The Incarnation as the Fundamental Mystery for Sacramentality in the Catholic Tübingen School

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Abstract
This article reveals part of the rich but unknown liturgical thought of the nineteenth-century Catholic Tübingen School. In the reflections of these German theologians on liturgy and especially the eucharist, the incarnation plays a vital role. Johann Sebastian Drey considers the incarnation as the “fundamental mystery” of the Christian faith. In this article, the importance of the incarnation for Drey’s liturgical thinking and his reflections on sacramentality are explored. Attention is also given to Drey’s student, Johann Adam Möhler. The crucial role of the incarnation for his ecclesiology has already been proven, but this article demonstrates the role of the incarnation in his liturgical and sacramental reflections. In his writings on the eucharist, he makes an interesting connection between what he calls “ongoing incarnation” and the idea of theosis. At the end of the article some contemporary liturgical theological perspectives are developed on the relevance of (ongoing) incarnation and theosis.

Keywords
Incarnation, Catholic Tübingen School, liturgy, eucharist, Johann Sebastian Drey, Johann Adam Möhler, Romanticism

I. Introduction
To date, the German Romantic period remains largely unexplored in liturgical studies and sacramental theology. At most, liturgical handbooks and surveys mention it in

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passing, and many historical overviews quickly jump from the Reformation and the Council of Trent to the Liturgical Movement as if nothing interesting happened during the centuries in between. An intensive study, however, of the works of some Tübingen scholars from the perspective of the theology of the eucharist and the liturgy reveals a number of interesting and noteworthy topics. In this article, I will focus on the thought of two protagonists of the Catholic Tübingen School. The first focus will be Johann Sebastian Drey, the founder of this highly creative school of thought at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Then, I will discuss the thought of Johann Adam Möhler, student of Drey and probably the most famous of the Tübingen scholars due to Yves Congar’s reception of Möhler’s views on history, Christology, and the church.

In this article, the focus lies on the concept of the incarnation and its meaning for the liturgical ideas of the Tübingen theologians. First, I will explore the importance of the incarnation for Drey’s liturgical thinking and his reflections on sacramentality. According to Drey, the incarnation is the “fundamental mystery” (Grundgeheimnis) of the Christian faith. For Möhler, the crucial role of the incarnation in view of his ecclesiology has been proven, but in this article, the role of the incarnation in his liturgical and sacramental reflections will be demonstrated. In his writings on the eucharist, he connects the idea of “ongoing incarnation” with the idea of theosis. By way of conclusion, I will give a short evaluation of their thought and develop some contemporary reflections on the relationship between liturgy and sacramentality.

2. Incarnation and the Liturgy in the Writings of J. S. Drey

I will demonstrate the role of the incarnation in Drey’s thought in two steps. First, I will briefly explain the position of the liturgy in Drey’s theological system. Second, I will present Drey’s interpretation of the classic distinction between the essentials and the non-essentials of the liturgy and the sacraments. These two steps are needed to come to a full understanding of the incarnation in Drey’s reflections on liturgy and sacramentality.

2.1. Doctrine, Worship, and Polity

It is fascinating, and for nineteenth-century theology remarkable, to see what position the liturgy has in Drey’s general theological system. In his famous Brief Introduction to the Study of Theology, Drey clearly describes how there are three crucial elements in theological reflection, which at the same time make up the essential structure of the church itself. It concerns what he calls: Lehrbegriff, Cultus, and Verfassung, translated by Himes as doctrine, worship, and polity. The study of these three belongs to what Drey calls “Scientific

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2. Johann Sebastian von Drey, Brief Introduction to the Study of Theology. With Reference to the Scientific Standpoint and the Catholic System, trans. Michael J. Himes, vol. 1, Notre Dame Studies in Theology (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994) §272. For this work, I refer to the paragraph numbers, which makes it easier to retrieve the original German text as well, recently edited and republished: Johann Sebastian Drey, Kurze Einleitung in das Studium der Theologie mit Rücksicht auf den wissenschaftlichen Standpunkt und das katholische System (Tübingen 1819), ed. Max Seckler, vol. 3, Nachgelassene Schriften Johann Sebastian Drey (Tübingen: Francke, 2007).
Theology.” For Drey, doctrine, worship, and the organization of church life are strongly intertwined: “the religious life of the church, consists in what worship clearly demonstrates and causes, namely that what is proclaimed in doctrine as an idea here becomes reality.” Hence, Drey tries to reconnect liturgy and theological reflection:

[until now the theory of worship has been divided into two branches; that which deals with the essence of worship—sacraments—has been included under the system of doctrine . . ., and the other, which contains the theory of the non-essentials—ritual—has been treated under so-called liturgics. The distinction between essential and non-essential seems to justify this division. But science which maintains the ideal of a complete theory of Christian worship, the nature of liturgics which can only treat all non-essential elements within it by reference to essential elements, and even accidental circumstances, all encourage the reintegration of what has been divided, i.e. a complete scientific study of everything which pertains to Christian worship.]

From this quotation, it seems that this nineteenth-century scholar was only a small step away from what, through the work of Alexander Schmemann and the Liturgical Movement, has become known as “liturgical theology.” It is a clear appeal to recognize the vital role of the liturgy as a *locus theologicus*, and a plea for the reintegration of the *lex orandi* in the academic and scientific study of theology.

### 2.2. Essentials and Non-essentials

In his theory of the liturgy and the sacraments, Drey refers to the scholastic difference between the essentials and the non-essentials of sacraments and liturgy, which was also mentioned in the quotation above. Striking, however, in Drey’s reflection on the liturgy is the importance of the non-essential liturgical elements in relation to sacramental theory, which he wants to reunite with each other. Although his definition of the non-essential or *außerwesentliche* aspect of the liturgy is not crystal-clear—referring to it he uses “signs,” “ritual,” “liturgy,” and “worship” interchangeably—Drey describes it in close relation to the *substantia sacramenti*. For example, he states that “the sign is actually a symbolic act which, for the sake of its significance, must be continuously present, like the sacrament.” Further on, Drey describes liturgy or worship as the (external) expression of the essence and the mystery of the sacramental transcendental act which is beyond full understanding, stating that this “transcendental act is bound to the symbolic action.”

In light of the importance of the non-essential sacramental aspects, Drey gives some anthropological and philosophical arguments on the one hand and develops a theological argumentation on the other, the latter referring to the incarnation. These arguments can

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3. In Drey’s *Brief Introduction*, the theory of worship belongs to the “Specialized Science” (chapter II.B), studying the “System of the Christian Church” (chapter II.B.2).
4. Drey, *Brief Introduction*, §275.
5. Drey, *Brief Introduction*, §283.
6. See, amongst others, Joris Geldhof, “Liturgical Theology,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion* (2015), http://religion.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-14.
7. Drey, *Brief Introduction*, §274.
8. Drey, *Brief Introduction*, §276.
be found in an article published in the first volume of the *Theologische Quartalschrift*, co-founded by Drey in 1819, the same year in which he published his *Brief Introduction to Theology*. The summary of his first argument, which one could call an anthropological one, rests on the human constitution as being both spirit and body, “both a spiritual and a sensual being.” Secondly, he mentions the importance of the aesthetical. Apart from the Good and the True, the Beautiful is also a form of divine revelation. Therefore, according to Drey, we have to give due attention to the outward or ritual dimension of the liturgy. History and time, as a third, more philosophical argument, are the cause of the different historical and still existing outward forms and developments of the liturgy. For Drey, the liturgy has been and always is characterized by a multiforality, which cannot be neglected in the theological discourse. Although these arguments and his idea of organic development and (liturgical) tradition are very interesting, I want to focus on his main theological argument in favor of the outwardly, bodily, ritual, or non-essential aspect of the liturgy and the sacraments. Discussing this, it must be clear that the term non-essential, also in what follows, has no pejorative meaning nor does it imply any sense of being non-important. As I have shown, this would be the opposite of Drey’s claims.

A crucial term for Drey’s thinking about liturgy and sacraments is *Vergegenwärtigung*. For Drey, the liturgy is not only the outward and real expression of faith; it is also strongly connected to the life of Christ himself. This connection becomes clear in his reflections on the essential and non-essential elements:

On the other hand, the bodily aspect of the cult must reveal the supernatural element of the religion, making it truly present, according to the ideas and the spirit of the specific, in this case the Christian religion.

I translated “*wirklich vergegenwärtigen*” as “making truly present.” When one consults the famous *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, one can see that the verb *vergegenwärtigen* is strongly related to remembering: “. . .to have a lively recollection or representation, in

9. Johann Sebastian Drey, “Vom Geist und Wesen des Katholicismus,” *Theologische Quartalschrift* 1 (1819) 8–24; 193–210; 369–91; 559–74. Pages in this article refer to this work as it can be found in: Josef Rupert Geiselmann, ed., *Geist des Christentums und des Katholizismus. Ausgewählte Schriften katholischer Theologie im Zeitalter des deutschen Idealismus und der Romantik*, Deutsche Klassiker der katholischen Theologie aus neuerer Zeit (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald, 1940) 193–234 (213–15); Johann Sebastian Drey, “Über das Verhältnis des Mystizismus zum Katholizismus, mit Nutzanwendung für unsere Zeit,” *Theologische Quartalschrift* 6 (1824) 219–48 (231).

10. Drey, *Brief Introduction*, §278. Also see Drey, “Vom Geist und Wesen,” 213–15 and Johann Sebastian Drey, “Über das Verhältnis des Mystizismus zum Katholizismus, mit Nutzanwendung für unsere Zeit,” *Theologische Quartalschrift* 6 (1824) 219–48 (231).

11. Drey, “Vom Geist und Wesen,” 220.

12. Drey, “Vom Geist und Wesen,” 222. Compare also Drey, *Brief Introduction*, §280.

13. “Hinwieder muß das Sinnliche des Cultus das Uebersinnliche der Religion auch wirklich offenbaren, *wirklich vergegenwärtigen*, und zwar nach den Ideen und dem Geist der bestimmten, hier der christlichen Religion” in Drey, “Vom Geist und Wesen,” 215. Italics are mine.
a way that it appears mentally real [geistig wirklich].”¹⁴ The dictionary adds that the term is mostly used for remembering people, but in theology and liturgical studies this idea is of course readily connected with liturgical anamnesis. In Drey’s use of this interesting term, at least two points seem important to notice. First, there is a strong connection between vergegenwärtigen and the outer or bodily aspect of the liturgy.¹⁵ Again, it is clear that this ritual dimension of the liturgy is crucial in Drey’s ideas on the liturgy, since it brings us to the core of sacramentality, namely Christ himself. Second, there is indeed the idea of anamnesis, which does not exclusively appear in Drey’s reflections on the eucharist or the sacraments. For Drey, and his Tübingen colleagues, the entire liturgical life of the church is perceived as the history of Christ “symbolically made present in feasts and ceremonies.”¹⁶ Drey does not use the term Vergegenwärtigung in an exclusively eucharistic context, which one would suspect because of the prevailing theologies in his time. With Vergegenwärtigung he apparently refers to the making present of the whole life of Christ and all his merciful gifts in the entire liturgical life of the church. This is crucial, if we want to understand the position of the liturgy in Drey’s theological reflections. Having explored all this, we finally come to the notion of the incarnation in Drey’s theory of liturgical Vergegenwärtigung.

For Drey, the incarnation is the fundamental mystery of Christian faith, the Grundgeheimnis. The entire liturgy, even the non-sacramental rites, are aimed at making the past, which is the Christ-event, present as much as possible.¹⁷ It is through the fundamental mystery of the incarnation that Drey, and Christian theology in general, analogically tries to understand the relation between outer and inner, body and spirit, spiritual and sensual.¹⁸ For Drey, the incarnation shows how intimately essentials and non-essentials, outer and inner, human and divine can be connected to each other in the liturgy. It is the incarnation that explains how the making present of Christ in the liturgy works. By

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¹⁴. Vergegenwärtigung, in Deutsches Wörterbuch 25 (1951) 394–95 (394): “vergegenwärtigen: ins Gedächtnis rufen, zu lebhafter Erinnerung, Vorstellung bringen, dasz [sic] es geistig wirklich erscheint; von der Erinnerung an Personen.”

¹⁵. “Der katholische Cultus hat ferner einen gegenwärtigen Gott, ein geheimnisvoll aber wahrhaft und beständig gegenwärtiges Heiliges, ein anschauliches Heiligthum. Ein solches fordert die Bestimmung des Cultus, der ja das Göttliche wirklich offenbaren, es in sinnlichen Formen als Zeichen und Unterpfändern seiner Nähe vergegenwärtigen soll.” Drey, “Vom Geist und Wesen,” 218.

¹⁶. “in Festen und Ceremonien symbolisch vergegenwärtigt” in Drey, “Vom Geist und Wesen,” 224. Earlier on in the same article he writes: “so hat zwar der Ritus die Bestimmung, die Vergangenheit soviel als möglich zu vergegenwärtigen, aber seine symbolische Natur liegt offen am Tage.” Drey, “Vom Geist und Wesen,” 216.

¹⁷. Drey, “Vom Geist und Wesen,” 216.

¹⁸. Drey, “Vom Geist und Wesen,” 215–16. Paraphrasing Chalcedon, Drey states: “Aber auch in dieser Erscheinung [Christus] ist die sinnliche manifestierende Hülle—das Menschliche—von dem manifestierten Göttlichen noch unterschieden; die beiden Naturen sind zwar auf das innigste miteinander verbunden, aber nicht vermischt, oder ineinandergefloessen.” Drey, “Vom Geist und Wesen,” 215.
drawing this clear parallel between the incarnation and what is taking place in the liturgy, Drey christologically frames his entire liturgical theory. It is, above all else, the incarnation which is being made “permanent, continuously working, ever present and real” in the liturgy. As such, the incarnation functions not only as a model to understand the sacraments and the liturgy, but as its ontological foundation. At its very core, the liturgy follows an incarnational logic.

Of course, Thomas Aquinas and other theologians also considered the incarnated Word as the significant cause of the sacraments. Drey, however, expands this idea to the entire liturgy, not only to the eucharist and the sacraments. He widens the concept of sacramentality by using the incarnation as his logic for the anamnestic making present of the life of Christ throughout the whole liturgy of the church. A critical remark might be that Drey’s theory is rather christocentric and leaves ample space for the Holy Spirit. It lacks a clear trinitarian foundation, which I believe would be paramount today when one speaks about the sacramentality of the liturgy. The fact that not only Drey, but also his friend and colleague Johann Baptist Hirscher (1788–1865), gives so much attention to the incarnation and the ritual dimension (non-essentials) of the liturgy has definitely had its influence on their most famous student: Johann Adam Möhler. Both in Ellwangen and Tübingen, the famous church historian was taught by Drey, and from 1821 was his colleague. It is Möhler who takes Drey’s theory of incarnation, church, and the liturgy a step further. Too often, however, the importance of Drey’s theological work and the creative ideas he initiates and explores in his works has been unfairly overlooked. Josef Finkenzeller, along with many others, ascribe the christological turn in the theology of the Tübingen School to Möhler. Instead, I would argue that this turn is already present in Drey’s work, as we can see in his liturgical reflections.

19. Compare with Johann Sebastian Drey, “Ehrerbietige Wünsche und Andeutungen in Bezug auf Verbesserungen in der Katholischen Kirchenzucht, Zunächst in Deutschland,” Theologische Quartalschrift 4 (1822) 225–59 (235–36).
20. “bleibend, fortdauernd wirkend, stets gegenwärtig und wirklich” in Drey, “Vom Geist und Wesen,” 216.
21. “[W]ie im Grundgeheimnisse, dem Gott-Mensch, der Gott an den Menschen unzertrennlich aber unvermischt gebunden ist, so bleibt auch hier im Sakrament wieder das Geheimnis, indem das Zeichen von der Sache unterschieden ist.” Drey, “Vom Geist und Wesen,” 216.
22. Compare Thomas Aquinas, Summa Teologica III q. 60 a. 6: “Primo enim possunt considerari ex parte cause sanctificantis, quæ est Verbum incarnatum, cui sacramentum quodammodo conformatur in hoc quod rei sensibili verbum adhibetur, sicut in mysterio incarnationis carni sensibili est Verbum Dei unitum.”
23. On J. B. Hirscher’s liturgical ideas, see Samuel Goyvaerts, “Community and Participation: Theological Correspondences between Johann Baptist Hirscher and the Liturgical Movement,” Questions Liturgiques/Studies in Liturgy 91 (2010) 201–212.
24. Josef Finkenzeller, Die Lehre von den Sakramenten im allgemeinen. Von Der Reformation bis zur Gegenwart, Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte, ed. Michael Schmaus, Grillmeier Alois, Leo Scheffczyk and Michael Sybold (Freiburg: Herder, 1981) 134–35.
3. The Incarnation and the Liturgy in the Writings of J. A. Möhler

Relying on his teachers Drey and Hirscher, Möhler develops his ecclesiology, anchoring it in the incarnation. From his reflections on the church and the incarnation, Möhler also proceeds to the eucharist and what he will call “reversed incarnation,” which is easily matched with the Eastern Orthodox concept of theosis. In what follows, I will discuss these different elements in Möhler’s thought: ecclesiology, eucharist, theosis, and of course incarnation.

3.1. The Church as Ongoing Incarnation

In the history of theology, Möhler is mostly known for his ecclesiology, mainly the pneumatological understanding of the church, which he presents in his early work, Die Einheit in der Kirche. In his later work, Symbolik, he shifts to a more christological ecclesiology. In the latter, one can read the following statement:

Thus, the visible Church, from the point of view here taken [that of the incarnation] is the Son of God himself, everlastingly manifesting himself among men in a human form, perpetually renovated and eternally young—the permanent incarnation of the same, as in Holy Writ, even the faithful are called “the body of Christ.”

25. For an in-depth study of Möhler’s ecclesiology see Michael J. Himes, Ongoing Incarnation: Johann Adam Möhler and the Beginnings of Modern Ecclesiology (New York: Crossroad, 1997). Himes, however, strangely enough does not explicitly relate Möhler’s ecclesiology with his eucharistic reflections. Also the idea of divinization and the influence of the French theologian Gerbet (see below) is not mentioned by Himes.

26. I do not intend to explore or develop Möhler’s sacramental insights in full here. I will only focus on the role of the incarnation in light of his ideas on the liturgy. On Möhler’s sacramental insights, see Ângelo Cardita, “Rehabilitating Johann Adam Möhler’s Sacramental Insights,” International Journal of Systematic Theology 13 (2011) 77–100.

27. Johann Adam Möhler, Die Einheit in der Kirche oder das Prinzip des Katholizismus. Dargestellt im Geiste der Kirchenväter der drei ersten Jahrhunderte, ed. Josef Rupert Geiselmann (Köln: Hegner, 1957). For the English translation, I use Johann Adam Möhler, Unity in the Church or the Principle of Catholicism: Presented in the Spirit of the Church Fathers of the First Three Centuries, trans. Peter C. Erb (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996).

28. Johann Adam Möhler, Symbolik oder Darstellung der dogmatischen Gegensätze der Katholiken und Protestanten nach ihren öffentlichen Bekenntnisschriften, ed. Josef Rupert Geiselmann, 2 vols. (Köln: Hegner, 1960–1961). For the English quotations in this article, I use Johann Adam Möhler, Symbolism: Exposition of the Doctrinal Differences between Catholics and Protestants as Evidenced by Their Symbolical Writings, ed. James Burton Robertson and Michael J. Himes (New York: Crossroad, 1997).

29. Möhler, Symbolism, 259.
Möhler presents Christ’s eternal and active presence as his ongoing (permanent) incarnation in the church. The incarnation, therefore, is the hermeneutical tool to understand Möhler’s entire theory of the church and the eucharist, which is most likely based on his study of the church father Athanasius. The relation between God and man, coming to the fore through the church and the sacraments, has not only its foundation but exists in and out of the figure of Christ himself: God and man, without confusion, unchangeable, indivisible, and inseparable. Möhler’s ecclesiology, however, has not become purely christocentric in the *Symbolik*. One of the many commentators on Möhler, Michel Deneken, writes: “It is because Christ is present in his church, that it, in a certain way, realizes the ongoing incarnation and, therefore, the Spirit is the co-instituting subject.” In other words, as Christ became human by the power of the Holy Spirit, and that same Holy Spirit came over the apostles and Mary at Pentecost, it is the Holy Spirit who works Christ’s continuing incarnating presence in the church. Notwithstanding the clear theological shift between the *Einheit* and the *Symbolik*—from a more pneumatological to a more christological perspective—most commentators agree on the idea that Möhler succeeds in balancing both Christology and pneumatology, also in his *Symbolik.*

A final remark on Möhler’s ecclesiology has to do with the dependency of his insights, also concerning the incarnation, on the French theologian Phillippe Gerbet (1798–1864). Although Gerbet seems to be a real source of inspiration for Möhler, I observed that none

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30. See Johann Adam Möhler, *Athanasius der Grosse und die Kirche Seiner Zeit, Besonders im Kampfe mit dem Arianismus. In Sechs Büchern*, 2nd ed. (Mainz: Kupferberg, 1844) 260–63; 563–64. See also Josef Rupert Geiselmann, “Der Einfluß der Christologie des Konzils von Chalkedon auf die Theologie Johann Adam Möhlers,” in *Das Konzil von Chalkedon. Geschichte und Gegenwart*, vol. 3: *Chalkedon Heute*, ed. Aloys Grillmeier and Heinrich Bacht (Würzburg: Echter, 1954) 341–420.

31. “C’est parce que le Christ est présent dans son Église que celle-ci en réalise en quelque sorte l’incarnation continuée, et dont l’Esprit Saint est le sujet co-instituant” in Michel Deneken, *Johann Adam Möhler* (Paris: Cerf, 2007) 139. See also Heribert Mühlen, *Una Mystica Persona. Die Kirche als das Mysterium der Identität des Heiligen Geistes in Christus und den Christen: eine Person in vielen Personen* (Paderborn: Schönningh, 1964) 8–11.

32. Again Deneken: “Mais la lecture attentive, et la mise en perspective de l’Unité et de la Symbolique révèlent, au contraire, que la pneumatologie ainsi remise à l’honneur et à sa juste place dans l’écclésiologie procède d’une christologique conséquente.” Deneken, *Johann Adam Möhler*, 139. Also compare Bradford E. Hinze, “The Holy Spirit and the Catholic Tradition: The Legacy of Johann Adam Möhler,” in *The Legacy of the Tübingen School: The Relevance of Nineteenth-Century Theology for the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Donald Dietrich and Michael Himes (New York: Crossroad, 1997) 75–94 (84–88); Philip J. Rosato, “Between Christocentrism and Pneumatocentrism: An Interpretation of Johann Adam Möhler’s Ecclesiology,” *The Heythrop Journal* 19 (1978) 46–70 (54–70).

33. Gerbet was a French ultramontanist theologian, priest, and later also bishop of Perpignan. From the perspective of the study of the liturgy and the Liturgical Movement, it is interesting to know that Gerbet also had a lot of influence on the young Dom Prosper Guéranger (1805–1875), who was a personal friend.
of Möhler’s commentators seems familiar with the lengthy review Möhler wrote one year before publishing his Symbolik. It is a review of Gerbet’s book entitled “Considerations on the Fundamental Dogma for Catholic Piety.” For Gerbet, this fundamental dogma is the eucharist. It is in this lengthy review that Möhler mentions the idea of ongoing incarnation for the very first time when he writes: “In the same way, the presence of Christ in the sacraments is the permanent or ongoing incarnation of God.” In his reflections, Möhler is clearly inspired by Gerbet who writes: “Since the incarnation of the Word, the church believes in the real presence of Christ: but what other is this presence, if not the permanent or continued incarnation?” In this quotation, Gerbet focuses on the presence of Christ in general, but further in his book he writes: “the eucharistic communion is the means by which the permanent incarnation individualizes itself in every single Christian.”

Even without the French influence, however, it is clear that for Möhler and the Tübingen School, there is a strong connection between ecclesiology, sacraments, and the incarnation.

3.2. Reversed Incarnation: Divinization of the Human Being

When discussing the eucharist in the Symbolik and trying to explain the unity with Christ, which comes forth from the eucharist, the incarnation is again a fundamental concept in Möhler’s theology. Only when one truly understands and accepts the incarnation, one realizes that the human being “must be of a Godly way of thinking,” according to Möhler. This inclination towards the divine is more than just a being oriented towards God. Considering the eucharist, Möhler explains the goal of the eucharist as an urgent exhortation to “our transfiguration into the divine.” In and through the eucharist, the faithful undergo a reversed incarnation:

[A]nyone, who has once apprehended the full meaning of the incarnation of the Deity, and who with joy confesses that his duty is the reverse—namely, to pass from seeming to real and divine existence, and has accordingly attained to the perception that the doctrine of a forgiveness of

34. Johann Adam Möhler, “Considérations sur le dogme générateur de la pieté catholique. Rezension,” Theologische Quartalschrift 13 (1831) 328–57.
35. “Desgleichen ist die Gegenwart Christi im Sacramente, die permanente oder fortgesetzte Inkarnation Gottes.” Möhler, “Considérations,” 343.
36. “Depuis l’incarnation du Verbe, l’Église croit à la présence réelle du Christ: mais qu’est-ce que cette présence, sinon l’incarnation permanente ou continuée?” Philippe Gerbet, Considérations sur le dogme générateur de la piété catholique (Paris: Bureau du mémorial Catholique, 1829) 38.
37. “la communion eucharistique est le moyen par lequel l’incarnation permanente s’individualise en chaque chrétien.” Gerbet, Considérations, 40.
38. Möhler, Symbolism, 242. I prefer the German “er müsse selbst auch göttlich gesinnt werden.” Möhler, Symbolik, vol. 1, 367.
39. Möhler, Symbolism, 243. Again, I prefer the German: “unserer Verklärung ins Göttliche,” which I would rather translate as: “our transfiguration in the divine.” Möhler, Symbolik, vol. 1, 367.
sins in Christ Jesus, *of an exaltation of man unto God, and of a communication of a divine life to him*, through our Lord, must remain unprofitable until it be brought before us in concrete forms . . .

This idea of *Vergöttlichung* (divinization) or *theosis* was of crucial importance in Möhler’s *Einheit*. Starting from the first paragraphs of this work, he connects the communication of the Spirit with the eucharist and the unity of all in and with Christ. Sharing the divine life as a Christian belongs to the essence of Catholic faith according to the Tübingen theologian. This idea is not new and can be found with many church fathers. Although Möhler does not refer to them in this context, he was well acquainted with the writings of Athanasius, where we can already find this idea of the eucharist leading to a “reversed incarnation” of the faithful. Two remarks must be made concerning this reoccurrence of the concept of *theosis*, which, concisely put, concerns the human partaking in the divine nature. First, the idea, as such, was mostly absent from Catholic Western theology at least since the Middle Ages. Second, in general, the rediscovery and reflections on divinization are attributed to twentieth-century theologians such as Hans Urs von Balthasar and Karl Rahner. Already in the nineteenth century, however, specifically with Möhler but also with his Anglo-Saxon counterpart John Henry Newman, this idea comes to the fore. This probably has to do with the movement of *ressourcement*, the beginnings of which are situated exactly in this period, and which coincide with the influence of post-Enlightenment and Romantic thought.

Crucial for Möhler, but also for the other Tübingen theologians, is the understanding of the eucharist as the sacrament of unity between God and the faithful. This unity is parallel to the incarnation, which at the same time is both its goal and the condition or possibility for this eucharistic unity. In line with Athanasius and other fathers of the

40. Möhler, *Symbolism*, 243. My italics. The full German quote reads: “Wie dagegen Jemand, der die volle Bedeutung der Inkarnation der Gottheit begriffen hat, und freudig anerkennt, das es nun umgekehrt auch an ihm sei, aus dem Scheinleben in das wahrhafte und göttliche Leben einzugehen, und sodann zur Einsicht vorgedrungen ist, das die Lehre von einer Sündenvergebung in Christo Jesu, von einer Vergöttlichung des Menschen und einer Mitteilung göttlichen Lebens durch ihn so lange fruchtlos bleibe, bis sie uns in ganz concreten Gestalten entgegenkommt und in die individuellste Beziehung zu uns tritt, wie der, sage ich, dem alles Dies klar geworden ist, in der katholischen Messe nicht eine göttliche Institution verehren kann, ist nicht zu begreifen.” Möhler, *Symbolik*, vol. 1, 368. Also compare again, on incarnation, justification and the eucharist: Gerbet, *Considérations*, 38–54.

41. Möhler, *Unity*, 81–82.

42. Möhler, *Athanasius*, 160–65.

43. For a good introduction to the idea of *theosis*, see Paul M. Collins, *Partaking in Divine Nature: Deification and Communion* (London: T&T Clark, 2010).

44. “Within what is understood as mainstream Western theological discourse from the early Middle Ages until the present time, the metaphor of deification has largely been ‘off the radar’.” Collins, *Partaking*, 111.

45. Collins, *Partaking*, 167–70.

46. Collins, *Partaking*, 159–67.

47. See on this *Zeitgeist* also Joris Geldhof, “German Romanticism and Liturgical Theology: Exploring the Potential of Organic Thinking,” *Horizons* 43 (2016) 282–307.
church, Möhler and his fellow Tübingers hold the opinion that God has become human in order to divinize humanity, specifically in and through the liturgy.

4. Incarnation and the Liturgy: Contemporary Perspectives

It is clear that the study of the Tübingen theologians adds a lot to the history of ideas concerning the theological study of the liturgy and the sacraments. What kind of conclusions can we draw and how can these nineteenth-century Romantic theologians contribute to contemporary theological reflections on the liturgy? I briefly want to mention three points on incarnation, the relation between the liturgy, sacraments, and divinization.

One could argue that, for the Tübingen School, the incarnation functions as the centrifugal and at the same time centripetal force when one considers the eucharist and the liturgy as a whole, if we remember Drey. The hypostatic union between God and the human being is not only revealed through the incarnation but manifests itself as ongoing incarnation in the liturgy and the sacraments. In this sense, I believe Tübingen theology provides a strong theological argument for the dynamics between God and the faithful in the liturgy, or between what is called κοραβσίσ (movement from God to humanity) and ομβασίσ (the movement from humanity towards God). Important also for contemporary theology is that Drey’s incarnational perspective, and sometimes too christocentric approach, is balanced by Möhler’s pneumatological ideas. The Holy Spirit realizes this dialogue between the human and the Godly nature. In addition, the specification of “ongoing” is important when one wants to apply this incarnational logic to the liturgy and the sacraments: it is by no means automatically achieved, as sometimes Western sacramentology in the past has seemed to have functioned. On the contrary, the idea of ongoing and reversed incarnation invites us to take the material and human condition seriously and start from there, with all its flaws and shortcomings but with the potential of becoming divinized. For the Tübingen theologians, liturgy and the relation between God and humanity is by no means a static one but an organic and relational process, an ongoing dialogue of praise, thanksgiving, divine grace, and real encounter with Christ and the entire Trinity.

Secondly, we see a widening of the concept of sacramentality in Drey’s liturgical thinking, which for the nineteenth century is quite remarkable. Starting from the incarnational logic, Drey is led to the clear conviction that the entire liturgy is aimed at making the past, which is the Christ-event, present as much as possible. Of course, the seven sacraments have a special status, but in line with Drey’s thought, it is my strong conviction that the reception of Sacrosanctum Concilium 7, on the different modes of Christ’s presence in the liturgy, is not yet complete.48 Both on the liturgical-theological as well as

48. See Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium, December 4, 1963. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html.
on the practical-liturgical level, this statement is not yet fully developed, and Drey’s theology might be one of the possible avenues to advance this. His reflections on the relation between the incarnation and the liturgy raise important questions about contemporary liturgical and sacramental practices. Current Roman Catholic issues concerning the shortage of priests, the decline in church attendance but abiding presence of popular devotion, the role of women, and so on, raise different liturgical and sacramental questions and practices. This has to challenge our theological reflections on what liturgy is and how sacraments function in the twenty-first century. Tübingen theology, with its stress on organic development, the idea of the liturgy, and lived religion as a genuine source for theology as well as the incarnational logic presented when approaching the liturgy, can be an important source of inspiration for contemporary theology.

Finally, the ideas presented in this paper can also prove fruitful for ecumenical dialogue. The incarnation, the stress on community, and the Christ-centered but also pneumatological theology developed in the early nineteenth century seem to be a common basis for conversation between Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant Churches. Moreover, the idea of theosis or divinization, which is still a rather uncommon way in Western theology to approach the liturgy, can energize the conversation on liturgy and church between the Eastern and Western Churches. There are a lot of mutual learning opportunities here, both from a systematic theological perspective as well as from a pastoral liturgical point of view. What does this idea of reversed incarnation actually mean for the concrete celebration of the liturgy? How does the idea of theosis change our worship and our reflections on liturgical and sacramental efficacy? Starting ecumenical conversations from common ground, which can be found in some of the Tübingen ideas, can open up new perspectives on these kind of questions.

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49. A fine example of this can be found in the work of the reformed theologian Hans Boersma, e.g. Hans Boersma, Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).