

# Casel and Calvin on the Eucharist<sup>1</sup>

BERNARD J. O'KEEFE

IN THESE DAYS of ecumenical dialogue, Catholic and Protestant theologians are examining each other's thought and traditions with more sympathy and sincere effort to understand than ever before in the whole history of divided Christendom. This has led to a renewed effort on the part of Catholic theologians to plumb the depths of the evil conditions that were the matrix of the Reformation, to understand the causes that led up to the rupture, and to attempt a new evaluation of the writings of the Reformation period—all of this with an eye towards discovering if perhaps the Protestant theologians of the Reform might not be closer to a true Catholic position than had hitherto been imagined possible.

Examining in this spirit the theology of John Calvin, Father James Quinn, s.j. makes this remark: "In spite of profound differences in other directions, there is a surprising affinity between Calvin's central 'insight' and the modern Catholic theological movement associated with the late Dom Odo Casel."<sup>2</sup> He goes on to say that "it might even be that some rapprochement between Calvinism and Catholic doctrine might begin with the theology of the 'Mystery.'"<sup>3</sup>

In this paper I wish to examine whether these observations are justified. The suggested comparison is striking at first! Dom Odo Casel centred his theological attention on the sacraments. His central insights are therefore limited to the realm of sacramental theology. John Calvin, on the other hand, while not so much concerned with the sacraments, has a great deal to say about them. The object of this paper is to compare the sacramental theology of John Calvin with the acceptable Catholic position of Dom Odo Casel.

Calvin's writings are so extensive that it is necessary to choose several of his works and limit ourselves to these. The works chosen are his *Short Treatise on the Lord's Supper*, written in 1541, his 1559 edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, and his *Clear Explanation (Dilucida Explicatio)* written in 1561 to defend his doctrine of the Lord's Supper against the attacks of Telemannus Heshusius Vesalius. It is generally accepted that these three works give a good picture of his sacramental doctrine.

1. An address to the Canadian Theological Society at Kingston, Ont., May, 1964.

2. James Quinn, s.j., "Calvinism," *A Catholic Dictionary of Theology*, Vol. I (London, 1962), p. 316.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 316.

## DOM ODO CASEL'S THEOLOGY OF THE MYSTERY

Dom Odo Casel died in 1948. He is known, at least among theologians of the modern era, as the initiator and chief proponent of a new school of theology, the theology of the mysteries.

We shall examine four key points in order to isolate what is most characteristic of his sacramental thinking: first, the content of the mystery; second, the way this content is made present in the sacraments; third, the reasons and necessity for this presence; and finally, the mode of existence of the mysteries of cult.

*The Content of the Mystery*

Dom Casel constantly refers to the presence of the Mystery in the cult of the Church. This mystery exists in three different ways. First, and most of all, the mystery is God himself as he exists in himself and in the things that he has made:

The mystery means three things and one. First of all it is God considered in Himself, as the infinitely distant, holy, unapproachable one, to whom no man may draw near and live; . . . And this all-holy one reveals his mystery, comes down to his creatures and reveals himself to them; yet once again, *in mysterio*, that is to say, in a revelation by grace, to those whom he has chosen, the humble, the pure of heart, not to the proud and the self-important. . . .<sup>4</sup>

Secondly, Christ is the mystery in person, because he shows the invisible godhead in the flesh. "Certainly the Divine One considered in Himself is sometimes called mystery; but the choice of this term always implies at least an allusion to the fact that this Divine one cannot be communicated except by a mysterious revelation."<sup>5</sup> Christ, therefore, is the content of the mystery as it has been revealed to us:

God's coming in the flesh fulfilled and more than fulfilled all longing and all promise; this event gave the word *mysterium* a new and deepened meaning. For St. Paul *mysterion* is the marvellous revelation of God in Christ. . . . In the Son of God made man and crucified we look upon the mystery of God which was hidden before the ages but through Christ is made known and revealed to the ecclesia, the body of those whom he has called.<sup>6</sup>

It is not just the Person of Christ who is the content of the mystery on this second level, it is Christ performing the actions by which he saved mankind. "The deeds of his lowliness, above all his sacrificial death on the cross, are mysteries because God shows himself through them in a fashion which surpasses any human measurement. Above all else, his resurrection and exaltation are mysteries because God's glory is shown through them in the human person of Jesus. . . ."<sup>7</sup>

4. Odo Casel, *The Mystery of Christian Worship* (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1962), p. 5.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

6. Odo Casel, "Das Mysteriengedächtnis der messliturgie im Lichte der Tradition," *Jahrbuch für Liturgiewissenschaft*, VI (1926), 142.

7. Casel, *The Mystery of Christian Worship*, p. 6.

It is this salvific activity of Christ that the apostles proclaimed to the Church, and that the Church passes on to all generations by sacred actions, her sacraments. Just as Christ's saving design is not merely teaching, but first and foremost his saving deed, so too the Church leads mankind to salvation not merely by word only, but by sacred actions. Through faith and the mysteries Christ lives in the Church:

Thus the mysterium acquires a third sense, which, however, is most intimately connected with the first two; since Christ is no longer visible among us, in St. Leo the Great's words, "What was visible in the Lord has passed over into the mysteries" (*Sermo* 74, 2, P.L. 54, 398A). We meet his person, his saving deeds, the workings of his grace in the mysteries of his worship.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, when Casel speaks of the mystery of cult, he refers to the presence of Christ and of his saving activity in the cultic actions of the Church: "The difference between the mystery of cult and the mystery of Christ consists in this, that the first is the representation by a cultic act of the mystery of Christ, the latter's sacramental mode of being. The difference concerns only the mode of being, not the essence itself."<sup>9</sup>

It is important to underline the fact that for Dom Casel the content of the cultic actions of the Church, that is the sacraments, is not just the effect or power of Christ's saving deeds, it is those very deeds themselves. In the Eucharist, as Filthaut says, Christ's death and resurrection are present:

What does the mystery of cult contain? Dom Casel replies with insistence: it is not only the grace conferred, it is the redeeming work itself; it is not only the fruit of grace, grace abstract and detached, like an effect of the saving act, it is the saving act itself from which this grace emanates. It is not only the product, the result, the efficacy, it is the reality itself which gives birth to this effect.<sup>10</sup>

The saving acts of Christ are present in the sacraments in a real and objective manner, not just present in their effects, and regardless of the recipient's subjective knowledge and attitude:

The saving acts, historically past, receive in the mysteries of cult an objective and real re-presentation. In effect it is not a simple intentional re-actualization which is produced in the cultic celebration; the saving acts are truly set forth anew in the present. The saving acts—the incarnation, death, resurrection, to cite only the most important—are the content and the proper object of the sacraments; they constitute the internal reality of the mysteries of cult.<sup>11</sup>

This does not mean that the saving acts of Christ are present in the sacraments in the historical way they existed when Christ enacted them in time. It is not a question of past historical actions being made present with all their historical trappings. It is a question not of historical fact but of the reality that lies behind the historical fact. The act is present in a different

8. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

10. Theodore Filthaut, *La Théologie des Mystères* (Tournai, 1954), p. 17. Cf. Odo Casel, "Neue Zeugnisse für das Kultmysterium," *Jahrbuch*, XIII (1935), 123.

11. Filthaut, *La Théologie des Mystères*, p. 18.

way, in a pneumatic or spiritual way. It is the essence of the saving act that is present, not its historical concomitants. "The mystery of cult, in so far as it is an image (. . .), has the power to distil out of the historic event the essential of the saving act, which is precisely its eternal signification of salvation, and to present it and set it forth in the symbol."<sup>12</sup> It is the act of Christ as Saviour, the substance of the saving act itself that is rendered present in the sacraments. And what is this substance? It is nothing less than the *transitus*, the passage from death to life, through the cross to the resurrection, which was once for all accomplished in Christ.

For Casel, the Lord is not separated from his mysteries but is present and active within them. But this presence of the Risen Lord is not properly speaking the reality made present in the sacraments, but rather the preliminary condition making possible the presence of what is essential, the saving acts of Christ: "The pneumatic presence of Christ is in the strictest possible relation to his saving historical act, it makes the act spiritually present and causes its fruit of grace to pass into the Church."<sup>13</sup>

It is necessary for the saving act itself to be present, and not just the Lord who performed it, because "it is not the Lord's state of death, but his sacrificial act on the Cross, his death, which is the final source of supernatural life. . . ."<sup>14</sup>

Finally, it is not any saving act in particular that is present in the sacraments, but the work of salvation in all its breadth and length. Birth and life, Death and Resurrection, are acts and events different from one another, but they are only one Mystery. It is the substance of this Mystery in its totality that is rendered present sacramentally in the cultic acts of the Church. Speaking of this fact in regard to the Mass, Casel says: "If the Mass is the real memorial of the sacrifice offered by Christ for the redemption of men, it is essentially logical that it be a memorial of all the phases of the saving work of the Lord; but all is there under the aspect of sacrifice and that is why the Passion is at the centre, as the active offering of sacrifice."<sup>15</sup>

### *How the Saving Acts of Christ are Rendered Present*

But how is the content of the mysteries rendered present? This is the second area of concern for the proponents of the theology of the mysteries. Dom Casel answers that the confecting of a sacrament has the essential properties of being objective, immediate, and visible. A sacrament is a visible sign, and this sign is objective, that is, it does not only exist in the subject who receives the sacrament, but rather exists apart from him. This sign is also immediate and visible. The sensible sacramental sign renders the content of the cultic mystery present as soon as the sign is set forth. Because the exterior sign of the sacrament is visible, the communication of

12. Odo Casel, "Glaube, Gnosis and Mysterium," *Jahrbuch*, XV (1941), 251.

13. Odo Casel, "Mysteriengegenwart," *Jahrbuch*, VIII (1928), 163.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

15. Odo Casel, "Das Mysteriengedachtnis . . .," *Jahrbuch*, VI (1926), 203.

the saving act is also visible. Man, in the light of faith, perceives, beyond the rite, the reality of the saving work.

There is an essential, necessary relationship between the sacramental process and the Incarnation of the Son of God. In the intimate life of God, the Son is the immediate, consubstantial image of the Father. The Word become flesh, Jesus Christ, is the image of the invisible God. A man, enlightened by faith, contemplates in the Man Jesus the divine majesty. Because of the unity of the Father and the Son, the man of faith sees immediately the Father also. Basing himself on this fact of faith, Dom Casel draws this conclusion with regard to the sacraments: "What can be said of Christ as an image of the Father can be said in an analogous way of the sacraments."<sup>16</sup> The sacraments are images of Christ, full of reality, that is to say, full of the reality of his being and of his activity. "Since, finally the presence of the Logos in human form was an objective presence, it is necessary to admit that the sacraments also contain the reality of salvation in an objective way. The immediate and objective presence of Christ requires and finds its prolongation in the mysteries."<sup>17</sup>

For Dom Casel, the word *image* has a much fuller and deeper meaning than the one given it by the modern world:

In this connection, Dom Casel elaborates on the patristic use of the word *eikon*, the image, a term borrowed from Platonism and used in a sense much fuller and more realistic than that to which we may be accustomed. An *eikon* is not an external image, foreign to its model, made from without and therefore life in itself. An *eikon* is the living image of the model, through which the model is present, through which it imposes itself on the material which is to receive it.<sup>18</sup>

Because the sacraments contain the content of the mystery, the mystery itself becomes present as soon as the sacraments come into existence.

#### *Why Christ and His Saving Work must be Present in the Sacraments*

But the further question must be asked: Why is it so important that the glorified Lord and his saving acts be really present in the mysteries of cult? The answer lies in what is axiomatic for the partisans of the theology of mysteries that a man only becomes a Christian by a real participation in the saving activity of Christ. Neither the presence of the person of the Saviour who has accomplished the work of salvation, nor the presence of the divine life that was active in him, nor the presence of the body and blood of the Lord which were offered in the most important act of salvation, is enough. The redeeming work itself must be present *hic et nunc*:

The saving acts of Christ are so necessary to the Christian that he cannot be a true Christian unless he lives them after and with Christ. It is not the teaching of Christ that makes the Christian, it is not the simple application

16. Odo Casel, "Glaube," *Jahrbuch*, VIII (1928), 247.

17. Filthaut, *La Théologie des Mystères*, p. 41.

18. Louis Bouyer, *Liturgical Piety* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 1955), p. 87.

of his grace; it is the total identification with the person of Christ obtained in reliving his life. The community of love, of life, of being is acquired through union in suffering and in activity.<sup>19</sup>

The Christian joins with Christ in living the saving acts of Christ by participating in the cultic actions of the Church, by offering the Mass and receiving the other sacraments.

### *The Sacramental Mode of Existence*

No other thesis of the theology of mysteries has given rise to so much misunderstanding and so many false interpretations as the thesis concerning the way in which the substance of the saving acts of Christ, historically actions of the past, exists in the present in the sacraments. For the content of the mystery, that is the saving acts of Christ, does not remain in the domain of the past but itself becomes present in the mystery of cult. The mystery of cult is nothing but the mystery of Christ and his work of salvation existing in a sacramental way. Just as the mystery of Christ's salvific work is a reality *sui generis*, because it is supernatural as well as a work accomplished in time, in the same way, the sacramental mode of existence is totally different from every natural way of existing.

The sacramental mode of existence is on another level than that of natural being or historical existence. Natural and sacramental modes of existence are subject to different laws. To understand this difference is to do away with most of the problems that arise from trying to understand how a past historical act can be rendered present once again. It becomes present under a mode of existence whose laws of being are different from the laws governing historical and natural existence.

The sacramental mode of existence has a supernatural character to it, and therefore its properties and existence cannot be understood by reason alone, but only by the mind illumined by faith. It belongs to faith and not to unaided reason to judge of the reality of this supernatural being.

Sacramental reality is primarily a veiled reality, salvation is hidden under the veil of material elements and human words; the exterior, sensible aspect of the sacrament is not to conceal but to show forth the interior reality. Sacramental being consists in the being of a sign.

The redemptive work of Christ is made present once again in the sacraments, but this does not mean that Christ does over again in the sacraments what he did once and for all during his life on earth. It is the same numerical act by which Christ saved mankind that is rendered present in the sacraments. "It is always one and the same reality; only the mode of the presence and the way it is manifest differs."<sup>20</sup>

The mystery as a saving act of God unfolds in history, but it is none the less a reality situated above history. Because it is not a natural being but a supernatural being, it is not restricted to the exigencies of time and space

19. Odo Casel, "Mysteriengegenwart," *Jahrbuch*, VIII (1928), 175.

20. Filthaut, *La Théologie des Mystères*, p. 63.

that pertain to all natural beings and natural modes of existence. Because it is above time the mystery can constantly appear anew in the mysterious action. The mystery transcends time, it is eternal.

The sacramental mode of being participates in the supratemporal character. It is not a temporal presence, and therefore it is not in time. It is without a historical *before* and *after*. In the celebration of the mysteries, the exterior rites are performed in time, and therefore they exist in time, but the content of these cultic acts does not exist in time.

What can be said of the content of the cultic acts concerning its transcendence of time can also be said of its transcendence of space. The substance of the saving acts does not exist in place, is not localized, even though the exterior rites do exist *in loco*.

Dom Casel does not attempt to explain metaphysically how this can be, contenting himself with the fact that this is the way in which the early Church understood the mysteries. For him, this is not a question of metaphysics but of a correct understanding of what a sacrament is, and of the way in which it differs from any other type of sign. The sacraments contain the mystery, and since their content is supernatural they can only be understood and recognized for what they are by faith.

In sum, for Dom Casel the sacraments are the point of contact for the saving work of Christ and the Christian who must participate in this saving work, live these saving acts with Christ, if he is himself to be saved. The substance of the saving work of Christ is really objectively present in the sacraments, but *in mysterio*, in a way that is mysterious to us. This is the central insight of Dom Casel.

#### THE SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY OF JOHN CALVIN

For John Calvin, the sacraments do not play the central role in the Christian life, although they are certainly an integral part of it. The sacraments are appendages to the Word of God, and their function is to sign and seal the gift that is given through the Sacred Word. "Now, from the definition that I have set forth we understand that a sacrament is never without a preceding promise but is joined to it as a sort of appendix, with the purpose of confirming and sealing the promise itself, and of making it more evident to us and in a sense ratifying it."<sup>21</sup>

The Word of God through which the promise is given holds first place in the theology of Calvin. Nevertheless, it will not be necessary to delve into Calvin's theology of the Word of God to discover the content of the sacraments, because the sacraments present the same reality to the believer as does the Word of God, but in a different way: "Therefore, let it be regarded as a settled principle that the sacraments have the same office as the Word of God: to offer and set forth Christ to us, and in him the treasures of heavenly grace."<sup>22</sup>

21. John Calvin, *Institutio Christianae Religionis* (Geneva, 1559), IV. 14. 3.

22. *Ibid.*, IV. xiv. 17.

Though the sacraments are appendages to the Word of God, and therefore subordinate to it, they are nevertheless not unimportant, for it is through the sacraments that the believer is *assured* of a true participation in the salvation wrought by Christ: "And indeed, I do not see how anyone can trust that he has redemption and righteousness in the cross of Christ, and life in his death, unless he relies chiefly on a true participation in Christ himself."<sup>23</sup> This true participation in Christ is given through the sacraments, as will be seen shortly.

### *The Sacraments in General*

For John Calvin there are only two sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. We shall first set forth Calvin's teaching about the sacraments in general, and then concentrate on his doctrine concerning the Lord's Supper.

Calvin defines a sacrament in the following way: "It seems to me that a simple and proper definition would be to say that it is an outward sign by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promises of his good will towards us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith; and we in turn attest our piety toward him in the presence of the Lord and of his angels and before men."<sup>24</sup>

A sacrament then is an outward sign of a spiritual gift. The outward sign does not itself contain the gift, but it is a visible indication of the spiritual gift that is offered. The reason that the outward sign does indicate the giving of this spiritual reality is that God has attached a promise to this sign. This point is very important for Calvin, because a sign with no promise attached to it is no sacrament at all. The importance of this will be seen when Calvin's doctrine of the Lord's Supper is set forth. The content of the Sacrament is determined by the nature of the promise that it signs and seals.

Since the sacraments are visible seals of the promises conveyed by the Word of God they serve to increase and sustain the Christian's faith in those promises. It is no inherent weakness in God's Word that calls for the support and sustaining power of the sacraments, but rather the weakness of our faith demands it. "Yet properly speaking, it (i.e. a sacrament) is not so much needed to confirm his Sacred Word as to establish our faith in it."<sup>25</sup> Christ in his mercy recognizes man's reliance on earthly elements in coming to a knowledge that is firm and secure and so he takes earthly elements and uses them to signify the spiritual gifts that he bestows. He does this because man is a being of composite nature, corporeal and spiritual. Calvin agrees with Chrysostom that if man were incorporeal Christ would give us his spiritual gifts "naked and incorporeal."

As far as man is concerned then, the promises and the sacraments are necessary to one another, and cannot be separated. Calvin puts it this way: And what is there, I beg, to offend any man greatly if we teach that the promise is sealed by the sacraments, when it is clear from the promises themselves that

23. *Ibid.*, IV. xvii. 11.

24. *Ibid.*, IV. xiv. 1; cf. IV. xiv. 3.

25. *Ibid.*, IV. xiv. 3.



each confirms the other? For the clearer anything is, the fitter it is to support faith. But the sacraments bring the clearest promises; and they have this characteristic over and above the word because they represent them for us as painted in a picture from life.<sup>26</sup>

For Calvin, then, the sacraments are symbols of the spiritual gift that is being offered through them, but they do not themselves contain the spiritual reality. Since this is so, Calvin rejects absolutely a notion regarded by him as Roman, that the sacraments produce their effect automatically by being received by someone who places no obstacle blocking their effectiveness. "It is good that our readers be briefly apprized of this thing also: whatever the Sophists have dreamed up concerning the *opus operatum* is not only false but contradicts the nature of the sacraments, which God so instituted that believers poor and deprived of all goods should bring nothing to it but begging."<sup>27</sup>

What makes the sacraments spiritually potent and effective is the fact that the Holy Spirit comes to them and opens man's soul for the sacraments to enter in and sanctify him. If this activity of the Holy Spirit is lacking, then the outward signs accomplish nothing.<sup>28</sup> The sacraments are instruments of the Holy Spirit, by whose power they effectively convey to the recipient the spiritual gifts of God indicated by the promises attached to them. The Holy Spirit gives the recipient the power he needs (i.e. faith) to perceive that this is actually what is happening when a sacrament is received.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, since the sacraments are instruments of the Holy Spirit, powerless in themselves to sanctify, a guarantee is needed to assure the recipient that the Holy Spirit is really working in the sacramental action so that more than a vain outward sign is present. This guarantee Calvin finds in the truthfulness of God himself, the truthfulness that makes him faithful to his promises.<sup>30</sup>

Calvin's general attitude towards the sacraments is this: they are outward signs to which God has so closely and irrevocably attached a promise that as the outward sign is given the promise is fulfilled in him who receives the sign in faith. The outward sign does not "contain" the spiritual gift but is the instrument by which the Holy Spirit conveys the gift to the believer. The activity of the Holy Spirit through and in the sacraments is guaranteed not by the fact that the sacraments are confectioned, but by the fact that God is true and faithful to his promises. These general principles having been laid down, Calvin's use of them in his doctrine of the Lord's Supper may now be studied.

### *Calvin's Teaching Concerning the Lord's Supper*

During the course of his lifetime Calvin engaged in many controversies over his doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Many of these controversies may

26. *Ibid.*, IV. xiv. 5.

27. *Ibid.*, IV. xiv. 26.

28. *Ibid.*, IV. xiv. 9.

29. *Ibid.*, IV. xiv. 10.

30. *Ibid.*, IV. xiv. 17.

well have resulted in large part from the fact that his approach to the sacraments was different from that of his Lutheran and Roman opponents. Calvin did not place his argument for the real presence of Christ in the sacrament in the words of institution: "This is my body" (Matt. 26:26). Calvin rather bases his conviction that Christ is truly offered to the recipient in the sacrament on the fact that the promise relating to the sacrament demands that the body of Christ be given for the spiritual nourishment of the faithful. This promise is found in the sixth chapter of St. John's gospel:

It is not, therefore, the chief function of the Sacrament simply and without higher consideration to extend to us the body of Christ. Rather it is to seal and confirm that promise by which he testifies that his flesh is food indeed and his blood is drink, which feeds unto eternal life. By this he declares himself to be the bread of life, of which he who eats will live forever. And to do this the Sacrament sends us to the cross of Christ, where that promise was indeed performed and in all respects fulfilled.<sup>31</sup>

The promise that the sacrament signs and seals therefore is not merely that Christ will be present in it, but rather that Christ will himself be the food of our souls, the nourishment our spiritual life demands: "To this end, therefore, he has, through the hand of his only-begotten Son given to his church another sacrament, that is, a spiritual banquet, wherein Christ attests himself to be the lifegiving bread, upon which our souls feed unto true and blessed immortality."<sup>32</sup> It is because Christ has promised to be the bread of our soul's life that Calvin teaches that he is offered to us as such in the sacrament.

Christ fulfilled the promise to be the food of our souls in his own life by his suffering, death, and resurrection. The present distribution of the body and blood of the Lord would not greatly benefit us unless they had once for all been given for our redemption and salvation. It is therefore the crucified and risen Lord who is promised to us as the food of our souls.<sup>33</sup>

### *The Content of the Lord's Supper*

It has already been shown that for Calvin the "content" of a sacrament is governed by the promise it signs and seals. Another strong emphasis in Calvin's sacramental doctrine is that the sign itself points to the content of the sacrament. The outward sign of the Lord's Supper is bread and wine, and these physical signs lead us "by a sort of analogy to spiritual things." The fact that bread is the symbol should lead us to see that just as bread nourishes, sustains, and keeps the life of our body, so the content of the spiritual gift being offered will have the same effect on our spiritual life. And just as wine refreshes, nourishes, strengthens, and gladdens the body, so the spiritual gift offered and symbolized by the wine will have the same effect on our soul. What then precisely is this spiritual gift that is being offered?

31. *Ibid.*, IV. xvii. 4.

32. *Ibid.*, IV. xvii. 1.

33. *Ibid.*, IV. xvii. 4.

First of all, Christ himself is offered in the Lord's Supper: "Now Christ is the only food of our soul, and therefore our heavenly Father invites us to Christ, that refreshed by partaking of him, we may repeatedly gather strength until we shall have reached heavenly immortality."<sup>34</sup> The person of Christ is offered in the sacrament, and if received in faith, the result is that by true partaking of him, his life passes into us and is made ours—just as bread when taken as food imparts vigour to the body. If Christ himself were not the content of the supper, the sacrament would be not only useless, but a blasphemy.

But it is the glorified Lord who is present in the sacrament, not Christ as he was here on earth. The reason Calvin rejects a local presence of Christ in the elements is that this is incompatible with the present heavenly state of Christ: "I reject only absurd things which appear either too unworthy of Christ's heavenly majesty, or incompatible with the reality of his human nature . . . ; for it [i.e. God's Word] also teaches that Christ was so received into the glory of the heavenly kingdom as to be lifted above all worldly estate. . . ."<sup>35</sup>

In addition to the Person of the Glorified Lord, there is also offered in the supper his flesh and blood, the flesh and blood that were offered on Calvary for our salvation. This is necessary because it was through his humanity that Christ became the food of our souls. But here again it is not Christ's flesh and blood as it existed on earth that is offered in the supper, but rather the crucified and glorified flesh and blood of Christ.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, in the Supper, Christ offers a share in his own life through the medium of his glorified flesh and blood. Not only Christ in his divinity, but also Christ in his humanity is the content of the supper. For rightly speaking: "The one cannot be without the other. For when he gives himself to us, it is in order that we may possess him entirely."<sup>37</sup>

In his controversy with Heshusius, however, Calvin points out that it is the *substance* of Christ's flesh and blood in which we participate: "When I say that the flesh and blood of Christ are *substantially* offered and exhibited to us in the supper I at the same time explain the mode, namely that the flesh of Christ becomes vivifying to us. . . ."<sup>38</sup> Calvin goes on to explain that this means that Christ transfuses his own proper life into us from the substance of his flesh. Calvin does not explain what the difference is between the "body of Christ" and the "substance of the body of Christ." But there can be no doubt that he is highlighting his teaching that physical eating of the body is not involved in the real but spiritual partaking of Christ's flesh: "Does he who denies that the body of Christ is eaten by the mouth take away the substance of his body from the sacred Supper? I frankly engage at close quarters with the man who denies that we are partakers of the substance of the flesh of Christ, unless we eat it with our

34. *Ibid.*, IV. xvii. 1.

35. *Ibid.*, IV. xvii. 32.

36. *Ibid.*, IV. xvii. 9.

37. John Calvin, *Opera Selecta*, I (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1926), p. 508.

38. John Calvin, *Dilucidio Explicatio . . . , Corpus Reformatorum*, XXXVII, 470.

mouths.”<sup>39</sup> To say that the substance of Christ’s body is offered in the supper seems for Calvin to be equivalent to saying that the life-giving virtue from Christ’s flesh is poured into the recipient by the Spirit. This at least is the opinion of R. S. Wallace: “Calvin’s purpose in using such language is to express the fact that the ‘substance’ of the flesh is not to be thought of as ‘material’ substance. In his use of these additional terms he is seeking to avoid the impression that there is ‘anything earthly or material’ in the body and blood of Christ as given in the Sacrament.”<sup>40</sup>

The content of the Lord’s Supper therefore is, for Calvin, the Person of the Risen Christ together with the substance of his Flesh and Blood, now glorified. “I call Christ with his death and resurrection the matter or substance” of the sacrament. It now remains to be seen how this content is made present to the recipient.

#### *How the Content is Rendered Present*

When Calvin attempts to explain how the Person of Christ with his glorified and life-giving flesh and blood is communicated to the recipient of the sacrament he is forced to confess that he is face to face with a mystery that defies explanation.<sup>41</sup> This being the case, Calvin rather sets out to show what limitations must be set on the presence of Christ, to explain how Christ is not present, rather than to attempt to demonstrate how he is present. First of all, Christ is not locally present, the bread does not circumscribe him in any way, for this would detract from his heavenly glory. It would also make it necessary for Christ’s body to be localized in many different places at once, and this conflicts with the fact that Christ has a truly human nature. Christ’s presence in the sacrament is subject to the limitations of his present heavenly existence, and it cannot be explained in any way that would violate these limitations.<sup>42</sup> Within these bounds, Calvin is willing to allow any explanation that indicates how Christ is truly received, not just by the mind or imagination, but by a true and real participation.

If Christ had not departed from the world he would not have substituted the Holy Spirit to supply for his absence, for “surely the coming of the Holy Spirit and the ascent of Christ are antithetical; consequently, Christ cannot dwell with us according to the flesh in the same way that he sends his Spirit.” Though Christ is absent with respect to place, this does not, for Calvin, mean that he is totally absent. For there are two kinds of absence, physical absence and spiritual absence. Though Christ is absent physically, he is nevertheless spiritually, not just mentally, present: “. . . as if I had not long ago expressly made my readers aware of two kinds of absence: they should know that the body of Christ is indeed absent in respect to place, but that we enjoy a spiritual participation in it, every obstacle on

39. *Ibid.*

40. R. S. Wallace, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1953), p. 203.

41. Calvin, *Institutio*, IV. xvii. 7.

42. *Ibid.*, IV. xvii. 19; cf. IV xvii. 12.

the score of distance being surmounted by his divine virtue."<sup>43</sup> For Calvin, this distance of place is no objection to a real participation in the body and blood of Christ, for the distance is overcome by the secret working of the Spirit.

In addition to the limitations of Christ's glorified humanity, Calvin sees a further reason for the local absence of Christ. His body must in no way be confused or intermingled with the material elements of the sacrament: the bread must remain bread, the wine must remain wine. This is required by the very nature of a sacrament. For the sign of the sacrament must have some correspondence with the spiritual gift that it symbolizes and conveys. In the Supper then "there must be material bread, to testify to us that the body of Christ is our food. For otherwise, what meaning could there be in whiteness symbolizing it for us? We see then, clearly, how the whole representation, which our Lord wished to give in condescension to our infirmity, is lost, unless the true bread remain."<sup>44</sup>

This argument of Calvin harks back to his sacramental starting point, namely, that the content of the sacrament is first of all determined by the content of the promise attached to it. In the supper, the promise is that Christ's body is food for our souls, and this is what the external sign must symbolize. The bread is called the body of Christ, because it is the symbol by which the Lord offers the true eating of his body, just as the Apostle teaches (I Cor. 10:4) that the rock from which spiritual drink sprang forth for the Israelites was Christ because "it was a visible sign under which that spiritual drink truly was."

Having reviewed the ways in which Christ is not present in the sacrament, and the reasoning behind this position, we must now see how Calvin envisages the presence of Christ to the believer. He goes so far as to say that the content of the invisible gift is joined to the visible signs in such a way that when the elements are received by one who believes, the spiritual gift is also received: "We have then to confess that if the representation which God grants in the Supper is veracious, the internal substance of the sacrament is joined with the visible signs; and as the bread is distributed by hand, so the body of Christ is communicated to us, so that we are made partakers of it."<sup>45</sup> This joining of the spiritual gift to the physical elements can hardly be imagined as anything more than an intimate but extrinsic link due to God's promise, in view of the fact that Calvin has already denied the localizing of Christ in the elements. Rather the receiving of the bread to which the promise of Christ is attached is a sure sign that the body of Christ is also being received with it. The power of the Holy Spirit makes the signs not vain and empty but rather productive of the gift that is promised through them. To do this He overcomes the distance that separates us from Christ.<sup>46</sup>

43. Calvin, C.R. XXXVII, 472.

44. Calvin, *Opera Selecta*, I, p. 520.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 509.

46. Calvin, *Institutio*, IV. xvii. 10.

Having attempted this much by way of explanation Calvin confesses that how it actually happens is beyond his ken. "Now if anyone should ask me how this takes place, I shall not be ashamed to confess that it is a secret too lofty for either my mind to comprehend or my words to declare. And to speak more plainly, I rather experience than understand it."<sup>47</sup> The manner of Christ's presence is not only mysterious, beyond our ability to understand, it is also supernatural. Speaking of the miracle involved Calvin says: "For nothing is more beyond the natural than that souls should borrow spiritual and heavenly life from a flesh that had its origins from earth, and underwent death." And to highlight the supernaturalness of the event he adds: "There is nothing more incredible than that things severed and removed from one another by the whole space between heaven and earth should not only be connected across such a great distance but also be united. . . ."<sup>48</sup>

In describing what happens Calvin says in one place that Christ descends to man.<sup>49</sup> But when he goes on to discuss the manner of this in more detail, he inclines rather to the view that Christ does not so much descend to us as we rather ascend to him by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the symbols.<sup>50</sup> This would seem to be the most fitting description of Calvin's position, for he refers to the same idea in his controversy with Heshusius, saying that for believers the supper is a "heavenly action, or a kind of vehicle by which they transcend the world."

### *The Purpose and Effect of the Supper*

As this study is already extending itself unduly, we shall limit ourselves to an enumeration of Calvin's doctrines concerning the purpose and effects of the Lord's Supper. First, it quickens the recipient spiritually and gives him what he needs for eternal life. It does this by bringing the recipient into personal union with Christ himself. This personal union with Christ assures the recipient that he stands righteous before God, in spite of his sinfulness, because Christ's sacrifice has been applied to him. This assurance removes the recipient's doubt about his forgiveness and acceptability to God and, rousing him from his negligence and indolence, causes him to render thanks to God for the wonderful blessings He bestows. The Lord's Supper is therefore a vehement incitement to holy living. Finally, the Lord's Supper is creative of unity among Christians, for the Lord so communicates his body to us that there he is made completely one with us and we with him. He makes us one in himself.

## CASEL AND CALVIN COMPARED

### *Specific Comparisons*

In this final section we wish to see how close the two theologians are to one another in their sacramental thinking.

47. *Ibid.*, IV. xvii. 32.

48. *Ibid.*, IV. xvii. 24.

49. *Ibid.*, IV. xvii. 24.

50. *Ibid.*, IV. xvii. 31.

There are really only two points of possible comparison between the sacramental theologies of Casel and Calvin, namely, the content of the sacraments and their mode of existence. It was shown in the first part of this paper that for Casel the content of the sacraments is twofold. First of all and underlying everything else is the Person of Jesus Christ. Yet it is not the Person of Christ as he existed here on earth, but rather the crucified and glorified Lord, the *Kyrios pneumatikos*. In this, Calvin is in perfect agreement with Casel; for him, too, it is the crucified and risen Lord who is present in the Lord's Supper. For both theologians the presence of the glorified Lord means also the presence of his divinity and his humanity.

Casel then goes a step farther than Calvin in teaching that in addition to the presence of the glorified Lord, and following upon his presence, there is also to be found in the sacraments the substance of the saving acts by which Christ redeemed the world. Casel sees this as the heart-centre of the sacramental mystery. Calvin nowhere speaks of the presence of the saving acts themselves in the Lord's Supper, but rather teaches that in communing with the Saviour the recipient of the sacraments has the effects of Christ's saving acts applied to himself. So for Calvin it is the power of Christ's saving acts that is rendered present in the Lord's Supper. Their effects are made present to the recipient. This is what Calvin means by teaching that the substance of Christ's flesh is present in the Supper, Christ's flesh in so far as it has become the source of salvation for man through being crucified and then glorified. Casel on the other hand, insists that the saving acts themselves must be present, not just the results of those saving acts.

In this question of the content of the sacraments, Calvin is actually further removed from the sacramental doctrine of Casel than he is from the traditional Catholic position found in the standard texts. In these latter, the sacraments are generally treated as means of grace helping us to live the life of faith in spite of our weakness. The sacraments are seen as making the results of Christ's salvific activity available to us to strengthen us. They are not so much viewed, as Casel views them, as encounters with the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Therefore, in spite of their agreement as to the presence of the Risen Christ in the Sacraments, Casel's "central insight" concerning the presence of Christ's saving acts in the sacraments makes it impossible to say that Calvin agrees with him about the content of the sacraments. Calvin is close to the traditional Catholic position but very distant from Casel.

When it comes to the question of how the content of the sacraments is rendered present both Casel and Calvin agree that this is a mysterious thing, a supernatural event that can only be accepted by faith, for its mode transcends the ability of unaided human reason to comprehend. But having said that, Calvin goes on to explain the presence in terms of the secret activity of the Holy Spirit, raising the believing recipient beyond the confines of this world for a real but spiritual union with Christ in heaven.

Casel rather sees the content being made present by the very fact of the sacrament being confected, for by its very nature it belongs to a sacrament to set forth what it signifies. The sacrament is a sign filled with the reality that it shows forth.

In spite of their agreement concerning the mysterious, supernatural mode of existence of the content of the sacraments, there is nevertheless a real difference of direction in their sacramental positions. For Calvin the motion is heavenwards; the Holy Spirit lifts the recipient beyond the confines of this world for a spiritual confrontation with Christ who is in heaven. For Casel, Christ becomes present to this world in and through the sacramental signs; the motion is earthwards. Nevertheless both Calvin and Casel agree that Christ's presence is neither spatial nor temporal. If to this fact is added the fact that Casel explains the presence of the Risen Christ in terms that avoid particularizing about transubstantiation, perhaps we have a clue as to why the idea of comparing Calvin to Casel suggested itself to Father Quinn. But the suggested comparison is really not possible on any deep or essential level—the similarities in the sacramental doctrine of the two theologians are superficial.

The whole notion of what a sacrament is and for what it exists is very different in the two theologies under consideration. For Casel, since it is necessary for a man to enter into those actions by which Christ saved the world, the acts themselves must be present, for there is no other way for a man to enter into them. For Calvin, on the other hand, it is the reception with faith of the Word of God that is salvific for man. The sacraments look more to the weakness of man's composite nature than to an objective need of bringing salvation to man by any means apart from the Gospel itself. The sacraments sign and seal the promises of the Gospel but they do not give anything that has not been given already in the Word of God. They look to the confirmation and strengthening of man's faith in the saving power of the Gospel.

### *Some General Conclusions*

Although we have reached the conclusion that the sacramental theology of John Calvin does not admit of positive comparison with that of Odo Casel on anything but a superficial level, nevertheless it is legitimate to ask whether developments in Calvinism, faithful to the principles of Calvin, would or could lead to a rapprochement with Casel's position. The following points summarize the opinion of this writer in answer to this question and will serve as a conclusion to this paper.

1. A development of Calvinism could admit the presence of the saving acts of Christ in the sacraments without denying any of Calvin's sacramental principles. On this point then, rapprochement is possible.

2. Casel demands the objective presence of the content of the sacraments in the external signs themselves. He also teaches that this content is present as soon as the signs are shown forth. Calvin's doctrine on this point is not



so clear. The Reformer teaches that the signs considered apart from their promises are vain and useless, and even though they are truly vehicles of God's action, fulfilling the promises in man, they are not regarded as causes of grace. For Calvin, the sacraments do not contain divine grace, although they present it to the hearer when the signs are shown forth in conjunction with a proclamation of the promises which they seal. There is some basic disagreement here, for Casel holds to the unfailing action of the sacraments, the so-called *opus operatum* principle which Calvin seems to deny, or at least affirms and rejects at the same time. No reconciliation seems possible as long as both theologians remain consistent with their sacramental principles.

3. Both theologians teach that how the content is rendered present is beyond the ability of human reason to understand. This is a supernatural thing, and therefore a mystery. Calvin teaches that it is due to the secret activity of the Holy Spirit. Casel does not say this, but he could say it without denying anything else that he teaches about the sacraments. Rapprochement on this question is possible.

4. As to the mode of existence of the content, both theologians agree that it is different from any natural mode of existence, and that neither place nor time enter into it. On this point there is very strong agreement, and there would appear to be no great difficulty in reconciling the two points of view.

In conclusion, it seems possible to say that on three out of the four important points of sacramental theology investigated in this study the doctrine of Dom Odo Casel can be reconciled with that of John Calvin or with a legitimate development of Calvinistic thought. That is to say, the position of each could be fitted into the teaching of the other without altering anything essential to the original doctrine of the two theologians. But regarding the question of the objective presence of the content in the signs, the difference is rather marked, and it does not appear how the two divergent positions can be reconciled. The question to ask, then, is whether this divergence is of such a fundamental nature that it makes reconciliation seem impossible in spite of the widespread agreement in the other three areas. To this writer at least, the answer to that question has to be affirmative, for the powers of the priesthood are involved, and on the existence and power of priests in Christ's plan of salvation, Calvin and Casel could hardly be said to agree.