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The Theology of the Introduction and Sermon
“De Corpore et Sanguine Christi”
attributed to John Damascene

The Introduction and Homily *De Corpore et Sanguine Christi* is taken as inauthentic by nearly every scholar of the Damascene's works. Unlike the other disputed works of John Damascene, which are disputed on the grounds of the manuscript traditions, there are really two issues to discuss here: one issue is indeed the manuscript tradition¹; but in this case there is a second and purely theological issue as well, concerning the theology of the risen body of Christ and its relation to the eucharist. It is with this that we will be concerned in this essay.

1 It is not my purpose to tackle this aspect of the problem here, as indeed the questions involved are likely to be very difficult to resolve; however I shall give a brief summary of the general position as it was when J. M. Hoeck OSB addressed the problem in his 1951 article (Hoeck, J. M. “Stand und Aufgaben der Damaskenos-Forschung” in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 17:1/2 (1951) pp. 5-60).

The work consists of an Introduction and Homily on the Eucharist. Migne (95.401) prints Lequien's Paris Text of this work, given by Migne as “Regius, n. 2428”, which ascribes the Introduction (and by implication the Homily as well) to Petrus Mansur, apparently a kinsman of John whose family name was Mansur: various attempts have been made to identify Petrus further, but without success. A number of other manuscripts were known to Lequien, and it is to be given due weight that all of them (according to Lequien) ascribe the work to St John.

Hoeck cautions us that Lequien gave two locations for the Paris Manuscript which refers to Petrus Mansur (2428 [nunc. 900] and 2414 [nunc. 1261]) and moreover, Hoeck himself could not locate the manuscript to which these location numbers referred (p. 21, fn.).

Nonetheless, Hoeck disputes its authenticity even so. He suggests (p. 21) that linguistic similarities can be put down to conscious imitation, and adds that the Colophon which precedes or follow nearly all the manuscript, which says that this Chapter “is found in the most ancient manuscripts, being mutilated, and being copied from his own hand in code”, raises doubts in his mind (Hoeck does not specify what those doubts are). It is my view that this issue is far from satisfactorily resolved, and that in view of the daring quality of its theology the question of the manuscript tradition is one that scholars in that field might well undertake with profit.

I. Theological problems raised by scholars in respect of 'De Immaculato Corpore'.

Hoeck, as we saw, admits that there are great similarities of language between *De Immaculato Corpore* and the rest of John's writings, but suggests they could have been consciously imitated. There is, of course, little that one can say against this, except that without other evidence of inauthenticity it is something of a speculation. Darwell Stone even goes so far as to say that there is broad theological agreement as well, despite also opting for inauthenticity on theological grounds.

However, several commentators other than Darwell Stone have claimed a further problem in ascribing *De Immaculato Corpore* to St John, by picking out (as he does) what they see as a grave error of theology that Damascene would have avoided. It is declared, both in the Introduction and in the Homily itself, that Christ's risen body is not to be identified with the eucharistic species until after they have been consumed. (It is, incidentally, worth reminding oneself constantly that the author does not say that the risen body is *absent* from the eucharist prior to the communication of the species. He merely states that it and the sacred species are not to be *identified* until after the communication of the species.)

The explanation given for this is that the body which was raised from the Tomb is a true body but not a material body, not that Christ is disembodied but that he is without blood and without flesh, and so cannot be subjected to material actions like movement, breaking, chewing and the like:

The body incorruptible through the resurrection is not broken, nor eaten, nor drunk: and the incorruptible body does not contain blood, but nor might it properly be called flesh².

He goes on to cite (in a much abbreviated form) Gregory of Nazianzus' *Oration XL* 46, saying:

"Believe that Christ the Son of God will come again with the presence of his glory to judge the living and the dead: no longer flesh, but not disembodied, by those reasons he himself knows³, of a more divine body, in order both that he might be seen by those who murdered him, and that he might remain God beyond thickness⁴.

2 τὸ διὰ τῆς ἀναστάσεως ἄφθαρτον σῶμα οὐ κλάται, οὔτε ἐσθίεται, οὔτε πίνεται· οὔτε αἷμα τὸ ἄφθαρτον κέχρηται σῶμα, ἀλλ' οὔτε σὰρξ ἂν δικαίως ὀνομάζοιτο (95.408B-C).

3 Correcting the text in Migne to match that in *Barlaam and Ioasaph*: Migne's is untranslatable as it stands, and is probably just an error.

4 Πίστευε Χριστὸν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ ἦξειν πάλιν μετὰ τῆς ἐνδόξου αὐτοῦ παρουσίας κρῖναι ζῶντας καὶ νεκρούς· οὐκέτι μὲν σάρκα, οὐκ ἄσώματον δὲ, οἷς οἶδεν αὐτὸς λόγοις, θεοειδεστέρου σώματος, ἵνα καὶ ὁφθῇ ὑπὸ τῶν ἐκκενησάντων, καὶ μεῖνῃ Θεὸς ἔξω παχύτητος (95.408C).

That is to say, that the risen body of Christ is not a dimensional ‘thick’⁵ body, or at least, that it is a body whose dimensions differ from those of the material world. This question occurred to Thomas Aquinas as well (*Summa Theol.* IIIa. q.76 a.6), who addresses the same problem and concludes that the risen Christ is present in the sacrament even during the time that it is subjected to material treatment. Aquinas holds that these ‘dimensive qualities’ (as he terms them) are concerned with the accident of the bread and wine alone, which of course remain, and not with the risen body, which is present but not under material dimensions.

But the author of this Homily does not quite adopt this solution, though the two are not mutually exclusive, I think. He cannot accept that the sacred species are to be identified in *any way* with the risen body of Christ, which is bloodless, fleshless, outside movement or anything proper to ‘thickness’, that is, to spatial measurement. The sacred species cannot *be* the risen body because they are so manifestly material, and being treated in a dimensional, ‘thick’ way. What is a bar to us considering ourselves full participators in the resurrection⁶ must, he appears to reason, also be a bar to the bread and wine.

However, Lequien is moved to deny John’s authorship of *De Immaculato Corpore*:

“For since to John religion is to decline the least from the maxims and sayings of his elders, far it would be from him to assert that the body of the Lord which rose from the dead was as outside blood as it was outside corruption. For this no Greek Father is known to have said, and it very much approaches the sense of Origen, which no one would feel more deeply or recoil from greatly than John Damascene”⁷.

Darwell Stone agrees with Lequien. “There is one remarkable passage” he says “in which the contrast between the pre-resurrection and the risen body of Christ is pushed to the extent of saying that the risen body had no blood, and it appears

5 παχύτης, thick: this word is used in the same way in the third *Oration on the Holy Icons* chapter 26; Kotter III 134⁶⁶. It seems to refer to the grossness of materiality, its limitations in comparison with pure spirit.

References to Kotter are to the volume number, page number and where relevant line number (in superscript) of the critical edition of John Damascene’s writings. Kotter, P.B. “Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos”, *Patristische Texte und Studien*, Berlin 1969ff. 5 vols. This essay cites from vol. 2 (*Expositio Fidei*) Berlin 1973, and vol. 3 (*Contra imaginum calumniatores orationes tres*) Berlin 1975.

6 Cf. Cyril of Alexandria *On John* 4.2 [PG74.362B] “This thick (πάχυν) and earthly body is sanctified through a more thick and a congenital partaking [διὰ παχυτέρας καὶ συγγενοῦς ἀγιάζεσθαι μεταλήψεως i.e. of the sacramental species] and is called to incorruption”.

7 Nam cum ei religio esset a maiorum placitis et dictis vel minimum discrepere, procul aberat, ut asseret Domini corpus quod surrexit a mortuis, uti corruptionis, ita et sanguinis modo expers esse. Hoc enim Patrum Graecorum nemo effutuisse noscitur, nimiumque ad Origenis sensum accedit, quem Joanne Damasceno nullus persenserit melius vel exhorruerit magis, PG95.397/8.

to be implied that the body of Christ which is given and received in the eucharist is in the condition of the preresurrection not the risen body”, citing this from St John:

“the body that is incorruptible by means of the resurrection is not broken nor eaten nor drunk; neither does the incorruptible body possess blood, as also it would not in the proper sense be called flesh... This body and blood of our God of which we partake is corruptible, being broken and poured out, eaten and drunk”⁸.

Stone is forced, rather like Hoeck, to concede that there are great similarities between this writing and the Damascene’s writings, saying that “most of the teaching contained in it is of the same character as that of St. John of Damascus and lays stress, as he does, on the parallel between the Holy Ghost descending on the holy Mother of our Lord and causing her, though a virgin, to conceive her divine Son and the descent of the Holy Ghost in the eucharist whereby the bread and wine are supernaturally made to be the body and blood of Christ”. Nonetheless, again like Hoeck, he cannot bring himself to accept John as the author, and guesses, though without any specific explanation, the *De Immaculato Corpore* is of later date than John’s time.

The fact that the author quotes from Gregory the Theologian in order to support his view must surely, though, be taken as a mark in favour of John’s authorship, because the presence of this citation in *De Immaculato Corpore* goes conclusively against Lequien’s claim that “no Greek Father is known to have said this”. Gregory manifestly holds that the resurrection body is outside or beyond material relations (ἔξω παχύτητος) and states clearly that it cannot be called flesh, and cannot be said to contain blood; and consequently, there is no reason to deny Johannine authorship on the grounds that there is here an error of theology that John would not have made. Above all, both Gregory and the author of *De Immaculato Corpore* could easily point to Scripture in order to support their claims:

This I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor corruption inherit incorruption⁹.

There is also some justification for saying that this view is at least not contradicted by the authentic writings of St John Damascene. In *Exposition* 86 (IV 13) he cautions us:

The body which is born of the holy Virgin is in truth body united with divinity, not that the body

⁸ Stone, D. *The Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 2 vols London 1909, vol. 2 p. 152.

⁹ τοῦτο δέ φημι, ἀδελφοί, ὅτι σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα βασιλείαν θεοῦ κληρονομήσαι οὐ δύναται οὐδὲ ἡ φθορὰ τὴν ἀφθαρσίαν κληρονομεῖ (1 Cor. 15v20).

which was received up into the heavens descends, but that the bread itself and the wine are changed into God's body and blood,¹⁰

which either indicates agreement with *De Immaculato Corpore* that the risen body remains in heaven and cannot be said to have reversed the decisive event of the Ascension in order to be materially present at the eucharist, or indicates that John wishes to emphasize that if the risen body is present in the eucharist, it is nonetheless still with Christ's Person at the right hand of the Father. Which of these is the case is not made clear, but whichever of them is preferred the line taken by the author of *De Immaculato Corpore* – that the risen body should not be identified with the material species – cannot be said to be denied by Damascene.

Likewise, although Damascene speaks of the 'deified body and blood'¹¹ this is once again neither a confirmation nor a denial of the theology of *De Immaculato Corpore*. On the face of it this might appear to mean that for the author of the *Exposition* the bread and wine are deified while still material and subject to material movement, whereas for the author of the Homily that cannot be. Its author would hold, I think, that this phrase refers to the fact that, as was the case in Jesus's ministry, the body and blood of the Lord are united to the divinity but are not as yet risen, and thus as yet not the recipients of the qualities of the risen body. It is a key-point of his thought that at the epiclesis the bread and wine are hypostatically united to the Word but are not to be considered as 'risen' until consumed by the communicant.

Then it is lifted up in the hands of the priest as upon the Cross, and being broken it is distributed, and thus is buried in us, and it makes us co-incorruptible with him. For this is the boundary-point of the oeconomy. It does not corrupt in us, just as the body of the Lord did not corrupt in the tomb. But until we receive it, it is subject to all things belonging to corruption.¹²

Thus in both the ministry of Jesus and in the eucharist the material humanity of Christ is unrisen, but still deified, material and subject to material limitations though it is. When risen, its characteristics change totally, even as they do in the communicant. So the phrase "deified body" in the *Exposition* does not imply a theology inconsistent with that of the Homily. The writer of the latter believes that on the basis of his heavily emphasized parallel between the Incarnation and

10 Σώμα ἐστιν ἀληθῶς ἡνωμένον θεότητι, τὸ ἐκ τῆς ἀγίας Παρθένου σῶμα, οὐχ ὅτι τὸ ἀναληφθὲν σῶμα ἐξ οὐρανοῦ κατέρχεται, ἀλλ' ὅτι αὐτὸς ὁ ἄρτος καὶ οἶνος μεταποιεῖται εἰς σῶμα καὶ αἷμα Θεοῦ, Kotter II 194⁹⁴⁻⁹⁶.

11 *Exposition* 86 (IV 13), Kotter II 195¹⁵⁵.

12 εἴτα ὑψοῦται ἐν ταῖς χερσὶ τοῦ ἱερέως ὡς ἐπὶ σταυροῦ, καὶ διαδίδοται κλώμενον, καὶ οὕτως ἐν ἡμῖν θάπτεται, καὶ συναφθαρίζει ἡμᾶς. Τοῦτο γὰρ ἐστὶ τὸ πέρας τῆς οἰκονομίας. Οὐ διαφθείρεται ἐν ἡμῖν, ὡς οὐ διεφθάρη τὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ σῶμα ἐν τῇ τάφῳ. ἕως δὲ τῆς ἡμῶν μεταλήψεως πάντα τῆς φθορᾶς ὑπομένει (409C-D).

the conversion of the eucharistic species, just as Christ was God after the Incarnation and yet before his resurrection, so too the eucharistic species can be said to be deified after the conversion and yet before their resurrection within the communicant.

The disputed but by no means definitely spurious Johannine text *Barlaam and Ioasaph* chapter 19, 164¹³ cites the same text from Gregory's *Oration*, but here the author has edited out Gregory's οὐκ ἔτι μὲν σάρκα, οὐκ ἀσώματον δὲ despite keeping θεοειδεστέρου σώματος, which might be argued to indicate tacit disagreement with Gregory's position. But the citation from Gregory has been considerably edited by the author of *Barlaam and Ioasaph* in a number of places beside this one, with much added to it, much removed from it, and much of it relocated, all material which is beyond reproach, for example, an exhortation to "receive [i.e. accept as true] besides this the resurrection", and a scripture-based reference to faith without works. It would be to presume far too much to regard the omission of οὐκ ἔτι μὲν σάρκα, οὐκ ἀσώματον δέ as theologically motivated, especially as θεοειδεστέρου σώματος has been retained.

This theology may cause surprise and indeed several problems of interpretation, and there certainly are some difficult questions arising from it, but that must not be allowed to influence us into ascribing the work safely to some unknown and presumably lesser theologian. It is not contradicted by the accepted authentic writings or by the disputed ones, and in the absence of other indications of inauthenticity we must at least maintain an open mind. But more importantly there is something of a matter of principle here: that a remarkable and original theological work of the patristic period should not be allowed to fall into theological obscurity simply because its authorship cannot be identified.

II. Other theological issues which merit discussion

1. The Conversion of the Elements by the epiclesis.

The originality of this little work becomes yet more apparent as we delve more deeply into its thought. The Homily *De Immaculato Corpore* presents us with an interesting interplay between the Words of Institution and the epiclesis, similar to that in the *De Fide Orthodoxa*. As in the *De Fide Orthodoxa*, it is clearly stated that the epiclesis effects something identical to the Incarnation, with the Person of the Son of God entering the womb of the Theotokos:

13 Lang, D.M. *St John Damascene: Barlaam and Ioasaph*, Loeb Classical Library (repr. 1983) p.278.

“How then does this come about? There was the Holy Virgin, the table, having the matter of the body: then according to the angel’s voice a Holy Spirit came upon her. Then the power of the Most High overshadowed her, the divine Word, the divine person [ὑπόστασις], and took for himself [προσελάβετο] flesh from her: and it lies there, as in the womb of the Virgin, on the mystic table, matter as the bread and the mix of wine and water¹⁴.

This is then specifically linked by the author to the epiclesis, to the invocation and intervention of the Holy Spirit, for the conversion of the bread and wine:

The Priest says, like the Angel, “In order that the Holy Spirit might intervene and sanctify and make this bread the holy body of Christ, and this cup the precious blood of the Christ”.¹⁵

But despite this connection between the Incarnation on the one hand, and the epiclesis and conversion on the other, the author of the Homily has, like John, a prominent place for the Words of Institution as well. He describes how it was by the Words of Institution that Christ made the first eucharistic conversion, at the Last Supper:

Taking bread and a cup of wine and water, he gave thanks and blessed, and said: ‘This is my body’. And in place of the natural oeconomy [i.e. digestion], the bread and the wine and water became his body and blood through his word¹⁶.

Like St John in the *Exposition*, the author of the *De Immaculato Corpore* seems to hold that the conversion was effected by the Words of Institution at the Last Supper but is effected by the epiclesis at every subsequent eucharist, although he does not perhaps bring out the link between them as clearly as John does in the *Exposition*. In both cases, the epiclesis appears to invoke a power of conversion comparable to that of the Incarnation, and the Words of Institution at the Last Supper prove that this divine power is at work in the eucharist.

2. Further acts of conversion following the epiclesis.

We have already noted that the *De Immaculato Corpore* advances a theory of gradual conversion apparently beginning before the epiclesis, and concluding after the sacred species have been distributed and consumed by the faithful. This

14 Πῶς οὖν γέγονεν; ἔκει ἦν ἡ ἀγία Παρθένος ἡ τράπεζα, ἔχουσα τὴν ὕλην τοῦ σώματος· εἶτα κατὰ τὴν τοῦ ἀγγέλου φωνὴν Πνεῦμα ἅγιον ἐπῆλθεν ἐπ’ αὐτήν. Τότε ἡ δύναμις τοῦ Ὑψίστου αὐτῇ ἐπεσχίασεν, ὁ Θεὸς Λόγος, ἡ θεία ὑπόστασις, καὶ προσελάβετο ἐξ αὐτῆς σὰρκα· καὶ ὧδε κεῖται, ὡς ἐν γαστρὶ τῆς Παρθένου, ἐν τῇ τραπέζῃ τῇ μυστικῇ, ὕλη ὁ ἄρτος καὶ τὸ ἐξ οἴνου καὶ ὕδατος κρῶμα (95.409B).

15 Φησὶν ὁ ἱερεὺς, ὡς ὁ ἄγγελος, ἵνα ἐπιφοιτήσῃ Πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ἀγιάσῃ, καὶ ποιήσῃ, τὸν μὲν ἄρτον τοῦτον σῶμα ἅγιον Χριστοῦ, καὶ τὸ ποτήριον τοῦτο αἷμα τίμιον Χριστοῦ (95.409C).

16 Λαβὼν γὰρ ἄρτον καὶ ποτήριον ἐξ οἴνου καὶ ὕδατος, ἠὺχαρίστησε καὶ ἠὺλόγησε, καὶ εἶπε· Τοῦτό μοι ἐστὶ τὸ σῶμα. Καὶ ἀντὶ τῆς φυσικῆς οἰκονομίας, ὁ ἄρτος καὶ ὁ οἶνος σὺν ὕδατι διὰ τοῦ λόγου αὐτοῦ γέγονε σῶμα καὶ αἷμα αὐτοῦ (95.408B).

theory is not to be found or even hinted at – positively or negatively – in the ‘authentic’ writings of the Damascene.

Despite stating that the risen body cannot be said to be present in the unconsumed sacrament, on the grounds that it is subject to material treatment, the author of *De Immaculato Corpore* undoubtedly holds, as we saw earlier, that the action of the Holy Spirit following the epiclesis converts the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. It is clear from this work that the author sees the bread and wine as, at this stage, in the same position as the flesh of the infant Jesus. There is even said, as we just saw, to be a hypostatic union of sacrament and God the Word:

Then the power of the Most High overshadowed her, the divine Word, the divine person [ὑπόστασις], and took for himself [προσελάβετο] flesh from her: and it lies there, as in the womb of the Virgin, on the mystic table, matter as the bread and the mix of wine and water.¹⁷

But like the flesh of the infant Christ, the sacred species hypostatically united to the Word are corruptible and material, capable of hurt and moving in a material sphere, that is to say, still without resurrection. Indeed, they bear no relation to Christ’s risen body whatsoever, except such relation as might be said to have existed between the risen body and the infant body. The one must, clearly, be changed into the other, and the author selects the simplest explanation of how this comes about: just as the infant body became a risen one through being first crucified and then raised, so too must the sacred species be crucified and raised. The problem here is how to explain the unity of the two risen bodies thus produced, the question to which the Homily as a whole is addressed.

The author uses the analogy of an *infant* – an analogy which John uses in a different but not wholly different context in *De Duabus Voluntatibus* 9 – twice in this work, and in two ways. First, he applies it to our relation to Christ. If an infant applies the powers of eating and drinking to food, that food then becomes subject to those powers and is conformed to them, the nature of the infant works an increase in its body by applying its natural economy to the food: the food no longer subsists according to its own principles alone, but according to those of the infant. The eucharistic body of Christ has this effect on us (95.406 AB). It ‘consumes’ us, making us concorporal (σύσσωμοι) with Christ because the principles of His nature are applied to us. We thus become the body of Christ, ever increasing; and He is our head in as much as He the principle of our new state.

Second, the author applies the analogy to the sacred elements in their relation to Christ. This time, the analogy is taken back to birth: it is not the application

17 τότε ἡ δύναμις τοῦ Ὑψίστου αὐτῇ ἐπεσκίασεν, ὁ Θεὸς Λόγος, ἡ θεία ὑπόστασις, καὶ προσελάβετο ἐξ αὐτῆς σάρκα· καὶ ὧδε κεῖται, ὡς ἐν γαστρὶ τῆς Παρθένου, ἐν τῇ τραπέζῃ τῇ μυστικῇ, ὅλη ὁ ἄρτος καὶ τὸ ἐξ οἴνου καὶ ὕδατος κράμα (95.409B).

of the natural economy but the constituting of the bread and wine as possessing these powers actively, not merely as passive recipients of it.

For the seed of its father is a certain beginning of the constitution of the body of the infant. Nourishment is gained from the blood of the mother, and a change occurs from underlying matter into an organic body, according to the power given to the nature from the Creator of our nature and power, and thus flesh and blood, and bone, and the rest of the members are set up together through attractive, retentive, nutritive and digestive powers: and in such a manner the supplementation [προσθήκη, an addition; aid, assistance], through the body of the infant, through the digestive, attractive, retentive and nutritive powers, makes for itself the increase of the body. And so therefore also in the increase of the body of the Lord can be discerned all the divine economy of his enfleshment, and crucifixion, and burial, and resurrection, and incorruptibility¹⁸.

Not only, then, does the epiclesis result in the overshadowing of the sacred species by the Holy Spirit, but the (second) elevation of the host and the distribution result in the crucifixion of the bread and wine united with Christ's divine Person and its burial, undergoing a resurrection within the faithful – as we saw earlier. The sacred elements are not consumed in this liturgical economy, but incarnated, hypostatically united to Christ, just as his earthly body was, not this time thinking of the increase of the body through eating, but of the initial constitution of the very principles of the body by which it can be said to be that of the Word. The author distinguishes between a kind of 'core' body that has the power of assimilation, and body that has been assimilated by its powers: the former is the sacrament, the latter the communicants. The sacrament is constituted as this core body by the liturgical consecrations – and even less is it possible to pin-point the 'moment of consecration' in the *De Immaculato Corpore* than it is in the authentic writings, for in the *De Immaculato Corpore* it is a process which takes place over some time, and which requires more than one liturgical 'event' – whereas the communicants are assimilated, by the powers which thereafter reside in the sacrament, to Christ's body.

This 'power', likened to the nutritive and other natural powers of a human body, is the power to make us incorruptible. "Then" writes the author of the Homily "it is elevated in the hands of the priest, as on the Cross; and being broken it is distributed, and thus is laid to rest in us, and we are made incorruptible together with it", since Christ's body did not corrupt in the tomb, but was

18 Ἐφ' ἡμῶν γὰρ ἡ σπορά τοῦ πατρὸς ἀρχὴ τίς ἴσθι τῆς τοῦ σώματος τοῦ βρέφους συστάσεως· χορηγείται δὲ τροφὴ ἐκ τῶν τῆς μητρὸς αἱμάτων καὶ γίνεται μεταβολὴ τοῦ ὑποκειμένου ὕλικου εἰς ὀργανικὸν σῶμα, κατὰ τὴν δοθεῖσαν τῇ φύσει δυνάμιν παρὰ τοῦ Δημιουργοῦ τῆς φύσεως ἡμῶν καὶ δυνάμεως, καὶ οὕτω σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα, καὶ ὀστέα, καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ τῶν μελῶν συνίσταται δι' ἐλκτικῆς καὶ καθεκτικῆς καὶ ἀλλοιωτικῆς, ἥτοι θρεπτικῆς δυνάμεως· ὁμοίως καὶ ἡ διὰ τῆς βρώσεως τοῦ σώματος προσθήκη, διὰ τῆς θρεπτικῆς ἥτοι ἐλκτικῆς, καὶ καθεκτικῆς, καὶ ἀλλοιωτικῆς δυνάμεως τὴν αὔξησιν ποιεῖται τοῦ σώματος. Ἐδει οὖν καὶ ἐν τῇ ἐπαυξήσει τοῦ Κυριακοῦ σώματος θεωρῆσαι πᾶσαν τὴν θεῖαν οἰκονομίαν τῆς αὐτοῦ σαρκώσεως, καὶ σταυρώσεως, καὶ ταφῆς, καὶ ἀναστάσεως, καὶ ἀφθαρσίας (95.409A).

raised (95.409C). The bread, being at last perfectly changed and rendered *factitive*, as it were, as the core body of Christ, the faculties of assimilation being given to it, makes us whom it touches like to itself.

In what sense does this make us Christ's body – in what sense are we 'consumed'? The identification of the action of the eucharist with incorruptibility, made by the author, most naturally reminds of Maximus the Confessor's carefully laboured point:

We do not become this body through the loss of our own bodies; nor again because Christ's body passes into us hypostatically or is divided into members; but rather because we conform to the likeness of the Lord's flesh by shaking off the corruption of sin. For just as Christ in his manhood was sinless by nature both in flesh and soul, so we too who believe in him, and have clothed ourselves in him through the Spirit, can be without sin if we so choose¹⁹.

Maximus seems the right background against which to interpret this text (particularly if it is by John). The action of the eucharist is the granting of incorruptibility, just as the action of the epiclesis is (eventually) the granting of incorruptibility to the host. Obviously, the difference between us as the body and the bread as the body is that while we are consumed, we do not then have the power to transmit that incorruptibility to others, although this is not spelled out by the author. He, like John in his *Third Speech on the Icons*, would doubtless point to the fact that we are not hypostatically united, unlike the bread and wine.²⁰

We should note that the analogy of the infant, as used of the eucharist at any rate, is put to a different use here from that in the *Exposition* (or anywhere else, for that matter). In the *Exposition*, the analogy is used to show how the elements are to be regarded as at one with Christ, as with Gregory of Nyssa (*Or. Cat.* 37). In the *De Immaculato Corpore* the elements are thus shown to be converted gradually, and to be given a power to render the recipient incorruptible, an emphasis comparable to one found by McPartlan (following de Lubac) in Augustine's thought²¹. In the *Exposition* John nonetheless to some extent stands apart from Gregory of Nyssa in emphasizing the hypostatic union, the aspect of the *Incarnation* of the bread and wine rather than just the assimilation by eating; but no one comes close, to the best of my knowledge, to the extraordinary theory of the *De Immaculato Corpore*. Whether or not it is by John – and I see no way at the moment of proving its authenticity or of disproving it either – it is certainly testimony to an original mind of great subtlety.

19 *Second Century on Theology* 84. Translation as in the *Philokalia* ed. Palmer, Sherrard and Ware, 3 vols, London 1981, vol. 2 p. 158f.

20 Chapter 26; Kotter III 134⁵⁹⁻⁶².

21 P. McPartlan, *The Eucharist Makes the Church* (T&T Clark 1993), p. 4, where he draws our attention to the theme of "eater being eaten", and pp. 54 n. 16, 55, 67-72 where he makes use of *Conf.* 7,10,16 (PL32.742): "*nec tu me in te mutabis, sicut cibum carnis tuae, sed tu mutaberis in me*".