

imperfections and limitations. Metaphor, one might say, is intrinsically incarnational. In fact, as I want to argue later, the Incarnation is, indeed, the making of a metaphor into a literal truth. But this kind of language about God also places him on the plane of time. And it is a consequence of this fact that metaphorical language about God tends naturally towards *narrative* forms. For it is only in stories that it is possible to display God's involvement with time, that is to say, to show him living on the horizontal plane of the world's processes and incarnate in them as a divine presence.

Egner on the Eucharistic Presence

by E. L. Mascall

The interesting and provocative article entitled 'Some Thoughts on the Eucharistic Presence', which appeared in the issues of *New Blackfriars* for August and September under the name of G. Egner, lead one to anticipate with eagerness the forthcoming book on which it is based. In the mean time I am glad to be allowed to make some comments upon it, and if these are largely critical it is simply because there is not much point in endorsing passages (of which there are many) with which one is in entire or almost entire agreement.

'I think that a consecrated host is still bread', Egner writes on p. 354, 'bread in precisely the way that an unconsecrated host is bread.' If what is meant is that all the natural properties of bread remain, I fully agree, and I would emphasize that I have just said 'natural' and not (using words in their modern sense) 'physical' or 'material'. There has been, from time to time, a lamentable tendency in Christian thought to assume that sacramental realities are concerned simply with the spiritual aspects of man's being (his 'soul') and that his material aspects (his 'body') need only natural nutriment. In the Catechism of the Anglican Prayer Book of 1662 there is a most unfortunate statement that, in receiving Holy Communion, the benefits are 'the strengthening and refreshing of our souls by the Body and Blood of Christ, as our bodies are by the Bread and Wine', in other words that, while our souls need supernatural nutriment, natural nutriment is sufficient for our bodies. What has happened here (and I think it could be paralleled by a good deal of Roman Catholic writing as well) is that the duality of body and soul has been substituted for the duality of nature and supernature, with the consequence that, where we should have been told that the whole

man, body and soul together, needs natural food for his natural life and supernatural food for his supernatural life (the life which began with baptism and will culminate in the resurrection and the beatific vision), there has been introduced a violent separation between body and soul and by implication an equally violent separation between nature on the one hand and grace and supernature on the other. The truth that grace does not merely slap a supernatural slab on to the top of a natural structure which is entirely self-sufficient, but supernaturalizes nature and indeed needs nature as the concrete medium without which grace would itself be a sheer abstraction—this truth has only too often been overlooked and virtually denied, with sad consequences for the natural and the supernatural order alike. If Egner means that everything that can be detected by natural means remains in the bread (and we must presumably add, in the wine) after consecration, I agree, and so, I think, would St Thomas; and I should want to add that this includes not only what can be detected by the physicist and the chemist but also those effects in the mental life of man that can be produced by eating and drinking. (Wine, we are told in Scripture, makes glad the heart of man, and gladness is not something that can be detected in the laboratory—nor is ‘heart’ in the biblical sense.) All the natural qualities and potentialities of the bread and wine remain, and this is important. However, what is of supreme importance after consecration is that the elements now belong not only to the natural but to the supernatural order; they nourish man for the beatific vision and orientate him towards it. And, because grace does not destroy nature but perfects and supernaturalizes it, even the natural properties of the elements and the natural life of man which they nourish are now orientated to the beatific vision and subservient to it. I should further wish to add that neither on the natural nor on the supernatural level are beings to be thought of as merely subjects isolated from all other beings and incapsulated in their qualities. They are the subjects not only of qualities but also of relations, and in virtue of these relations they are incorporated into the living and developing structure of the created universe. If we remember this we may see pointers to the solution of the problem which I believe lies at the heart of Protestant objections to the Catholic doctrine of the Eucharistic presence, the problem as to how it is possible for the living ascended glorified personal Christ to be identical with lifeless impersonal objects, bread and wine. This is a problem which deserves far more attention from Catholic theologians than it has in fact received; it was given a thoroughly perverse solution by those post-Reformation Catholic writers who held that in the Eucharistic elements Christ was in fact reduced to the condition of a lifeless material object, no more capable of speech or motion than are a piece of bread and a few drops of wine. But now to return to Egner.

It may seem trite to say that whether you accept transubstantiation

or not depends on what you mean by transubstantiation. But I am not convinced that, as I understand it, Egner's view involves the repudiation of transubstantiation, though he clearly thinks that it does. I have said above that, after consecration, all the natural qualities of bread and wine remain, but what is of supreme importance is that the elements now belong not only to the natural but to the supernatural order, that they nourish and orientate the communicant not only to his earthly end but to the resurrection and the beatific vision. And I would maintain that what is supremely important about an object, in the place which it holds and the finalities to which it is directed and the energies which it exerts in the total order of God's creation, can rightly be called its substance. It is not that any of the natural qualities or relations of either element have been lost or destroyed by the consecration; but they are no longer the supremely important aspect of it, they no longer manifest its ultimate reality, its *substance*. I am as opposed as anyone to the reductionist tendency of some theologians to retain traditional terms and give them new meanings which are inconsistent with those that they have always had; but I do not think that I am doing that here. Development and interpretation are not reduction. And it seems to me that it is only if one interprets substance in a very rigid and narrow sense that Egner's repudiation of transubstantiation is necessary.

Egner is emphatic that he is not concerned to deny the Eucharistic presence, but to try to persuade people that the ways in which we talk about it are misleading and empty and to suggest better ways. He is not, however, aligning himself with the Dutch authors who have recently got into trouble with the Vatican. He maintains that both their views and those of the older writers are saying basically the same things and that both sides are wrong. He does not accept the common objection that Catholic Eucharistic belief has been tied too closely to an outmoded philosophic tradition. 'What Aristotle—or Thomas Aquinas—wrote about change', he says, 'may or may not be acceptable; but what Trent (following Aquinas) wrote about transubstantiation is only a nonsensical abuse of Aristotelian ideas' (p. 354). Somewhat surprisingly, he does not comment on the fact that Trent, while speaking of the conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of Christ's body and asserting that only the appearances of bread remain, does not in fact use the Aristotelian and Thomist term 'accidents'. However, his main points are, first, that the Aristotelian doctrine of change is itself unsatisfactory and dangerous and, secondly, that to adapt the terminology to the Eucharist makes matters far worse since it then ceases to be intelligible. 'For better or worse, Aristotle and Aquinas have chosen to describe change in terms of potentialities that are actuated first in one way and then in another by successive actualities. What possible sense inside that tradition can we make of a change in which,

as Aquinas puts it, there is no potential element?' (p. 357).

I agree with Egner that 'appeals to God's omnipotence are not in order here' (*ibid.*). Even God cannot do what is logically or metaphysically impossible. And I admit that there is something very strained about St Thomas's account of the Eucharistic presence. As long ago as 1931 the Abbé M. T.-L. Penido, in *Le Rôle de l'Analogie en Théologie Dogmatique*, took the case of the Eucharistic presence as one in which the notion of analogy had to be pressed to its most extreme limits and needed a long discussion of more direct and easier cases to be made at all acceptable. ('There's no use trying', said Alice. 'One *can't* believe impossible things.' 'I daresay you haven't had much practice', said the Queen. 'When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.') But I am not sure that to leave the matter there is to be quite fair to Aquinas, or indeed to understand his attitude to the Aristotelian philosophy to provide, if not a perfect, at least a fairly adequate instrument for Christian purposes. It is nevertheless most instructive to see the way in which he handled his Aristotelian material; so far from bringing Christian thought into line with the modern thought of his day, he almost brutally brought the modern thought into line with Christian doctrine. Thus, for example, in the realm of cosmology, while he accepted the Aristotelian theory of the celestial orbs, he entirely changed its metaphysical basis. No longer would the orbs continually perform their uniform gyrations to all eternity because uniform circular motion is theoretically perfect; they would do it just as long as God intended, and when his purposes for the world had been achieved they would come to an end. Again, St Thomas adopted in detail Aristotle's arguments for the existence of a first unmoved mover, but, while Aristotle's first mover was engaged solely in contemplating his own perfection and was unconscious of the very existence of the world which did its best to imitate him, Thomas's first mover was the God of Judaism and Christianity, the creator and sustainer without whose knowledge not even a sparrow falls to the ground. Even more striking is the violence which Thomas does to the Aristotelian doctrine of soul and body as respectively the form and the matter of a human being, in order to maintain the survival of the individual after death. It is not surprising, therefore, if in order to formulate a satisfactory doctrine of the Eucharistic presence, he handled the Aristotelian doctrine of substance and accidents with equal brutality.

Now in any or all of these instances it is open to anyone to argue that, in order to square the Aristotelian doctrine with Catholic orthodoxy, the Angelic Doctor was not improving or adapting the former but making it logically incoherent. And, as Egner points out and as St Thomas would have agreed, even God cannot do what

is logically impossible. It is obviously a delicate matter to decide this question in any one case; and even if Thomas has been successful in one case it does not follow that he was successful in another. I do not know what Egner's judgment would be on the three cases that I have mentioned, those of cosmology, God's relation to the world and the individuality of the human soul, but it is clear than on the Eucharistic presence he thinks that Thomas failed. I am strongly tempted to agree, but with this proviso. If he failed, the reason was that the Aristotelian philosophy was inadequate, and perhaps incurably so. My own impression is that he thought he had succeeded, but only by the skin of his teeth. What he would not have done consciously would have been to modify the Christian faith to make it fit the philosophy. Whether, in the case of the Eucharistic presence, he did this unconsciously or whether he left the two closely juxtaposed but not really fitting together, is a very delicate issue. I incline to the latter alternative; Egner, I think, inclines to the former. I would nevertheless agree that much more needs to be said on the matter than even St Thomas said. In particular attention needs to be given to the point which I mentioned earlier, namely the problem of the identification of a living person with a lifeless though nutritive object; and I think more needs to be said about this than is said in article four of question seventy-five of the Third Part of the *Summa*, where the question is raised whether bread can become the Body of Christ.

When he turns to the newer theories of the Eucharistic presence, Egner is able to do a real service to his readers by his ability to cope with the languages—Flemish and Dutch—in which most of their discussions have been conducted. He rightly observes that, just as the older theories were couched in the terminology of Aristotle, the newer ones, too, have a particular philosophical setting, that of the phenomenology which derives from Edmund Husserl. I should have thought that the existentialism which derives from Martin Heidegger was equally influential, but both phenomenology and existentialism are such many-faced movements that the point is not perhaps of great importance. Egner maintains, however, that 'the relationship between the newer theology and Husserl is not the same as the relationship between the traditional account and Aristotle. The newer opinions do not abuse phenomenology in the way that the concepts of actuality and potentiality are abused in the theory of transubstantiation' (p. 399). Nevertheless, Egner has considerable reservations about the whole programme; so have I, though I am not sure that they are entirely the same as his. I agree with him that 'phenomenology is a very difficult brand of philosophy to put into a few words' (*ibid.*). One is sometimes told by writers with a Teutonic background that phenomenology and existentialism provide just the medium that is needed to make the Christian faith understandable by contemporary man and acceptable to him. Whatever may

be the case in Germany and Holland, this seems to me to be highly implausible as regards English-speaking countries. Furthermore, even in professional philosophical circles in those countries, phenomenology and existentialism are virtually unknown or are treated with thinly disguised contempt. This is, I think, deplorable, for philosophers, of all people, should be open-minded towards systems other than their own. Nevertheless, the fact remains that anyone who tries to commend the Christian faith to the English-speaking philosophical world in the current Continental idiom will receive a very cool reception. Dr van Buren has at least seen this, in his attempts to reformulate the Christian faith on the basis of linguistic empiricism and Wittgenstein, but that is another story. Egner is probably right in saying that 'it is possible to pick out one or two things from [phenomenology] that have influenced recent theological speculation on the eucharistic presence' (*ibid.*), but I should think that most of the recent advances in Eucharistic theology in general have been due much more to the deepening and development of strictly theological thinking, aided by the revival of patristic studies, than to phenomenological and existentialist philosophizing.

As a typical expression of the metaphysical attitude which underlies the 'modern' theories Egner takes this passage:

If Christ really is the keystone, then the one definitive point of view of things is that from which Christ sees and judges them. Things are purely and simply what they are for Christ, because the mind of Christ is the absolute norm of our own mind, just as his own existence is. Perceptible and physico-chemical properties have only a relative meaning (p. 401).

And he reinforces this by a passage from Schillebeeckx:

We confront the world as giving it meaning, certainly, but it is not our handiwork. It is given to us by God as our world. . . . The meanings given by man are governed by a reality which is in the first place God's, and only then man's. . . . The deepest essence of persons and things therefore always escapes us (p. 403).

Egner attacks such statements as these on the grounds that they fall into what he calls the Fallacy of Replacement, that is to say that they substitute for a straightforward statement another statement which may be compatible with it or even implied by it, but is not the same, so that the question of the truth or falsehood of the original statement, which is a perfectly valid question, is ignored or repudiated. 'To say that something only *looks* like bread and at the same time to say that no criterion for being bread is absent, makes no sense. . . . We may keep to the older phrase and say that a consecrated host looks like bread but is not, or follow recent fashion and say that physical properties are relative and that things really are what Christ sees them to be. In either case we commit the Fallacy of Replacement, and our claim is empty' (p. 402).

I find it difficult to follow Egner here, though I have no great

liking for the 'modern' approaches. Since God is the creator (I would rather say 'God' here than 'Christ', without, of course, denying that Christ is God), what things mean to him is what they are; what God says 'goes'. And this holds, not for some semantic or linguistic reason, but in virtue of the creative efficient causality of God. Whether we are to say that the consecrated host is bread is rather like asking whether a five-pound note is paper; of course it is, but that is not the really important thing about it, that is not what its status in the world is now intended to be by the Creator (in the case of the host) or the Treasury (in the case of the note). I agree with Egner in thinking that talk about transignification or transfinalization does not really help us, or rather I would hold that it is helpful only if they are seen as consequences of transubstantiation. What is regrettable (and this is, I think, what the twenty-eighth of the Anglican Articles of Religion was worried about) is that transubstantiation has often been conceived in terms of destruction instead of transformation and elevation. And here I think the Aristotelian metaphysic breaks down in spite of all St Thomas's efforts to subject it to his purposes as a theologian. If, however, transubstantiation is seen not as a destruction of anything that made it right to call the unconsecrated host bread, but as its elevation to a supernatural order of being in which, while everything in virtue of which it was called bread remains, it has received a vastly higher status, so that to go on calling it bread is not so much false as irrelevant and almost comical (more so even than it would be to insist on calling the banknote a piece of paper)—if this is true, I cannot see that one is falling into the Fallacy of Replacement. In Egner's insistence that if it looks and tastes like bread we must go on simply calling it bread, I suspect a subtle concession to a quasi-Humean view that identifies an object, if not simply with its empirical qualities, at least with its natural ones. As I said above, I am not enamoured of the phenomenological movement in modern theology, but I am not convinced by Egner's criticisms of it.

And now to consider Egner's own approach. For its full statement we must wait for his book, since he gives only the slightest sketch of it in his article. I agree entirely with him when he says that we must start from the significance of eating and in particular with our Lord's actions in the Passover context at the Last Supper, with all that it implies about redemption, the New Covenant and the People of God. And I agree with his criticism of the 'newer theology' in so far as it 'let[s] the reality of Christ's gift negate the reality of the earthly means of its giving' (p. 405). I agree also that it was a weakness of the 'older theology' that it failed to see the real, and not just arbitrary, relation between the inner reality of the Eucharist and its material embodiment, though I think the phrase 'camouflaged cannibalism' is a somewhat extreme description of St Thomas's view. With Egner's five 'Principles' for theological development I have very

great sympathy. Religious activity does indeed cover a far wider field than theology or articulated belief. And reflection on belief does indeed demand a constant process of accommodation, in which 'selective amnesia' has a part; how many Roman Catholic theologians today would hold the views about the immolation of Christ in the Mass that were common in the seventeenth century? Again, something more is needed than an inherited sense of fittingness if we are to speak relevantly in a largely non-sacral community, though I wish that Egner showed more awareness of the danger of secularizing the Gospel and not only the medium of its presentation. Understanding and confrontation, yes; but, if John 6 has any roots in history, it was precisely our Lord's declaration that his blood was to be drunk that shocked his hearers. Looseness of fit, yes again; and I warmly appreciate Egner's sympathy for the ordinary Christian and his discrimination between the intention of a dogmatic statement and the possibly questionable terms in which it is made. And finally, it is good, at a time when there is so much superficial and ham-fisted religious writing about, to see how conscious he is of the complexity and delicacy of the theologian's task. For the full exposition of the position which he wishes to defend against both the 'older' and the 'newer' approaches we must await the appearance of his book. And we shall await it very eagerly.

Transubstantiation: A reply to G. Egner

by Herbert McCabe, O.P.

In the first of his excellent articles on the Eucharistic presence (our August issue) G. Egner notes that some people object to the notion of transubstantiation because it involves outmoded philosophical concepts such as substance and accident; his own objection, however, is quite different. He proposes to show that even if we start from this Aristotelian tradition, the notion makes no sense. I hope to show that he is mistaken about this. He also argues that 'a consecrated host is still bread, bread in precisely the way an unconsecrated host is bread'. I shall try to show why I think this also to be untrue. I think it would be useful to clear up these matters in order that his own approach which he sketches in the second article may receive the attention and appreciation it deserves.

Does transubstantiation make sense?

I cannot state Egner's argument more lucidly than he does himself