New Blackfriars

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Paschal Triduum

Herbert McCabe OP

Abstract

Here *New Blackfriars* is publishing for the first time a set of three talks given in 1979 by the distinguished Dominican theologian Herbert McCabe (1926-2001). It appears that the talks were delivered in Leeds, UK, during a Holy Week retreat (or something like that). The text below derives from a typescript put together by someone unknown on the basis of what seems to have been an audio recording. McCabe is clearly drawing on these talks in Chapters 7 to 9 of his 1987 book *God Matters* (chapters which are reprints of articles published in *New Blackfriars* in 1986). However, the original talks as they appear below have the brevity, freshness, informality, spontaneity, and blemishes characteristic of a 'live performance' rather than a reworking and development of them for publication coming seven years after they were delivered. That is why *New Blackfriars* is now publishing them in the hope that they might interest readers of the journal, which McCabe edited for many years. *New Blackfriars* is grateful to Marie Turner for drawing its attention to them and for sending it a copy of the typescript of the 1979 talks.

Keywords

Christ, Communication, Death, Easter, Eucharist, God, Holy Week, Mystery, Sin, Resurrection

FIRST TALK – *Holy Thursday, the Mystery of the Unity of Christ*

The fact that we're here in Holy Week pretty well dictates what I'm going to speak about in these three talks. For I see my job as simply to remind you of the things that you would like to talk about yourselves. I don't expect to say anything new to you, or not much anyway. I was thinking of talking about the mysteries we are celebrating. And, just for the sake of structure, I am organizing these talks around Holy Thursday (the mystery of the unity of Christ), then Good Friday (the mystery of the cross of Christ), and then the Easter Vigil (with its mystery of new life).

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Well, first of all, what about the word 'mystery'? By this I mean something like 'depth of meaning' or 'deep meaning'. There are two things to notice here. First, a mystery always refers to something that has meaning (words, or signs, or symbols of some sort). Second, mystery always refers to the not-so-obvious, deeper, or at first hidden, meaning of signs, or symbols, or words. Take for example something like *Macbeth*. You can talk about the meaning of this obviously at many levels. At one level it's easy enough to see that it's a good thriller about intrigue and murder at court. At another slightly deeper level, it's a piece of typical English propaganda slandering the memory of a good Catholic king who had the misfortune of being Scottish. At a deeper level still, it's a tragedy about a man over-reaching himself, about the relationship of a man with nature, and especially about human life and time (about how we belong to nature, belong to the cosmos, belong to the time that is given to us, and yet seek to transcend this, to belong to ourselves; and about the revenge that nature and time take on us).

Now you wouldn't expect to see all these deeper meanings in the play when you saw it for the first time. It's only when you get to know it, when you reach down into its depths, into the mystery within it, that you begin to understand it like this. And, of course, it's the mark of a great work of art, such as the liturgy, that the more you get to know it, the further you get into its meanings, and then the more you get out of it.

A really great work of art, like *Macbeth* or *Pride and Prejudice* or a magnificent piano concerto, seems endless. You never get to the end of these depths within it. You never exhaust it. You can always come back to it. And there is one very important thing about deep meanings. This is that the deeper they are, the more irreplaceable they are.

I mean, if you *are* treating *Macbeth* at a fairly superficial, but still interesting level, as a good thriller, then it's replaceable. You can tell the story of the play in other words. In these other words, the meaning can, so to speak, be detached from the play itself. You can put the meaning in another way, in other words. You can tell the story of the plot. But when it comes down to reading down to the deeper meaning, there is no substitute for watching or taking part in the play itself. These meanings only reveal themselves to you in the actual performance, like sharing in the enactment of the play itself. So it's very hard to try to put into other words the deep meaning of something such as *Macbeth*. And that is why literary critics are always much harder to read than Shakespeare, and it all seems so much more complicated. But this is not because critics are trying to make things difficult. Nor is it because the deep meaning of *Macbeth* is at all complicated. It's simple in itself, but it's deep. And when you try to bring the deep simplicities up to the surface you have to be complicated about them. If you don't, then you're going to be just superficial. The job of the literary critic is to prevent you from simply seeing *Macbeth* as a thriller. Okay, it *is* a thriller; but it

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is so much more than that. The critic is trying to stop you from just stopping there. Why? Because there's a great deal more enjoyment to be got out of it if you reach down to its deeper meaning. The job of the critic is to encourage you to see further, to get in touch with the mystery. Of course, it's no use substituting the critic for the play itself. All the critic is doing is pointing towards something. You have to go and take a look yourself.

Now it seems to me, that it's this way with the mysteries we have been and shall be sharing this week. We'll be enacting the mysteries themselves. And this corresponds to (1) performing and (2) watching the play itself. We'll be, as it were, literary critics for the play. We'll be trying to put into words the meaning of these mysteries — encouraging each other, therefore, to go further, not to stop at a superficial understanding of what we are doing. In other words, we'll be doing theology.

Of course theology is no substitute for the mysteries themselves, any more than the critic is a substitute for Shakespeare. But it does have a very important function. Without it we may rest content with a shallow understanding of the mystery. And, apart from anything else, that might make us rest content with a shallow and superficial enactment of the mysteries themselves. Heaven knows, this is common enough nowadays.

Finally, when the theology of the Eucharist is reduced, it seems, to a few clever slogans that can be written on posters, then you get the kind of celebration of the Eucharist that's really just a celebration of optimism and complacency. Just as in the bad old days I'm sure none of you are old enough to remember, when Eucharistic theology was reduced to a few propositions in a handbook, you got the kind of mass that could be mumbled in 18 minutes, including prayers for Russia and the last Gospel.

So, let's have a look at what the mystery of Holy Thursday really is about. If we could put it into one word we could say it's about *unity*, about a people being *together*. And, of course, you could say that this is what the entire Gospel is about. That's what the whole of divine revelation is about. The entire Bible, the whole tradition of the scriptures, the life and sacraments of the people of God are about human animals being with each other, culminating in the revelation that the only way in which we can really be with each other is in the Holy Spirit. Simply about that.

But of course, it is about being together at a *deep* level, about a very profound and mysterious unity; and when we try to bring this unity to the surface in words, to talk about it, it becomes not simple but very complicated and various. It becomes all the elaboration of the history of Israel and the life and death of Jesus. It becomes all about the Bible (a very complicated level).

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The whole of the Paschal mystery is about unity, of course. But Holy Thursday is obviously very blatant about unity because it's specifically about the Church, about the sacrament of union with God, and about the unity of mankind. I am very glad to see that this definition of the Church (as sacrament, mystery of union with God and the unity of all mankind), which comes in Vatican II, is put in no less than three times in Pope John Paul II's recent encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*.

Union with God and the unity of all mankind are not two separate things. The real and deep unity of mankind is only to be found in God, and the real God is only to be found in the unity of mankind. Now it's because we've not reached this point, because we're still disunited, that our picture of God keeps slipping into falsehood and idolatry so that God becomes the God of our class or our race or our time: a tutelary deity of the free world. It's because we've not reached unity in God, who is Love, that our unity is less than unity of all mankind. Our unity is always 'ours' against 'theirs'.

Now please don't mistake me about this. I don't mean that we should pretend that this is not so. I don't think we should pretend that we have reached some kind of unity of all mankind. I don't think we should pretend that there is no sin, that the Kingdom of God is already established, that there already *is* a brotherhood of man. I think we should realize both that the only human unity we can now achieve is the unity of the poor and the oppressed against their oppressors, and that this is not what real unity will finally be. It's just the nearest we can get to it (the unity of the poor). I think we have to recognize both that our God just has to be seen as the God of the poor, the God who takes sides in the struggle, and that any God of consensus who is supposed to belong to both sides is false to our understanding. We should realize both that God is the God of reason *and* that this picture of God is inadequate. But it's just the only one we've got. This is not God as we shall see him when the struggle is over. It's the nearest we can get to it.

We can't see the unity of mankind except in mystery, except as a gesture towards a reality that is to come. We can't see God except in mystery, as he who is to come. We can't see Love except in hints and guesses of what is to come.

So, on Holy Thursday we celebrate the being together of people. But we celebrate it as something that is to come, as something that is present all right, present in mystery, present in hints, present in sacrament. The reason why it's still to come, the meaning of this unity in love not being yet, is *sin*. Holy Thursday is about sin.

Sin is the disunity of people, the deep disunity. Sin is a mystery. It's not something we can see on the surface. It's not something easy to detect. It's the depth within our quarrels and disunity and dislikes.

There are people who think that we have already found a way for human beings to live with each other. These are the complacent propagandists of '*our* world', the western free world. True, there are still

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some little difficulties; but these are mainly due to the menace of Communism and the forces that threaten us from outside. Or else they are awkward things that can be cleared up with a few judicious reforms here and there. Basically *we* are on the path of progress. Basically *we* are where the Kingdom of God has been established. If only we could see it, change our hearts and minds, and recognize what a nice, good place our world is, how nice and good people are, then all would be well.

Now these people do not believe in *sin*. They *dare* not believe in sin. Instead they believe in our world. They believe in what John's gospel calls 'this world' and its values. And the mysteries of Holy Week are a challenge to them.

Then there are also those who do see that our world is heading for destruction, that its alleged unity is born out of fear, and that it is based on violence, the violence built into its structures (that it's not the unity of love but the unity of concealed hatred, a hypocritical presence of fellowship). But for many of these people, the remedy is almost as shallow as the world they are attacking. They think that genuine human unity can be restored simply by eliminating certain basic economic injustices. They haven't reached down to the mystery. For them the mysteries of Holy Week should not be so much a challenge as an invitation, an invitation to go further, to enter into the deeper mystery of human sin, to realize the transformation we need is even more radical than revolution; it is forgiveness.

So sin is the mysterious depth within human disunity, within the alienation and isolation of people from each other. Sin is not to be identified with the more obvious signs of human separation, any more than real unity in love can be identified with superficial friendliness and cheerfulness. The signs and symbols of Holy Thursday take us into the real depths within both sin and love.

This year I expect most of you, like myself, missed the first great enactment of Holy Thursday, the Mass of the Chrism which took place yesterday morning. This is the first and most obvious sign of unity because it is the one time in the year, when the whole Church is gathered together as one, when at least priests, representing the various parishes and communities, gather together with the bishop as a visible sign of the unity of the whole Church.

I say the *whole* Church because, of course, the diocese of Leeds is not simply a local part of the Church. In the diocese centered on the bishop is the mystery of the whole Church. Just as the whole Christ is present whenever the Eucharist is celebrated, so the whole Church is present wherever there is a complete structure of the bishop and his people. The Church isn't fundamentally an international organization, distributed over many subsidiary sections. The Church of Leeds is as much the whole Church as the Church of Rome, or any other Church. There is nothing lacking to the Church of Leeds that needs to be supplied

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by, for example, the Church of Rome. The Church of Leeds is complete unto herself. Rome of course is simply the focus of unity within the other complete Churches of the world.

So, when once a year on this special day the clergy and some of the laity of the diocese gather with the bishop, they represent and *are* the unity of the whole Church. From this united gathering, of course, the priests receive once more their commission to act for the bishop, to be themselves agents of unity in their churches, because that's what it is of course to be a priest: to be representative of the deep unity of his people. That is why he presides at the Eucharist.

So, Holy Thursday is a feast of priesthood (though not, of course, a feast of priests — as some special caste with secret powers). It's a feast of priesthood because it's a feast of the unity of the Church and of the unity of the Kingdom. Priests only matter in so far as they are centres, representatives, and generators of the unity, the deep and ultimate human unity.

Let us turn now to the great liturgy we celebrated last night, the mass of the evening, the mass which is about the mass. The first thing to notice is that there is, or should be, only one mass on Holy Thursday in each church, apart from the special mass of the Chrism in the Cathedral; and this very important rule is to emphasize the unity that is celebrated. All the people of the parish or the town or whatever should be celebrating this one mass together and only this one. In spite of the reform of Vatican II, in some churches corruption has already set in and another mass is sometimes celebrated in the morning for the sake, it is said, of those who cannot come to evening mass. This is a wanton, dangerous corruption of the mystery. Behind it is the idea, still lingering on, that instead of celebrating as a community the unity of the Church and the meaning of Christ's passion, we are providing each individual with his or her private allowance of grace.

If you can't make it to the one mass of Holy Thursday, well it's a pity, but it doesn't matter in the end. You are represented there by the people who can manage; so far as your sharing in the grace of the mass goes, you're in exactly the same position as those who have been lucky enough to be able to celebrate it as the liturgy envisages. Of course it is more satisfactory to be one of those who receive communion at the feast of the Lord's Supper, as it is more satisfactory to actually act in a play than to watch it. But the meaning of the play, and your sharing in that meaning, are just the same in both cases. The mere fact that some individuals cannot be present is no possible excuse for destroying the liturgical meaning of the single celebration. Those who are actually enacting the liturgical sign of eating the body of Christ and drinking his blood are doing so not for their own private sakes, but for the whole community. The actors are acting not just for their own satisfaction, but for the whole audience as well.

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So, in a properly conducted parish there is one eucharist to express the oneness of the Eucharist; and of course in a properly conducted parish the reason for and the meaning of this simple celebration will have been thoroughly explained — so that even the clergy will understand it. The Eucharist on *every* occasion is to do with being together. I am sure for everyone in this day and age there is no need to repeat the familiar point that all food shared is common life — life shared in common.

A meal is not just a way of absorbing carbohydrates and protein. It is a way of belonging to other people, and belonging to the unity of the community, whether it's tea with the family, or the office party, or a wedding breakfast, or whatever. Except in exceptional and marginal cases, for the human animal to eat is to eat together. I suspect that goes right back to the origins of the human animal, in the hunting phase when our earliest ancestors hunted together, brought down their prey together, and so ate together. Millions upon millions of years of this having drummed it into our psyches — eating means belonging to the pack! It even means receiving your food from the leader of the pack. 'You don't belong, you don't eat'. (I wasn't there of course, so I don't really know if that is what happened, but there it is!) Anyway, somewhere quite deep in our unconscious we link food with community and also with receiving a gift. Hence, we receive with gratitude.

I must say that there are some cultures which don't stress this communal aspect of food and therefore don't find it natural to understand the Eucharist. There are some African cultures which don't. For them the Eucharist is rather in the same position as anointing is for us. Our culture sees no connection between dripping with oil and being full of the Spirit. So it has to be explained to us. But generally speaking, apart from some exceptional cases, the human animal eats with others and finds food a potent symbol of unity with others. And just as any meal is a sign, not just an indication but a symbol that creates what it expresses (a sign of our unity in the family or in some other community), so the eucharistic meal is the sign of our deep unity, our unity in love, which is the Spirit of God. The shared food which is the sign of this unity is Christ himself in whom we find our unity in the Spirit.

I want to stress that. It's because the Eucharist is the sign of our unity that the body of Christ is present here. Christ is present precisely as the sign of our unity and not in any other way. I think people have gone wrong about the Eucharist, because they haven't seen it that way around. They've talked first of all about the real presence of Christ and then stopped so to speak; and then gone on to say 'Well we all share in it'. That's how you get the idea that Christ's presence is something quite independent of the mass, of the coming together of the faithful, as though the great thing were to have Christ in the tabernacle, and then the mass and communion is seen as a sort of way of making our own

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selves into tabernacles of Christ, and after communion each of us is a little tabernacle of the real presence, and so on.

You can see how this distorts the truth about the Eucharist, which is first of all about us being with each other in Christ. Christ is really present in order to be symbol and creative cause of that unity. I am very glad to see that, in his superb new encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*, Pope John Paul II puts the thing the right way around. He says that it is an *essential truth* that the Eucharist builds the Church as the authentic community of the people of God, bearing that same mark of unity that was shared by the apostles and the first disciples of the Lord. Accordingly in the Eucharist we touch in a way the very mystery of the body and blood of the Lord because the Eucharist forges our unity.

I want to go back now for a second to look at something I said earlier about meals and hospitality, meals, and gifts.

Meals, I should like to say, are primitively not only signs of community, but signs of hospitality. We receive our food at the hands of others, as gifts from others. The first meals we have, of course, are experienced as gift from our parents, from our families. They are basic signs of giving and receiving which are essential to the family communion. Parents are essentially providers. Of course this goes back beyond meals to the very first nourishment we receive at our mother's breast. And all hospitality can be seen as a kind of extension of that first relationship.

To invite a guest to a meal is to invite him or her into the family circle in a way — into a relationship defined by that very first and most primitive act of hospitality. So, there is a deep relationship between food and gift. The very first gift we have is the gift of food from our mother's body. It's the closest thing to the gift of life itself. Now in a certain way we are giving life to our guests when we give them food partly because to give someone food is of course to give him not something he can use but to give him his own body, which food becomes — and partly because all giving goes back to and is a kind of imitation of that primary giving. For all these reasons eating is very closely connected with saying 'Thank you'.

It seems altogether natural to say 'Thank you' to your immediate host. Let's just for a minute think of what this means. What does 'Thank you' actually mean? What are you doing when you say 'Thank you'? The word 'thank' comes from the same root as the word 'think', and to say 'Thank you' is to say something like 'I think of you' or 'This gift makes me think of you'. In other words it is to say that the gift is seen not just for what it is in itself but precisely as gift from you, as communication, as expression of friendship from you. To say 'Thank you' is to say 'I recognize this thing as an expression of your love for me'. It's to say 'I see that you are not only giving me this thing but giving me yourself'. That is what 'Thank you' would say — a pretty economical way of saying it!

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When I say 'Thank you' for a new tie you have given me I say that I am valuing the tie not just as something to put around my neck but as a sign, a symbol, an expression, a communication of your self-giving. This tie now means *you*. It is you who is given to me in the tie. So, when you thank your host for a nice meal (or even a nasty meal, because you must say 'Thank you' to your friends), you are saying that you recognize that he has given himself or herself to you in that gift.

Now besides thanking your host it's common, it's a common custom, especially among Christians, to thank God as well. We say grace at meals. When we do this we're recognizing that in the end all our food and all our life comes from God. We are seeing the food as an expression of God's love for us. We are seeing it not just in itself, as protein or not, but as sign of God's love, as word from God, expression from God. When we say grace we say 'Thank you' to God. 'Grace' of course is Latin for 'thank you'. To say grace means we see this food as word of love from God. The Greek for 'thank you' is 'eucharist'. When we make Eucharist we are saying 'Thank you'. We are recognizing our food and drink as word from God, as the Word of God incarnate, as God's ultimate communication of his love — God's ultimate gift to us. 'Let us give thanks to the Lord our God' — that's how we open the Eucharistic Prayer. What we call the words of institution are just part of the whole Eucharistic Prayer, the whole prayer of saying 'Thank you', in which we express our faith. We express our faith that in sharing together in this food and drink we are sharing together in Christ, in the communication of God's love, in the Word of God. That's the form the Eucharist takes, as saying 'Thank you' for our shared food and drink, saying 'Thank you', therefore, for our sign of unity in community. That's what we're thanking for this time.

Remember the Eucharist is a symbolic meal. That is to say the food and drink are not actually there to nourish us. There's not enough of them. A crumb of bread and a sip of wine is hardly a meal. It's a *token* meal. It's a *symbol* of our unity, a *sign* that we belong to one family. And what we're thanking God for is that sign. It's not quite like thanking your host for a good meal. When you thank him then, you're thanking him first of all for the nourishment of a good and hearty and tasty meal. But what we're thanking God for in the Eucharist is precisely the symbolic value of our food and drink, their value as signs of our fellowship. We are thanking him precisely for our *shared* food and drink, thanking him for the fact that we are a community of love. We're thanking him for bringing us together in *love* as symbolized by *this* food and drink. So, when we give thanks to the Lord our God we thank him for the gift of unity, for bringing people together. And, of course, the Eucharistic prayers — or those which are properly written — begin by some proclamation of the great deed by which God gradually *has* brought the human race together. In thanking him we are seeing the symbol of our unity, token meal of bread and wine, not just

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as the symbol of our unity, of our communication with others, but of this communication itself as gift of God. When I thank you for a tie I am recognizing this elegant piece of cloth as a communication from you, as a gift of you. When we thank God in the Eucharist we are recognizing our own communication between ourselves, our love for each other, as itself a communication from God, as gift from God, as gift of God.

Let us say it again to get it clearly. When you say 'Thank you' for a tie you are recognizing a thing, the tie, as also a symbol, a piece of human language, an expression of friendship. In the Eucharist we are recognizing what is already a simple symbol in our human language, what is already an expression of our love together — we are recognizing that, as also a symbol in *God's* eyes, it is also an expression of God's love for us. Any anthropologist, or indeed anybody at all, could recognize the Eucharist, if they happened to drop into church and knew nothing about it, had no faith at all, could recognize the Eucharist, if it was being properly celebrated, as a common symbolic meal representing and expressing our solidarity in community, our lives for each other. You don't need to have faith to see that. You just have to have some understanding of how human beings use symbols. But what we recognize in our Eucharistic prayer, in our prayer of thanksgiving, is a further dimension, a further depth in all this, in recognizing that this whole exchange of gifts between us is itself a gift from God, that the language we talk to each other is language from God, language of God and the Word of God, the Word of God incarnate; that the word of love we say to each other is the Word of God (we're talking divinely to each other).

In other words, the bread and wine are not symbols, are not signs, because the Eucharist is a sacrament. They are signs already because what we're having is not of course a real supper (because we're hungry). It's a token meal *saying that*. It's a piece of human language that just doesn't happen to be altogether in words. When we say it's a sacrament we mean not that bread and wine have become signs; they're that already. We mean that they've become *God's* signs — that they're *God's* expression of his love, of himself, to us. They're the Word of God, the Word of Love incarnate. They're God's self-understanding, the Word of God available to us incarnate, so that we share God's understanding of himself. We share divine life.

You want to understand how God understands himself? Look at and experience the love we have for each other and then you begin to understand. That love which we express in the Eucharist — that is what God is. God is Love. If you want to understand God try to understand the love people have for each other. But of course there comes the rub: where to find that? Where shall we find the love for each other? Not enough to look at the friendliness people sometimes show to select groups of people, people they get on well with. Not even enough to

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look at the intense love that we may experience for one person with whom we are in love. That too can be infected with vanity and selfishness. Where are we to find real love of one human being for another?

Only in Jesus and only in the cross of Jesus. If you want to know what real human love looks like, I'm afraid you have to look at that instrument of torture. Our world is such that real human love is finally expressed in suffering and death.

That's what Paul had to explain to the Corinthians, you will remember. They were absolutely fascinated by the Eucharist. It had a marvelous effect. A feast of fellowship and friendship, an occasion when you really expressed your love for your friends in an *agape*. But, as it turned out, just for your friends. Others were left out in the cold. Moreover, people tended to get drunk as well. So, Paul reminds them in I Corinthians, it's not just a question of community and friendship with Christ. It's a question of Christ crucified. Over the great meal of Christ with the apostles hangs the shadow of the cross. *'On the night before He died';*. Paul emphasizes, the body he shares with them is his body to be given up, his blood to be shed. If we're to understand God through his love we must look at the love between people that is expressed in this Eucharist; that the love expressed there is not just any love, any superficial friendliness or kindness, or whatever. It's the sacrificial love of Jesus, the love that expects death. But I want to talk about the cross and the death of Jesus next time.

Now let me end with a word about the washing of the feet. This story, as I'm sure you know, occurs only in John's Gospel. It isn't to be found in Matthew, Mark, or Luke, the people we call the synoptics. They, on the other hand, each have a story of the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper, which St John doesn't have. This fact has puzzled many scholars and the ordinary reader as well, a lot of them quite unnecessarily. The reason seems fairly clear.

For Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the Last Supper was the Jewish Paschal meal, Seder. And it seems very likely that this was historically the case. Certainly, the behavior of Jesus, in taking and blessing the bread during the meal and blessing the wine after the meal, fits in very well with the ritual of the Seder. So the synoptics, and probably Jesus himself, wanted to emphasize the connection between the Eucharistic banquet and the paschal meal of liberation, the meal that commemorated the release from the slavery in Egypt. And it also looks forward to the final liberation from sin and the triumph of the kingdom of God. That's what the Seder's for; that's what the Jews are celebrating, looking forward to the final liberation from all sin in the Kingdom. So that for Matthew, Mark and Luke, and also Jesus, the eucharistic meal foreshadows the future eschatological banquet — the banquet of the last days. The mass is the sacrament of heaven. When you go to mass you have a foretaste of heaven — but only sacramentally!

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Luke has Jesus saying 'I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer, for I tell you, I shall not eat it until it is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God. I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the Kingdom of God comes'. A very close connection is made here between what they're doing at that meal and the meal in the Kingdom, which Jesus seems to have thought of as coming in a few days' time.

But in John's interpretation of Jesus in his gospel, the meaning of Jesus' life is centered on his 'lifting up'. He calls it his 'hour' or glorification. His 'lifting up' whether it is on the cross or in the resurrection: this is when he will be glorified, and this is the kind of key point in his Gospel. Until that time, John says, of being 'lifted up', of being glorified, that 'hour' of Jesus, that glorification of Jesus, there is no Spirit. For he says at the first sign at Cana 'My hour has not yet come'.

For John, therefore, there can be no sacraments before the glorification of Christ, his lifting up and sending forth of the Spirit. So, for John there could be no Eucharist at the Last Supper. For him the paschal liberation is enacted not in this new paschal meal at the Last Supper, but in the crucifixion itself. So, for him the meal takes place before the Feast of the Passover.

So in place of the Eucharistic meal, John has a hint of looking forward to the Eucharistic meal. He has the washing of the feet.

You see it seems to me that it is a mistake to see this primarily in terms of the humility of Jesus; although of course that is a vastly important element in it, primarily it's a gesture of hospitality, a courtesy extended to your guests. Of course you've always got a slave to do the washing, and for the host himself to do it was utterly extraordinary. But first of all it is to be understood as a preliminary to a meal. So the washing of the feet, like the story of the feeding of the 5,000, is Eucharistic. It's John's way of hinting at the Eucharist to come, at the Church to come — hinting at it rather than describing it.

There is of course in it too the suggestion of cleansing, cleansing from sin, the cleansing from sin that comes from being united in love and being united in the Eucharist; and that of course made it especially appropriate for the old liturgy of Holy Thursday you may remember, which used to include the staging of the sacrament of penance. Penitents were reconciled, brought back into full communion with the Church in order to celebrate the Eucharist, but that brings up the whole question of sin.

SECOND TALK – *The Mystery of the Cross*

The best way I think to begin talking a little about the central mystery of Good Friday, the mystery of the Cross, is to ask why Christ died on the cross.

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Obviously this is a question which could mean all sorts of things. It could be asking about the historical circumstances that brought it about and what was he executed for; or it could be asking 'What did Christ do it for?'. What did he hope to achieve? Why was it important to him? Or why is it important to us?

And of course there have been a whole lot of answers to this in the past, about what Jesus thought he was doing. And people have said that he paid for the sins of the world. The idea, you may remember, was that sin had offended God, an infinite offense against the infinite God. Nothing that man himself could do could restore the balance of justice, so God the Son became man so that by his sufferings and death he could pay the price of sin — that kind of simplified version of St Anselm's line.

Now I think this line of thinking is based on some idea of punishment as a kind of payment, a re-payment; the criminal undergoing punishment pays his debt to society as they say, but it takes a divine man to pay our debt to divine justice.

Now I can make very little sense out of this idea, whether you apply it to criminals or to Christ. I can't see how a man in prison is paying his debt to society or paying anything else to society. On the contrary, it's rather expensive to keep him there. And if God won't forgive us until his son has been tortured to death for us then he is a lot less forgiving than even we are sometimes. If a society feels compensated for its loss by the satisfaction of watching the sufferings of a criminal, then that society is being vengeful in a pretty infantile way. And if God is satisfied and compensated for sin by the sufferings of mankind in Christ, then he is even more infantile.

As you know, there have been all sorts of variation on this story in the history of Christian thinking; people who held that Christ suffered as a representative of the human race, people who rather more oddly thought he suffered *instead* of the human, and the really bizarre people who held that Christ's suffering was a ransom paid to the devil for the liberation of sinners who had sold themselves to him. You get that idea in some of the hymns actually, some of the liturgical hymns in Holy Week.

Well of course no theory is going to exhaust the mystery of the Cross, and by the same token the most peculiar theories may have something to say about it, provided we don't take them too literally. So what I am offering is just my way of seeing the Cross, not with the idea of explaining everything but just as a possible story, and a better one I think that the ones I've mentioned.

In the first place it seems to me that Jesus did *not* want to die on the cross. He wasn't crazy after all, or a masochist, and, of course, we are told that he prayed to his Father to save him from this horrible death. In the Garden of Gethsemane, according to Luke anyway, he was so terrified that great drops of sweat fell from him looking like the blood that

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was to be crushed from him the next day. Actually those two verses are doubtful, they are not in the best manuscripts, but all three of the synoptics agree that he was miserable and depressed at the time, unlike John of course. In John, Jesus is totally in control of the situation, but in the synoptics he is obviously panicking. He came through this depression to a kind of calm in accepting the will of his Father, but he is quite explicit that it is not *his* will – 'not my will but thine be done.' He *did* want to accept his Father's will even if it meant the cross; but he certainly didn't want to be crucified.

Well then, did the Father want Jesus to be crucified? And if so, why? The answer as I see it is NO. The Father isn't wanting Jesus to be crucified. What the Father wished is that Jesus should be human. And this is the command, if you like, laid on Jesus, this is the obedience of Jesus to the Father, to be totally, completely human. And Jesus was simply obeying the Father's command to be human and nothing but human. The fact that to be human means to be crucified is not directly what the Father has planned but what we've arranged. We've made a world in which there is no other way of being really human that doesn't involve suffering.

Perhaps to explain this enigmatic statement: As I see it, not Adam but Jesus was the first human being, the first member of the human race in whom humanity really comes to fulfillment, the first human being for whom to live was simply to love. And, of course, that is what human beings are for.

When we encounter Jesus, however we do it, in whatever way we encounter him, he strikes a chord in us; we resonate to him, because in him is the humanity that lies more hidden in us — the humanity of which we are afraid. He is the human being that we dare not be. He takes the risks of love which we recognize as risks and so for the most part don't take.

You see it seems to me that we human animals have never really come to terms with the extraordinary revolution which brought us into existence — the radical change from the animal which is simply part of nature, part of the great impersonal scheme of things, to the animal which, because it uses language, because it can express the world and express itself symbolically, to some extent stands over against nature; we stand over against our own nature; we are the animal that in one of the Genesis stories names all the animals in the world.

That revolution, that change from being part of nature to standing over against nature, like all revolutions up to now, seems to have been extraordinarily violent and destructive. All you would have seen if you had been an observer millions of years ago would have been the emergence of a particularly bloodthirsty and dangerous beast, a species that filled the earth and subdued it because it could use weapons and organize its killing.

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And yet this same terrifying beast is the first person; the first animal whose form of communication is personal, linguistic, the first animal that creates and depends on love, in this sense of *personal* love.

The very same developments that made man the first murderer made him also the first lover. That paradox has been explored in lots of poems, myths, and theologies ever since the human animal had leisure to reflect on himself; and some of these myths, of course, are used in the Bible, exploring the mystery of man's nature, the contradictions of his life, the way in which his aspirations to be himself, to be loving, to be loved, seem to twist themselves into evil and inhumanity. This most destructive of animals is self-destructive as well. He destroys just what he most wants. (Sorry to use 'he' all the time in this sexist way! Just hear it as 'she' as I go on!)

One way of putting that is to say that we settle for being less than human. The new animal recognizes that its very nature calls it to something new and frightening, calls it to communication, which means self-giving, self-abandonment, being at the disposal of others. The special character of this new species is that it fulfills itself, it finds its fulfillment, its happiness, its flourishing, only in giving itself up, in getting beyond the self. It fulfills itself in love, and that's frightening.

It means a venture into something unknown, an abandonment of what is familiar and safe, the loss of the personality you think is all complete and 'you', and a willingness to be reshaped in ways that can't be predicted beforehand, an obedience to a summons we don't understand and can't control.

Of course there is a delight and a wonder in this as the world becomes quite new and all sorts of unexpected possibilities in us appear. But there is also this terrible risk, and mostly we don't like to take the risk. Mostly we settle for what we are, what we've made of ourselves; we settle to be the person that *we've* achieved, *we've* constructed; we settle for our own self-image instead of being made in the image of God. We recognize the call to faith, but we are afraid and settle for ourselves instead — and that's *sin*.

Now that is my way of talking about the human condition. I am sure you have got other ways which are probably quite different, but I think we could recognize them all as a picture of the same sort of thing: the contradiction or paradox at the heart of human beings in the way that our greatest powers tend to turn against us, unless they are in the service of love, unless they are used in obedience to this mysterious call to stop being ourselves, to transcend ourselves. To put it this way: the human animal is the one that depends on love, depends on personal love. The animal can't in fact live without love, but it's also the animal that's frightened of love, frightened of the destructive creative power of love. We need and deeply want to be loved, and yet when we meet love it seems a threat, because it asks us to give ourselves up, abandon ourselves, and so when we meet love we kill it.

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Not all the time of course; there couldn't be any human community at all without some love, but still we're uneasy with it, and love has to disguise itself if it's going to survive. It is when love appears nakedly for what it is that we kill it, and that's why we crucified Christ. Jesus was the first man who had no fear of love at all. And this, we have come to see, in the history of the Church, is because he is himself constituted by love instead of being created.

You might put it this way: when Jesus looked into himself with the question 'Who am I?', he saw only the Father's love. This is what gave the total meaning of his life — this love which is the ultimate basis and meaning of the universe.

Jesus we say was not made, not created, but loved into being by the Father. Being loved into being is perhaps an odd notion, but we know how love can give life, give being to people. We know the difference between the person that is not loved and is therefore stunted, trapped, unable to be himself, unable to grow, the difference between that and the child or the person who is loved and therefore grows; the love is giving him growth, giving him being. He is able to be free and creative, able to be himself. That's some sort of image of the way the Father, abyss of love, brings forth, gives being to the Son, who is Jesus.

When we say that Jesus is divine we mean, I think, that his relationship to the Father is purely and simply one of love and nothing else; not a relationship of creature to creator, of made to maker — and it's because it's a relationship of love and nothing but love that it's one of absolute equality, because, it seems to me, love, *real* love, can only exist between equals.

In fact love is just the recognition of another's equality, in a way. Of course people who love each other may be unequal in all sorts of ways (different heights or ages, or different I.Q.'s or whatever). But that's because they're related in all sorts of ways besides their love. But where their love is concerned they are equal. So, one can say love is the recognition of the deep equality of the other. That's why love is different from kindness, caring, concern and so on, all of which can be relationships between superior and inferior. Love cannot be. It is in itself a recognition of equality.

So, since the relationship of Jesus to the Father is simply one of love and *nothing else*, it is just one of absolute equality and so we speak of the divinity of Jesus, equal to the Father, divine as is the Father. Everything that can be said of the Father can be said of the Son, except his relationship with the Son.

Now we know if we're lucky what it's like to be conscious that we're loved. We know the freedom and the joy and the release which this gives. Well Jesus' self-consciousness was like that but enormously more so. The growing up of Jesus, his increasing self-awareness, must have been his increasing awareness of being loved. And it is out of this that he produces his idea of the Father. And you might say the whole of

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his teaching was summed up in this: that the Father loved him and that his friends were invited into their love. This is the new image of God that he produces.

Of course, to claim that God loved him was to claim implicit equality with God. And that seemed pretty clear to some of his contemporaries and naturally enough it was blasphemy to good religious people, to religious leaders. But it wasn't really strictly for this blasphemy that Jesus died. The blasphemy was only the way the charge was formulated. Jesus died because his love was a threat, a threat both to the religious and civil establishment, both to the established church and to the colonial power. Now this threat that Jesus posed to society was only the writing large of the threat that he poses to each individual, to each of us.

The reaction to that threat by crucifixion was just the public face of the reaction we call *sin*. Because of this paradox of the human condition, the twist that's been given by the trauma in which the human race was born in its catastrophic change from being immersed in love-nature to standing back from, transcending, standing over against nature through our symbolic mode of awareness and mode of life, because of this paradoxical twist, all our attempts at community and love tend to become forms not of love but of domination.

Every human society is a human attempt to make love, to search for a way of living together. And the way that human animals live together is to love because the way we are together is through communication, through giving ourselves to each other, through shared symbols. But every system of communication that we evolve, every language we create (using language in the broad sense to cover every medium of communication) turns with this terrible inevitability into a system of domination, a way not of sharing life with another but of taking life from another. Every human society sooner or later becomes less and less a way of sharing life and more and more a way of taking life. In the end every human society becomes structured by violence.

The actual killing that characterizes our own society, the actual shedding of blood, is only the culmination, it seems to me, of the continual taking of life, the exploitation of the lives of others. If you live in a society where the minority class lives by slowly crushing the life out of the rest of the people, it is not surprising this erupts at regular intervals into mass killings, as it does. But, quite apart from war, our society depends in the end on violence and the fear of violence or on policemen and torturers and prisons within the country or on nuclear deterrents between countries.

And of course the society in which Jesus lived was no different in principle. It was a less sophisticated society. It didn't have the techniques and the machinery for violence that we have, and it was all on a smaller scale. But it was violence all the same. I suppose crucifixion might seem a relatively mild affair compared to what at this moment

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is being done to people under some military dictatorships, but crucifixion was favored by the Roman colonial power — I think especially for its symbolic value, for what it said. It was essentially death by public helplessness. If you rebelled against the power of Rome, or if as a slave you rebelled against the ruling class, you were tied or nailed to a stake and left for everyone to see you dying of pain and cramps and thirst and helplessness. If like Jesus you were lucky and they whipped you first with metal scourges, you lost blood and died more quickly. He died remarkably quickly in fact. Some people took days to die, and there you were, writhing powerlessly as a living and dying symbol of the power and domination of the ruling class.

This happened to Jesus because the love that came from him and created around him a community of love, a community without fear, was a threat to the powers and stability of society. And of course it really *was* a threat, and Jesus wasn't crucified by accident. The Romans knew what they were doing. After all they had with infinite patience and conscientious hard work built up the Empire, an area of law and order and with a kind of peace, the peace given as the world gives it, peace backed by terror, in which it was possible to have civilization. And this whole structure was threatened by what Rosemary Haughton once called 'a serious outbreak of love'. Jesus was a threat to the power of the religious leaders because, unlike a number of other rabbis at the time, he questioned the whole precarious structure of colonial power in Palestine. 'If we let him go on like this everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our Holy Place and our nation'.

Of course it's very important, it seems to me, to see that Jesus made no attempt to pose a threat politically. He did not belong to the Zealots, but there were of course Zealots among his followers. He was naturally attractive to them. He didn't pose a threat by attacking the politicians, but his teaching and practice were such that the politicians had to attack him, because his teaching unmasked the lies and the violence of his world. So he had to be got rid of.

So, my thesis is that Jesus died of being human. His very humanity meant that he put up no barriers, no defenses against others. He was vulnerable. He refused to evade the consequences of being human in our inhuman world, and that was why he died. He died purely and simply through being human. So, his death on the cross shows up, unmasks our world for what it is, shows up ourselves for what we are. We have made a world in which it is dangerous, it is fatal, to be human. And the cross shows that whatever else may be wrong with the world, whatever may be remedied by this or that reform, the ultimate thing wrong with it is the fear of love, the rejection of love — and this is what we call 'sin'.

So, the cross then shows up the sin of the world. In this sense we would want to say that the crucifixion of Jesus is an original sin, is the

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root and meaning of original sin. Now in one sense the root of original sin in one way, 'materially', as Aquinas would say, is what I've called the birth trauma of the human race, a twist in the human condition; but that is only evident as *sin* with the crucifixion. So, I want to say that the crucifixion is *formally* what original sin is. With the cross the alienation of man is seen as sin, and for that very reason is seen as something that can be forgiven.

You see from one point of view the cross is the sacrament of the sin of the world, the ultimate sin that's been made inevitable by the kind of world that we have made. From another point of view it's the sacrament of our forgiveness, because it's the ultimate sign of the love of God for us.

Let us go into that. The Father of course can only love the Son. The Son is the only possible object of the Father's love, because only in the Son does he find an equal to love. He can be kind and considerate to his creatures as such, but in so far as they are simply his creatures, he can't *give* himself, *abandon* himself to them in love, and that incidentally is why any Unitarian theory of God, any theory that denies for example the divinity of Christ, makes God in the end ultimately a supreme boss. It leaves us in the end with a master/slave relationship between God and his creatures. It leaves us in the end with an infantile God who hasn't grown up enough to be able to love. Such a God might be a kind and indulgent boss, but he remains essentially a master of slaves, and I think that modern atheism is first of all a rejection of that God — a God before whom we are ultimately slaves even if we are well-treated ones. Modern atheism, I think since Nietzsche, rejects the idea that the deepest truth about man can be that he is a slave.

Now it seems to me that traditional Christianity, taking the Trinity seriously, rejects that too. In the Christian tradition the deepest truth about people is that they are loved. But that's only possible not because God could love the creature as such (he couldn't), but because we've been taken up into the love he has for the Son, into the relationship the Father has with the Son. God loves us because we are in Christ. We are in the Son and love with the same love that the Son loves, because the Son became incarnate, one of us, became human. It's because the Son of God became man that we are able to share into that relationship of love between the Father and Son that we call the Holy Spirit. And we should notice that because of this we share into the equality that the Son has with the Father. We too are divinized.

We were buried therefore with Christ by baptism, to death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life, not just newness of human life but this new life which is divinity, which is the Holy Spirit. God's love for us therefore is expressed and made possible by the Son becoming human, but the supreme expression of this humanity is, as we have seen, the cross. The cross is the sign that Jesus really was human, the first really human

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being who lived and died sheerly through love. And that is why the cross, as well as being the sign of our sin, unmasking us for what we're really like, is *also* the sign of forgiveness, the sign that the Father loves us unconditionally whatever we're like — even though we're sinners. Whether we are sinners or not doesn't matter to him, he still loves us.

Finally, the cross is the only prayer known to Christians. Let me explain that. On the cross Jesus finally abandons himself to the Father. His whole life work has ended in complete failure. It looked very optimistic at first, the crowds gathering to him to hear all these attractive things which people felt they needed to hear and felt so enthusiastic about, but now all that's been shown up for what it is, as superficial. His followers have deserted him; he has been denied by his closest follower he's been arrested and condemned; he's achieved nothing at all. All that initial apparent success, crowds that used to listen to him are now howling 'crucify him, crucify him'. He has got utterly nowhere in his life's work, in his attempt to set up a little commune of love where people could relate to each other as human beings, without domination and submission. All that is gone, totally collapsed around him. But still that is the mission he has from the Father, to be human and to show humanity at work. He won't compromise; he won't use the weapons of the world to defeat the world.

He accepts in fact his failure, recognizes that he has been able to do nothing; from now on, well, it's just the fact that it's the Father's mission, it's in the Father's hands, he's been able to do nothing. He accepts failure in obedience to his mission from the Father; he's *not* going to establish the Kingdom. Jesus established nothing, founded nothing, did nothing. He's not going to establish the Kingdom, he's not going to transform the world; colonial society goes on just as before, the same kinds of bitterness and meanness and hatreds go on as before. He's not going to succeed in anything. His death is simply obedience to his mission, and it's in this death that his prayer is abandonment of the whole lot to the Father.

His death *is* his prayer to the Father to accomplish this mission his Father has given him through his, Jesus', failure. He has not been able to do it through any success of Jesus, it's a prayer to do it through his failure. And of course the answer to that prayer is the Resurrection, when the Father through the risen Christ *does* accomplish Christ's mission — through transforming Jesus into the *risen* Jesus. Then through the risen Christ the Spirit is poured out on all people. Or, to put it in another way, the relationship between Father and Son, the relationship of eternal love, is extended to everyone.

On the cross Jesus casts himself upon the Father, and that is his prayer. It is not as though, Jesus having failed, the Father works instead. No, it's that the answer to the prayer of Jesus is that the Father transforms him so that now he does work through him

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Before his crucifixion Jesus tried and really failed to be a source of the Spirit of love to his companions. With a little bit of success he gathered these apostles round himself, but they failed on the way, they didn't get it. But now as risen from the dead he is the source of the Spirit to all people, not just this small group of friends, and finally he will transform the world into a community of love — into the Kingdom of God.

Now this exchange between Father and Son, the Son's prayer which is his crucifixion and the Father's response which is the Resurrection, that is Christian prayer and there isn't any other. Christian prayer is never simply the appeal by the creature to the Creator. The cross and resurrection, you might say, are the eternal dialogue between Father and Son as projected into history, what it looks like in history — that's what the eternal relationship of divine love looks like when it is projected on to the screen of our distorted world. If you want to know what the Trinity looks like, look at the crucifixion and Resurrection.

All our prayer is some kind of sharing into that dialogue, the dialogue represented by the Cross; *all* our prayer — that is the only prayer there is. Principally of course the mass itself is our sacrament of Calvary. But not only the mass; all our prayer is only prayer when it's sharing into the sacrifice of Calvary. It is only prayer when we're talking to God on these terms of equality in which the Son talks to Him.

The only relationship of prayer is of Son to Father, and not of creature to Creator. Our prayer is never simply the voice of the creature addressing the Creator, it's always the voice of the Son addressing the Father. And for us, that is in our history, that means Christ on the cross. It's by our sharing into this sacrificial prayer that we entered into our divine life, and we take part in the mystery of the Trinity, we speak to God not just as creatures but as sharing His divine life.

THIRD TALK – *The Easter Vigil*

Now we come to Easter night and the end of the celebration of the Resurrection.

It is of course quite natural to see the three days as three acts in a kind of passion play, following the story of the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ as three successive events. And of course that's quite a legitimate way of seeing it all. But if we look at the history of the Holy Week, if we look at how the liturgy of Easter developed, then we get a rather different picture.

In the first place the Easter Vigil which we celebrate tonight isn't just Act 3 of a sequence. It's the oldest and was for quite a long time the *only* celebration of Easter. From the very earliest days that we know about, the night of the resurrection was celebrated quite apart from any commemoration of Thursday or Friday.

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So the Easter Vigil is complete in itself; it's not just a happy ending tagged on to the mystery of the Last Supper and of the cross. Actually each of these really is complete in itself. Perhaps we might understand this better if we jump right into the middle of the celebration of the Vigil.

As you know, the Vigil is in three bits. There is the Feast of Light — all that bonfire stuff — in which we celebrate the coming of light out of darkness; the new fire, the paschal candle, the light of the risen Christ illuminates the Church and the world. That's followed by a celebration of Baptism, and finally, the celebration of the Eucharist.

Now the celebration of Baptism is preceded by a series of readings of which the first, of course, is the creation story of Genesis 1, and, like all the other readings, it has been chosen as a baptismal reading.

The liturgical reformers associated with Vatican II, seeing the pivotal importance of the Vigil's central point of the Church's liturgical year, quite rightly wanted to make it more available to people. They hoped that it would become for all Christians *the* great celebration. Everyone would, as far as possible, take part in it. If they took part in nothing else they'd be there for this.

Now the results, as is well known, have been very disappointing. In this country and in Ireland partly it's been simply due to inertia. Whatever we say or write or preach, the tradition, as Holy Week, centers on Good Friday afternoon. This is still extremely strong, and for a very large number of people the Easter Vigil is still 'Midnight Mass' at Easter, a kind of pale imitation of Midnight Mass at Christmas. And that's a disappointment.

But then I think the Vatican II reforms are partly responsible for this. In the interests of making the Vigil more available they shortened it, and that in itself, of course, was no bad thing; but in shortening it they very badly impoverished it. The magnificent restoration of the Easter Vigil in 1956, which I think was a really superb piece of liturgy, has been reduced, not to a mere shadow, but to something very different from the original service. And by hindsight I think we can now see that if the Vigil was to take a hold on people, if it was to form the centre of their consciousness, the central image for them of the meaning of their existence, it couldn't afford to lose its magic.

This to a great extent is what has happened in the 1970 Roman Missal. The *old* Easter Vigil, which two or three of you may be old enough to remember, was a very ramshackle affair, and its meaning was very badly obscured by the preposterous practice of celebrating it on Holy Saturday morning instead of at night. But still its strange power lay in its complexity and above all in the way it related the Christian mystery to very deep human things, in a visual and almost tactual way, to the very strange things lurking at the bottom of our human consciousness. Put as simply as possible, the old Easter Vigil was a very

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sexy affair, and the modern one looks as if Mrs. Mary Whitehouse has been getting at it!

The 1956 restoration, which brought, as you will remember, the Easter Vigil back to its proper place in the middle of the night, really retained all the riches of the old liturgy. This was, I think, the greatest liturgical creation of the century, and we've thrown it away — thrown it away about fourteen years later, in 1970. And of course in the English-speaking world we suffered double, because not only has the text of 1956 been cut down and bowdlerized, but the English translation we've been officially provided with has carried the process even further. I do think it is tragic that we are now in danger of losing the full meaning of the Easter celebration that was briefly restored to us in 1956. Instead, we've got a cut price ceremony tailored to the imagination, or the lack of imagination, of some Euro-theologians, and filtered down to us by a committee dedicated to putting the whole thing into a kind of suburban English which is guaranteed not to offend anybody by violence or sex or culture.

But to return to the Easter Liturgy. The first of the readings about Baptism is, as I said, the creation myth from Genesis 1. 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be light" and there was light. And God separated the light from the darkness'.

Here are all the fundamental images of the Easter Vigil — the spirit of creativity and fertility on the waters, and the light and the darkness. Now this poem about creation represents God as making the world and all its inhabitants in a week. Fortunately Biblical apologists have long ago stopped telling us that really means six long periods of time, or geological epochs or whatever. They have stopped alleging that it was a primitive and unsophisticated way of explaining how the world came into being. We now know that the poem was written in what was certainly not a primitive but rather a decadent period of civilization, and of course the poet meant exactly what he said.

He is talking about a week and his meaning depends on this image of a week. The first and most obvious point is that God is represented as finishing his creation in six days and then resting on the Sabbath. The Hebrew Sabbath rest is interpreted in this poem as a celebration of and even a sharing in God's completion of his creation. It represents something finished, something consummated.

The Hebrews you know, did not reckon their days from midnight to midnight, but from evening to evening. Of course we still have a vestige of that in celebrating First Vespers of Sunday on Saturday evening. And any of you who have Jewish friends will know that the Sabbath begins on Friday evening and lasts until Saturday evening.

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Now this creation poem has provided a permanent symbolism for each day of the week, or rather each night of the week — a symbolism made use of by Christ himself, by the evangelists, and by the liturgy.

Let us see one detail of what this is. The work of creation begins on the first day, that is to say Saturday night. This is when the Spirit of God moves over the waters, fertilizes them, and also when God created light and separates it from darkness. The work of creation is finished on the sixth day, and the seventh day, Friday night onwards, is the day of rest. Now that of course is the point of Christ's death on Good Friday. Like God at the end of his creation, he rests on Friday night. 'It is consummated', he said. Throughout the Sabbath Day he rests in the tomb. This point is stressed of course by John — the bodies mustn't remain on the cross on the Sabbath day. John, of course, has the crucifixion at the beginning of the Sabbath. What he wants bring out is the parallel between the creative work which Christ did in his passion and the work which God did in creation. What Christ was bringing about was the *new* creation, and this appears in the resurrection.

After the Sabbath of course we come again to Saturday night, on which we see once more the night of the beginning of creation, and *that* is when the resurrection occurs. The day of the resurrection is the first day of the new week. A new first day, as the Fathers of the Church used to say, it's the eighth day of the week. New beginning of creation follows on completion of the old. And that is what we celebrate in the Vigil on Easter Saturday — the coming of the eighth day, the New Creation, the New Era.

And from very earliest times this is what the Church celebrated every Sunday, or every night between Saturday and Sunday. The early Jewish Christians, after observing the Sabbath on the Saturday, would gather to observe the feast of the Lord's resurrection on the Saturday night, or Sunday morning. First the Sabbath and then the celebration of the resurrection.

Of course, in spite of the Lord's Day Observance Society, and in spite of the Ulster moralists who, you may remember, put padlocks on the children's swings on Sundays, the Christian Sunday is something quite distinct from the Sabbath. The first man who thought of combining the two and making Sunday into a day of rest was the Emperor Constantine, of ambiguous memory. When he combined the two, at first, Sunday was simply the day on which the law courts did not operate, and that was because he thought it was inappropriate to torture people on the day of resurrection.

So, the Easter Vigil has no immediate connection in itself with Holy Thursday and Good Friday. It is the Christian Sunday celebration writ large. The early Christians began by meeting each week on the day of the Lord for the reading of the scriptures and the breaking of bread, the celebration of the Lord's Supper, and fairly soon, we don't know quite how soon, the great Lord's Day, at the time of Passover, the anniversary

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of the Resurrection became a special feast. And that was the Easter celebration, the Easter Vigil.

The rest of Holy Week developed from special ceremonies in Jerusalem connected with the Holy Places, or what were thought to be the Holy Places. And that really was something a bit like a passion play. The commemoration of events of the passion and cross, the veneration of what was believed to be the cross itself. And those celebrations in Jerusalem were so exciting, so dramatic and impressive. We know all about them from the letters of a very lively, enterprising nun called Egeria, who described them in very interesting letters written to her community. Anyway, they were so impressive that they spread throughout the Church and gradually formed the Holy Week ceremonies which we now have.

Now I have said all this not to give a lecture on liturgical history, but because it raises the question, a rather important question, about how we understand the Resurrection.

Are we to see the Easter Vigil as complete in itself or as Act 3 in a series? And similarly, are we to see the Resurrection as something complete in itself or as the final act of a series? A sort of sequence — he was crucified, he died, he was buried; on the third day he rose from the dead. How exactly are we to understand this?

We might of course, and this is the easiest thing to do, see it as a simple sequence of events. But a meditation on the liturgy of Holy Week may suggest other thoughts. The Easter Vigil, we might think, is *not* the commemoration of the last of a series of events but a celebration of the meaning of the whole series.

It's as though we had a passion play which re-enacted the events of the Passion, and then *another* play which enacted the meaning of the whole thing for us. That's another way of looking at it.

And this brings to mind a question much discussed today among Catholic scholars. Was the resurrection as a matter of historical fact a distinct event from the death of Christ? Now I want to stress that this is something debated among Catholic scholars, because perhaps one's first instinct might be to say, 'Well, if you don't think the Resurrection happened quite distinctly from the crucifixion then you aren't a Catholic at all. You're denying the reality of the resurrection'. But without a doubt there are good Catholics, as loyal and devout as any others, who do not think as a matter of history there was an event called the resurrection which took place sometime after the death of Christ.

To put my own cards on the table I don't agree with these scholars. But I think they are perfectly good Catholics all the same.

I do think that the Resurrection was a distinct event from the death of Jesus, but not a distinct event of the same sort. I think it was an event whose whole point was to show the meaning of the cross. There is a picture of the resurrection in the cross.

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Of course it is the evangelist John who comes nearest to identifying the cross and the resurrection. For him they are both the lifting up of Jesus, and he doesn't want to make it whether he means lifting up on the cross or the lifting up of the Resurrection. For him they are conflated. They are both the hour of Jesus, the dominating theme throughout John's Gospel — the hour. And that hour is the hour of crucifixion and resurrection, all one thing. John brings together the lifting up and the glorification in power. The whole operation of Jesus' ministry is all in one.

Whereas St Luke you will remember, in Acts, has the sending down of the Spirit at Pentecost, days after the passion of Jesus. John, if you remember from yesterday's reading of the Passion, has, Jesus *on the cross* breathing forth his Spirit. The coming of the Spirit in John is brought into the same contact as the cross.

Now I don't myself think that John had the slightest intention of denying a historical sequence of events, any more than he had any intention of denying all those miracles and all those parables that he never mentioned. It's just that his interests are different. John is concerned with the *meaning* of what occurred. Of course, so are all the other New Testament writers. None of them are writing straight biography, but John conveys this meaning by the deliberate structure he gives to the life of Jesus.

In any case we must try to be clear that the cross and the resurrection are the one mystery, whatever view we hold about the historical events of the time (and that is an enormously complicated and difficult question), we can only tease out what we think happened given the evidence we have. But whether we think of a historical sequence or we don't, we must be clear (and the New Testament is very clear on this) that the cross and the resurrection are the one mystery, and that we misunderstand either of them if we take them in isolation. Of course, the cross is primarily about the failure of Jesus, about the collapse of his whole mission and about his identification with the most miserable of people. Because of the cross, whatever our sufferings, whatever betrayals we have to face, and whatever tragedy or misery we are caught up in, we can say not only that God knows and understands and pities us, but that he knows about it from personal experience, that he has compassion in the literal sense — i.e., suffering with. It's not just that he is all understanding and so on, but that he himself has had to go through this. He has suffered with us. Because of the cross God reaches down as far as we can go. Because of the cross God is not the kindly but superior boss up there. He is a fellow sufferer with us, one of us. Because of the cross we can have pity on God, we can be sorry for him, and that's fantastic.

This is something terribly well understood by, for example, Latin American Indians with their tradition of intensive concentration on the suffering Christ, the suffering God. It's an aspect of popular religion

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that gets treated rather patronizingly by Europeans. We say it's a vestige of their old paganism and so on. But I think when it really begins to make its impact on Latin American theology, liberation theology in particular, there are altogether astonishing results.

The cross then is primarily about the defeat of Christ, but, of course, it's also a sign of triumph. In his preface to the Restored Holy Week Liturgy, Cardinal Cicognani speaks of the cross as '*nostrae redemptionis trophaeum'*, the *trophy* of our redemption, and the words are singularly well chosen. A trophy is a sign of victory, but more than that. Originally, a trophy was something very definite. It was a wooden post or stake to which you fastened the spoils that you had taken from the enemy. And that is *exactly* what the cross is. Nailed to this post is a human being who has been wrested from the enemy, from death and sin. '*Regnavit a ligno Deus'* we sing. God rules, reigns, from the cross. We would misunderstand the cross if we did not see that it is the sign of power and triumph of God and man over death. The popular Western practice which makes the crucifix the central Christian symbol, I mean the actual crucifix which is a representation of Jesus dying on the cross, this practice seems to me absolutely sound. It's an image of the weakness of God and the foolishness of God and the helplessness of God, which is greater than the strength and wisdom of men.

So, the cross then is an ambiguous symbol, a symbol both of failure and of triumph, or rather it is a symbol of triumph *through* the failure of Christ. The kind of triumph it shows is a triumph of love; and to love is precisely not to exercise power and domination; it is to be vulnerable, to be able to let others be. And this, says the cross, is what the power of God really is: a kind of vulnerability.

St. Paul, I am convinced, didn't mean, when he said that the weakness of God is stronger than the strength of men, he didn't mean that God is so strong that even his weakness is stronger than our strength. No, he meant the power of God *looks like weakness,* and weakness, the weakness not of powerlessness, but the weakness of love, is our best picture of the power of God. From creation right through to redemption, the power of God is exercised not in manipulating and interfering with things but with letting them be, because the power of God is the power of love.

I could go on all night, but for just one minute let us get back to the cross and the resurrection. What you give someone when you give them love, is the gift of yourself. And what does that mean? What it means is you give them space. You give them a place where they can be themselves. To give someone love is to give him himself, to give her herself, to let him be.

You see, impersonal things, chairs and tables and so on have no space, no emptiness round them. They're hedged and humped around by other things. When you come to the end of this thing there is another thing immediately outside itself so to speak. There is no space in the

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impersonal world, just some things are thinner than others. And we can be similarly hedged and cribbed and cabined and confined by things. What gives us elbow room, what gives us space to grow and become ourselves is the love that comes to us from another. When you are loved you are being given a space to expand in.

In this sense we receive ourselves at the hands of others. Of course we receive ourselves in many ways from the hands of others. We are born of others and so on. But our growth too, as persons, we receive at the hands of others, because it's only others who can give us that space in which to grow. It isn't a space we can just take for granted. Or at least we can take it precisely as granted, because it is granted to us by someone who loves us.

We receive ourselves then at the hands of others. It's because of the parents' love, if any, that a child can grow and become himself or herself, because he or she has been given space to grow in. To give love is to give this precious gift of nothing, *space*, so that the beloved can be himself or herself. To give love is to let be.

Now the power of God is pre-eminently the power to let things be. The creative power is just the power that because it makes things be what they are, because it makes persons be who they are, cannot interfere with creatures. Obviously creating doesn't make any difference to things. It lets things be themselves. Creating is simply and solely letting things be, and our love is a faint image of that.

So, the power of God expresses itself in hiding itself, in weakness — in the gentleness of silence. So the cross does *not* show us some temporary weakness of God which was cancelled out by the resurrection. It says something permanent about God — that the power of God is love, therefore, as expressed in history, is suffering.

We see the cross then from both sides, as the failure of Jesus and the triumph that comes through this failure; it's an ambiguous symbol. Now it's just as important to see the paradox and the ambiguity in the resurrection as we see it on the cross. The cross is not straightforward failure and the resurrection is not straightforward triumph. Just as the cross is primarily a sign of failure, so the resurrection is primarily a sign of victory and triumph, but not an unambiguous triumph. And that's brought out very clearly in the stories of the appearances of the risen Christ.

You see the pure triumph aspect of the Resurrection belongs to the Last Day — to the Parousia, to the final consummation when we all share in Christ's resurrection. But that will not be in any sense an event in history. It will be the end of it. It could no more be an event enclosed by history than creation could be an event enclosed by time. But when we look at the resurrection as within history, when we look, that is to say, at Christ's resurrection from the tomb, it's ambiguous. May I just say something a bit enigmatic here? We can think of Christ's resurrection, if we like, as the *first* resurrection; the first fruits of the dead, the

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first resurrection that is going to be followed by ours when we will join him. That is one pretty obvious way of seeing it. Or we can think of this resurrection and ours as the Resurrection, the victory of love, seen either within history, that's Christ's resurrection, or beyond history, and that's our resurrection. Christ's resurrection from the tomb is just what the resurrection of mankind, the final consummation of human history, looks like when projected within history itself, just as the cross is what God's creative love looks like when projected within history itself. But that's all a bit enigmatic, and we must leave it there for the moment.

I have said that the resurrection from the tomb is ambiguous. Let me explain what I mean. I mean it's both a presence and an absence in Christ. People who want to insist that resurrection doesn't mean resuscitation, doesn't mean that the cross is cancelled out because Jesus comes back to life again, are pointing to just this kind of thing.

The resurrection is not a simple thing any more than the cross is a simple thing. It's both a presence and an absence of Jesus. It is of course essential to the Catholic tradition that the resurrection of Christ is bodily, that is to say that it is Christ himself, this bodily human being who is risen. It's not just, for example that some thought of Christ, some inspiring memory of him, lives on in the minds of his followers. The message of the resurrection is that Christ is alive and that he is with us. '*Resurrexi et adhuc tecum sum'* — 'I have risen and I am with you'.

Now perhaps a word here about bodies 'being with'. We can be wrong about bodies because of our peculiar education. We are so used to thinking of bodies traveling at a uniform velocity, 37 feet per second, or accelerating to whatever, that we think of bodies as things, as objects. We need recalling to what in fact bodies are like.

Think of a telephone. There's a telephone on the table in front of you and it's one of the things on the table. It occupies a little bit of your world, of your visual space; actual space — a thing you look at. You dust it or don't You can do things to it.

Now what happens when the telephone rings? You pick it up and you start talking, and when you do that, then your telephone ceases to be a thing in front of you, part of your world, and becomes a means of communication with somebody, a means by which you are with another person. In doing that, in a way, it disappears.

A telephone just as an object on a table is something to look at, one of the things around you that you see, but once you're talking on the telephone (unless it goes wrong, in which case you look at it, shake and so on), if it's working properly, you're not conscious of talking to a telephone. True, you can do your physics and find out that what's happening is that vibrations are taking place in your throat and that's making the thing here vibrate and that's doing things to the magnetic field, etc., but your actual *experience* is not of doing something to a telephone which is thereby doing something to somebody at the other

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end of the line, but an experience of talking to the person concerned. And the telephone itself is not an object for you, it's the *way* in which you are with another person.

Now I mentioned telephones, because it seems to me just the other way round with your bodies. A telephone is something which is most of the time a thing around you, an object, which just sometimes becomes a medium of communication with the rest of the world. Now your body, it seems to me, is normally experienced as your medium of communication, and only occasionally experienced as a thing, an object, particularly when something goes wrong with it. When you drop a hammer on your toe, you look at your toe, you look at your toe with some concern for your body as matter; but ordinarily the way in which you have consciousness of being bodily, consciousness, that is, of your body, is of your body as your way of being present to the world. That's the way you're aware of having your body. Five minutes ago you were all perfectly aware of having left elbows, but you weren't actually thinking about your left elbows; probably very few of you were. Your body belongs to you as the way in which you are present to the world, although it can be treated as an object too. The body is your primary way of being present, way of communication, and it's the source of all other forms of communication.

Telephones are only media of communication because they are being used by a body. Without human bodies they would just be things lying around. The body uses all other forms of communication: telephones, writing, words, the lot. Nothing uses the body; the body is the source of communication. It's because it's the source of communication that we say it is alive. We say it has a soul, which means it's alive.

The body then is the source of all communicativeness, all the personness of the world. It's because of the body that we make signs and symbols, and it seems to me therefore that all signs and symbols are in some way commensurate with our bodies. That is obvious enough in the case of music, painting, building, sculpture, and so on. They're directly and fairly readily relatable to your actual bodies. Less directly is it so in the case of words, though poetry, the primary use of words, is bodily. The effect of poetry has to do with bodily rhythms. Prose escapes from this and that's one of the oddities of prose, one of the reasons why we can dehumanize ourselves in prose.

However, I'm not engaged in a lecture on aesthetics, so I'll skip that. I merely want to stress that the actual human body itself is the way in which we are in communication with each other; and not only in the sense that the body creates signs, but all kinds of communication. Civilization just is a network of communication between human bodies. It is one of the peculiarities of the human body. That unlike other animals we can extend our bodies outside our skin, and the city is nothing but the human body extended outside the skin of the human animal.

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So, the body then is our presence. Primarily it's our way of being present. The special thing about Jesus in Palestine was that even his bodily presence had an effect on people, and bodily presence of course included his speaking. In his presence people felt accepted, and because they knew that they were accepted and forgiven, they were able to accept each other. That is how Jesus did create what we could call a little commune of human living around him. In his bodily presence this was possible for a few people.

Because our body is primarily our way of being present, our fundamental way of communication, absence means always bodily absence, or nearly always bodily absence, physically being away from. Love requires bodily presence. Speech in itself is of course bodily presence. We don't actually have to be touching all the time. There are all sorts of ways in which we can share bodily presence with each other. But when the beloved is away, we long for presence, for some kind of bodily communication. That is why we write letters and make telephone calls. These are ways of bringing us into the bodily presence of the person that we love.

Now the resurrection of Christ first of all means that we are in his presence — his bodily presence. And this, of course, is what we celebrate and symbolize in the sacraments, centering on the eucharistic sacrament of Christ's body. In the sacraments we sacramentally come in contact with the body of Christ, touch the body of Christ. Our bodies are linked with his.

The resurrection of Jesus, then, is first of all saying that he is present to us, and we celebrate this in sacrament. We celebrate it in the New Testament with the stories of the appearance of Jesus and so on. They are all ways of celebrating that Christ is alive, bodily alive, and therefore with us. But, and this is the point I want to make, we are only in contact sacramentally, through our ritual signs, through a special depth within our intercommunion with each other. And that's an ambiguous way of being present. Our resurrection at the end of time means that we shan't be sacramentally but unambiguously present to Christ, but in the meantime, his presence is also a kind of absence.

Notice how in all the stories of Christ's appearances after the resurrection, he is presented as very differently present in the body; he eats and drinks with his disciples, and so on. He asks Thomas to touch him. And yet it's not — and this is just as clear — it's not an ordinary bodily presence. It's very clear in the Thomas story. In fact Thomas *doesn't* touch him. The disciples, for example, sometimes don't recognize him. Mary Magdalen doesn't recognize Jesus.

There's an ambiguity about this bodily presence. He's not just come back to life as he was before the resurrection. He has come to life but it is a new kind of bodily life, a new depth of bodiliness. If we see the body as we should, as the way we are present to each other, then we can truly say that the risen Christ is actually more bodily than we are,

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because he is more present now to all mankind than he was in Galilee. There he was in the presence of a few friends and his enemies, now he is present to us all.

It's this presence that we now celebrate, this new kind of bodily life that we are sharing; but a bodily life that's not yet obvious. It's ambiguous. It's only made visible sacramentally. That's why when the disciples met the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus, for example, they didn't recognize him even though they were drawn to him by his exposition of the Scriptures. It was only when they stopped for the night to share a meal with him that of course they knew him in the breaking of the bread. It's in the breaking of the bread, the Eucharist, that we know the Christ who is with us. 'And immediately he vanished from their sight'. That Emmaus story is a sort of comment on all the resurrection stories.

Once we've recognized the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, in our celebration of our love for each other, there is no need for any other appearance. We are to find the risen Christ find our own risen life, in that very thing we celebrate in the Eucharist, that is to say our unity with each other and with all mankind, our love for each other. As soon as the disciples at Emmaus had got to the point of seeing where Christ really is, in the celebration of love for each other, then the appearance things don't matter, and Jesus vanishes from their sight.

You see we encounter the risen Christ, so the Gospels tell us, in two ways, in the visible signs of the sin of the world, and in the visible signs of the love of God — two great realities.

We encounter him in the poor and in the sacraments. The visible signs of the sin of the world are the poor, the oppressed, the homeless, the naked, the hungry, who need our help. Their very existence, if we turn our eyes to it, unmasks our world for what it is, a world structured by sin. In men we find Christ in judgment on our world. It's to these of course that he refers when he talks about the judgment. Take the point of that story in Matthew. He says something like if you want to see what the judgment means, in the story of God judging the world, look at the naked, the homeless, the poor; *that* is where Christ is judging. So there we have the visible risen Christ, visible in the form of judgment in the poor.

The visible signs of the *love* of God are in the sacraments, in which we celebrate the coming of the Kingdom of love which contrasts with our world and into which our world is being transformed. So the other way in which Christ is visible is in our celebration of our friendship, love, kindness to each other.

This kingdom to which we are dedicated in our baptism, which is founded on the resurrection of Christ, is a life in which we will encounter Christ neither in the poor nor in the sacraments. For there will be neither poverty nor religion in the coming kingdom. The Church will have withered away, poverty will be gone. Then we will be fully

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and bodily present to the risen Christ, sharing fully in his transformed humanity and in his divinity for eternity.

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