reveals what the crucifixion was. No moment of Christ's death is empty of the resurrection.

Old prescriptions of a worship... could only be a sign of the true realities.
(JN151)

Benedict suggests that we could construct a history of sacrifice that would show a development from pagan to Christian account of sacrifice. 'Let us remind ourselves here of that transition from animal sacrifices to 'worship in harmony with the Logos' which characterises the path from the Old Testament to the New.' (*Liturgy* 196) in such account would show that ancient pagan man gave way to Israel which, first dimly and then with increasingly clarity, saw that the true worship is *spiritual*. But in such an account 'spiritual' could only mean non-bloody, non-bodily, and such a genealogy would only conclude that man moves inevitably from the crassly material and bloody to the sacrifice of pure reason. Then sacrifice is disembodied. But Christian worship is always embodied. It is pagans who are not sure that creation and bodies are good, while it is the Christians who say that creation, and every creature embodied within it, is good. So Benedict is on much stronger ground with his purely theological account. True worship and pure sacrifice, praise and thanksgiving starts in heaven. It is this divine liturgy that prays truly.

For an Israelite to bring an offering when he came to pray in the temple is no diminution of prayer, or failure of rationality. Animals are no more than words. The animals offered in temple always were the words received by Israel from God and returned to him. Granted the message that these animals represented was that the poor were being exploited and so in this pagan sense sacrificed by the rich.

Otherwise to bring an animal to the temple is no different from bringing some financial offering to any Christian service of worship. Our praise and thanks does not become more crassly material and less rational or spiritual when it is accompanied by the action of our bodies in standing, kneeling, signing ourselves with the cross. We bring an offering and put it in the collection. There are many modes in which human bodies communicate and pray, and many modes in which human persons make meaning through the bodies of animals, as Mary Douglas and Jacob Milgrom have amply shown in the case of Israel. All human bodies are made of animal bodies, for man is commanded to take and eat, in Israel's case only the animals specified, and of course to avoid consuming the blood and life of the animal.

All our actions and relationships are embodied and our prayers are embodied prayers. We cannot be persons without bodies. Benedict needs to establish that bodies are forms of presence to others. It is for other people's benefit that we have bodies, for only so can they find us and are able to address us. Until we do this, 'spiritual' will imply 'purified' of body and thus disembodied and thus isolated from communion. The true sacrifice is not of words rather than bodies, human or animal, but simply the prayer that Jesus purifies and passes on to God.

Adverbs

How does God come to man – spiritually or materially, peacefully or violently, in eternity or in time?

Our salvation is both spiritual and embodied. God comes to man on God's terms, and thus spiritual, and he truly come to humanity and thus meets us in our flesh so that

we can perceive and acknowledge him. God comes to man on God's terms and man's terms: the incarnation is no diminution of Spirit or of God's divinity.

The same question can be asked in terms of violence. The sacrifice and liturgy of Christ is peaceful, but our *salvation* is *both* peaceful *and* violent. God is peaceful, we are violent and put up violent resistance to this peace, and the peace overcomes the violence. The hard, vain and never finished forced labour inflicted by man on man is overcome by the rest of God, that we may call the sabbath or the eschaton.

The same question must be asked in terms of time. How does God come to man, in time or in eternity? Again we need to refuse the dichotomy and give both accounts, from below and from above. The time which God came to man is both temporal (one moment in our time) and eternal, and so not limited to the past. To the question 'when' we have to reply with all three tenses. He *came*, he *comes* and *is now present* (by his Spirit) and he *will* come. Then we need to affirm that our two accounts point to God's one indivisible act: we can distinguish between them, but they are not finally separable.

5. Work and rest

Benedict and Neusner on the Sabbath

God rests from the labour of creation on the seventh day. For Benedict's interlocutor, Jacob Neusner, that Israel rests on the seventh day is the sign that Israel is the people of that God, for Genesis tells that God himself rested on the seventh day.

But what sort of exegesis is it that ignores the entire corpus of sabbath and jubilee legislation found across the Pentateuch which commands man to let his servants, cattle and land rest, every seventh day and year and seventh-seventh year? The meaning the Sabbath is driven home in the narrative of Exodus; the pharaoh who would not let the people of Israel worship God. He is the hard master who has no pity on his people, who acknowledges no bounds on his power.

The charge at issue between Christ and his interlocutors is not that Israel is not healed on the sabbath. The charge Christ makes is that Israel has received, has not been healed, purified or allowed its restoration. Every day, every sabbath day included, Israel is worked by hard masters and so worked to exhaustion. But the exegesis offered by the proto-rabbinic schools insists only that the poor produce the sacrificial offerings which they are in no position to give, and which therefore mark them as excluded from Israel. The sabbath law is a command to the rich to provide those very resources to the poor and so purify them and bring them into the temple and the covenant. To the poor the sabbath is a promise, not a demand or a threat. Those who do not interpret the law in this way, as mercy rather than sacrifice, act as uncaringly as Pharaoh himself.

The sabbath legislation that commands all masters to let their people have their rest and worship the true God. God gives the command to man. God does not 'rest' because his work is alien work, for an alien master, that he is compelled to. But for the God of Israel there is no dichotomy of work and rest. He provides for, and protects, his servant Israel and this is no coerced or alien work. The Son is entirely free in his service of mankind, for he regards man as his own, and so is not working for another and so regard this service is its own reward.

Israel must remain distinct and pure. Neusner believes that the function of the sabbath is merely sociological, Israel's identity marker serves simply to distinguish Israel from the Gentiles (FN111). But there is a further reason for why Israel must remain distinct. Israel is the witness of God to the Gentiles; it is for their sake that Israel is holy. They are the unholiness that always threatens Israel and it is for their sake that Israel must remain demonstrably inviolable.

Benedict is adamant that Christ is not setting aside the law. Indeed, it is Christ who has given this law and himself is this law. 'The Law has become a person' (268). It is Neusner's conception of God as the problem. God spoke once to give Israel the Law, but Neusner does not apparently expect God to address his people again and again, or to act, to come, to lead from the front. This God is deist. But Benedict does not regard this Word as past event; rather Word is prayer, and even invitation to address God and enter conversation with him.

When we encounter Jesus we feed off the living God himself. This happens in the context of faith in Jesus, who is dialogue – a living relationship with the Father – and who wants to become Word and love in us as well' (268).

The Sabbath is Israel's doctrine of the eschaton. It is the judgment of all masters and the end of hard service in the kingdom of God, making itself felt in history. That kingdom already sends instalments of that rest and delight forward to us. Eschatology does not come simply at the end: the eschaton is the provider of the secular life and reveals itself by its interruption as the (eternal) seventh day that insists that all secular life acknowledge its limits, so that we receive what God intends us to receive and so take our rest. Rest is not the opposite of work but is work together with its purpose and end, performed without coercion and so willingly and in freedom. Without the resurrection, all life is a passion without purpose or end. All this belongs to any book entitled 'Jesus of Nazareth'.

6. Un-interpreted body

But alongside the theology of high priest who gives us his endless service, Benedict also gives us another discourse in which Christ is a body. Without enough theological context, this body does not appear to be a person so much as a thing.

'The Word's becoming-flesh... is the offering of his body on the cross' (269).

This is the a simple repetition of doxological and eucharistic statements that need unpacking, but which Benedict does not unpack. The incarnation gives us this body, which without further information we might assume is inert. What are we supposed to do with it? If this body is a treasury of resources, are we left to unpack and distribute is ourselves? Theology fails seriously when it fails to break open and interpret this body.

'A God who makes himself flesh and sacrifices himself for the life of the world'.
Corpus Christi 2007.

We are told that 'He gave his life for us' (JN 286). But we should be assured that he gave up life, died, because he could not support both us and himself in life. It does not mean that he died and that this was somehow to our advantage. It does not

mean that he ceased to live, but that he decided to live with us, and that he dedicated himself to serving us for the whole length of our life. The substitutionary death is constantly introduced at the wrong place. Benedict seldom writes a sentence about the resurrection without interrupting it with a mention of the cross, all his theology turned straight into moral talk about discipleship.

‘The goal of the Word’s becoming-flesh spoken of by the prologue (of John) is precisely the offering of his body on the Cross’ (JN 269).

But ‘the offering of his body on the Cross’ does not tell us enough. It is a legitimate doxological statement, the kind of thing that we might sing in a hymn, but it is not an explanation. When this body is not interpreted pneumatologically and ecclesiologically we are left with the impression that we are being delivered a large chunk of meat and thereafter left to our own devices. Without being controlled by all the rest of our exegesis, the ‘body on the cross’ will look like a corpse on a stick and we left baffled by the cannibalistic thought that so utterly betrays all Levitical legislation about avoiding even the slightest suspicion about taking life and consuming it.

Embodiment and carnality are essential, of course .

‘We must not be surprised if today too many find it hard to accept the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. It cannot be otherwise. This is how it has been since the day when, in the synagogue at Capernaum, Jesus openly declared that he had come to give us his flesh and his blood as food (cf. Jn 6: 26-58)’ (Corpus Christi 2007)

This makes the eucharist always a ‘sign of contradiction’.

‘The shepherd has become the lamb’, Benedict tells us (Liturgy p.147). But we must add that he has not thereby ceased to be the shepherd. The giver gives us gifts, and even is the gifts he gives, but does not cease to be himself. The gifts are fully him, but he is never exhausted by them. He can give himself away in gifts without end, but he cannot finally be given away and so lost. The shepherd is eternal and indestructible. In Christ God is given to man. But also in Christ man is really received by God: man is the gift and God takes it.

Bodies and persons: things, their givers and receivers

We have seen that Benedict is keen to get rid of the animals. But it turns out that he is more focused on the eucharistic element, the inert body that is this eucharistic wafer, than on the living body of the Church and the eschaton that will bring it to completion.

In the Eucharist Jesus does not give us a "thing," but himself; he offers his own body and pours out his own blood. He thus gives us the totality of his life.
(*Sacramentum Caritatis* 7)

A pagan sacrifice has to be repeated for pagans can only give something – a *thing*. Whilst a thing may be enough to satisfy our need for a while, it cannot do so finally. A thing buys us time, but what we need is ultimately a person and one who won't be put off by us and go away.

In Christ God has given a person. In the course of our refusal to receive him, and we cut him off from life and so make him a mere thing. But God does not let him remain a thing, but raises him. Being a thing was something that Christ did for the brief triduum in order to show us that we cannot succeed in turning the person given to us into a thing. Ultimately this gift will not remain mute and unresponsive, or give up on us and go away. The shepherd came to us, without ceasing to be the shepherd he turned himself in the small and unthreatening figure of a lamb; we turned the lamb into a corpse, but in all this he *remains the shepherd*, the person, utterly unconstrained by our refusal of him. Our fear and hate does not diminish his love and patience or power. He does not cease to be this person. God cannot be made less than God. The person can become a thing for us without any loss of freedom, and so without being obliged to remain this thing and no more and so cease to be a person.

If he does not set the indivisible unity of Christ with God prior to this breaking and passion, it looks as though we divide Christ, and thus as though we have demonstrated that Christ has no relationship to God, for God does not help him. If we are able to overcome Christ, he is powerless to help us. But we did not overcome Christ and turn him into a corpse and a thing. He consented to suffer, so he is pierced, but only willingly, and not finally. The resurrection shows that the passion is free. We do not make him suffer, for he bears us in complete freedom. The passion is a function of the resurrection.

So it is only good to have this person at your disposal because they do something for you, that is, that they can provide what is necessary at the right moment, thus the person is good when they come with the required gift – that is, if they can come up with whatever is needed in that moment. We need our *daily* bread. He gives us many bodies – all the materiality that sustains us in life, including all the animals we consume. But equally, although each gift is good, it is good only in that moment. It lasts a day; tomorrow we will be as needy as before. Thus what we need is the regular *supply* and thus a supplier. We need both provision for today, and the supplier so we have the prospect of provision, and so a perspective, hope and future. It is only the existence of hope that makes sense of today. (*Spe Salvi* 7-9.)

So we need a gift, for today, and we need the giver for the hope that gives purpose to today. We need the sacrifice and the priest. We need the body of the lamb and we need the shepherd. And what we have acquired, we cannot just keep it and stockpile it. For have to pass it on, either by giving it to others, or by giving it back to the Lord from whom we have received it. If Benedict means that Christ's materiality (inexhaustibly) supplies us with our materiality he could say so, spelling out the cosmology of Israel in which the prayers of the righteous and the fertility of the land are in some if not causal then gracious relationship. We are not driven by fear to placate God with gifts, but rather God adores us, woos us and in everlasting patience serves us. *God sacrifices to us.*

This body also appears to be this inert object, the eucharistic bread. But the bread is simply to direct our attention to the body of Christ that is present and the body of Christ that is still absent and to come. Its presence is not complete, but it points ahead to the future redemption, the eschaton, and so we have to confess this present *absence*. When the evangelical narrative is not spelled out, we are left gazing at this bread object and our attention is drawn away from the body of Christ and this priesthood of the Whole Christ, one-and-many.

The Lamb is the Passover

But the body is not merely a body, but a passage

‘The way of unity, the way of love, is then a way of conversion, a way of purification: it takes the shape of the cross, it passes through the Paschal Mystery, through death and resurrection.’

This life is our Passover. We are crossing from mortality to eternal mortal life

‘The eucharist is an entry into the liturgy of heaven; by it we become contemporaries with Jesus Christ’s own act of worship, into which, through his body, he takes up worldly time and straightaway leads it beyond itself, snatching it out of its own sphere and enfolding it into the Communion of eternal love. Thus the altar signifies the entry of him who is the Orient into the assembled community, and the going out of the community from the prison of this world through the curtain now torn open, a participation in the Pasch, **the passing over** from the world to God that Christ has opened up. ... thus it brings heaven into the community assembled on earth, or rather it takes that community beyond itself into the communion of saints of all times and places.’
(‘Sacred Places; The Significance of the Church Building’ in *The Essential Pope Benedict XVI*, 198)

In this Passover divinity crosses over from God to us, and we are able to march through into the unlimited territory of the communion of God in which all creatures can meet. Eternity is breaking into time, divinity eternally breaking into humanity and uniting it to divinity. We experience this an in-breaking into history; eternity breaks into humanity both eternally and historically.

Just as he was transformed through the cross into a new manner of bodiliness and of being human pervaded by God's own being, so too for us this food must become an **opening-out of our existence, a passing through** the Cross, and an anticipation of the new life in God and with God (JN270).

From the communion of God, divine communion floods in to us, and eternity endlessly renews time. And finally we need a concept of the people of God, these many persons, and of the Church as this body and this Passover passage.

7. The Whole Christ

Christ gives us a body, and the Church is this body. In the one body of the Church he gives us many bodies of the sanctified, that is of those dedicated to our service, the communion of saints.

‘The Resurrection is not a thing of the past, the Resurrection has reached us and seized us. We grasp hold of it, we grasp hold of the risen Lord, and we know that he holds us firmly even when our hands grow weak. We grasp hold of his hand, and thus we also hold on to one another’s hands, and we become one single subject, not just one thing. I, but no longer I: this is the formula of Christian life rooted in Baptism, the formula of the Resurrection within time.’
(Easter Vigil 2006).

We become one person in Christ.

‘The Church is so identified with Christ that she can be called his body. But this bodily unity is to be understood against the biblical concept of man and wife – the word in one flesh’ (165).

It is the way that has opened to us. This is our action to carry out, not without Christ, but with him, directed and enabled by him, in the Spirit. It of an action that is simultaneously Christ’s and all his people’s. The Church is the gate through which the world can enter Christ. The Church and the Church’s passion is the path along which the world must go. The Lord commands the Church to break and distribute itself and make itself the opening that the world go through, so the Church suffers the world. The world is saved by the service and passion of the Church, the body of Christ. the Church suffers because it takes whatever the world in its frenzy metes out. This generation of the people of God are the conduit through which this generation of the world may enter the communion of God. Thus it is the Church which is present, with Christ, in the eucharist.

‘The remembrance of his perfect gift consists not in the mere repetition of the Last Supper...More than just statically receiving the incarnate Logos, ***we enter into the very dynamic of his self-giving***... a change meant to set off a process which transforms reality, a process leading ultimately to the transfiguration of the entire world, to the point where God will be all in all.’ (Homily for Palm Sunday 2007).

‘The Eucharist thus compels all who believe in him to become "bread that is broken" for others...Each of us is truly called, together with Jesus, to be bread broken for the life of the world’ (*Sacramentum Caritatis* 88).

But the theology of the Whole Christ, which would show that the Spirit always glorifies Christ by uniting his people to him, is not here consistently. There are occasional appearances, but no development of this doctrine.

To conclude.

When we only give the account in which the cross comes before the resurrection we set out the eucharist primarily in terms of the division and agony of Christ. That Christ is incarnate is significant for us only because he, the indivisible one, joins us in the indivisible communion of God. The crucifixion is about the agony of the world: it shows us the division, antagonism and self-rending of the world brought into the purposeful passion of Christ, fulfilled and redeemed. The account in which the resurrection enables our passion is fundamental. The resurrection is how we know the passion for what it is, the mode of our ascension. In the form of the passion, the resurrection strips us of what is broken and partial in order to clothe us with what is whole and indivisible. The ascension *enables* our passion; the resurrection, which restores us to the ascension, makes itself mysteriously known in the eucharist where, by faith, the gathering and reconciliation of all things in the communion of gloried Lord is confessed by the Church.

Bread and blood refer to the resurrection as much as it does to death, as much to unity as to division. If we only ever set salvation before sanctification and set the

cross before the resurrection, Christ is divided before he is united. Christ then only ever appears bereft of the Holy Spirit, as this individual, Jesus, without divinity or power. A Christ who is simply and essentially divided is in no position to help us. In this way we betray Christ of course, but we thereby betray our own hopes.

This paper has very impertinently suggested three clarifications around the concepts of work, eschatology and persons. Consistent concentration on the person is missing. The doctrine of the whole Christ would give us this: it is first in one another through all the instalments of the Spirit that we grow into the body of Christ and then in that holy body we will be ready to receive him, and thus we will be many persons in the person of Christ.

Pope Benedict
Jesus of Nazareth (JN)

'The Theology of the Liturgy' in *The Essential Pope Benedict XVI: His Central Writings and Speeches* (ed. John F. Thornton and Susan B. Varenne, San Francisco: Harper Collins 2007) ('Liturgy')

Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*

Homilies http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/index_en.htm