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REVIEW ARTICLE

# *The Eucharist, Metaphysics and Culture*

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*A companion to the eucharist in the Middle Ages*. Edited by Ian Christopher Levy, Gary Macy and Kristen van Ausdall. (Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition, 26.) Pp. xvii+640 incl. 90 figs. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2012. €195. 978 90 04 20141 5; 1871 6377

As Gary Macy notes in his introduction to this volume, medieval people did not separate out in their minds the theological, legal, liturgical, artistic, customary and socio-political aspects of eucharistic practice. In asserting that contemporary scholars tend to do so, he sees both an advantage and a drawback. On the one hand, they have at their disposal specific kinds of expertise which permit the arraignment of exact classifications unavailable to an earlier period. On the other hand, the inevitable lack of scholars expert in every field of medieval study means that the unity of the object of enquiry – eucharistic practice – can be obscured.

In fact, the danger is surely graver than this. If one imposes upon an historical period contemporary divisions of subject-matter, then the risk must be of failing to adopt a specifically historical method at all. Thus, for example, one should not study the 'art' of the Middle Ages unless one remains aware that the people of this era did not think of sacred images as 'artworks' in the way that we do today. Elizabeth Saxon and Kristen Van Ausdell's examinations of art and the eucharist during the various phases of the Middle Ages are sensitive to this issue, as well as riveting and comprehensive.

It could none the less be protested that the divisions between liturgical, legal and theological study were already adumbrated within the

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Middle Ages themselves. But here an opposite danger arises, namely, of taking an era's own articulated borders too much for granted and missing the benefits of a retrospective gaze which can disinter both hidden structural unities and traceable cross-fertilisations across apparently diverse fields. If one aspect of specifically historical enquiry is to take an epoch on its own terms, another is to situate its hidden holism with the benefit of hindsight. In either case, the anachronism which can arise from a disciplinarily-segmented gaze is avoided. Moreover, the theologian stands to benefit from such a double approach: while the integrity of the medieval theological regard is preserved, it can be supplemented by considerations of cultural context which it would not otherwise have entertained.

One cannot in any way accuse the present volume of any degree of anachronism. It is too scholarly and historically self-aware for that. Moreover, its contributors constantly indicate the holistic dimension, even if from time to time in the mode of mere gesture. One could, as Macy half-admits, accuse it of a certain lack of ambition in not tackling this dimension directly. Lamenting over-specialisation is not quite enough, one might hazard, since there exist historians who focus on periods in the round, rather than digging tunnels back through time along the confined trajectories of ideas, art or culture, respectively. To take the tunnelling, rather than the cross-sectional, approach has surely to be acknowledged as an editorial choice?

Yet it is one which yields important dividends. Above all, it means that the volume succeeds as an 'encyclopaedia' of its topic, offering the reader a reliable survey of its manifold aspects, with an abundance of fascinating and absorbing detail (including long quotations from primary sources), fresh insights and balanced judgements. The topics range from liturgical inheritance, form and vesture (Lizette Larson-Miller, Michael Driscoll, Edward Foley), architecture (Driscoll), canon law (Ian Christopher Levy), eucharistic theology (Celia Chazelle, Gary Macy and Stephen E. Lahey) and popular attitudes to the eucharist (Miri Rubin).

This comprehensive resource naturally gives rise to reflection. If it is under-theorised, it is none the less superbly directed towards theoretical promptings. Certain lineaments of eucharistic development become clear, and both the more general historian and the theologian is thereby steered towards their more adequate comprehension.

Above all, this book throws light on the extent to which the insistence upon a metaphysically realist account of Christ's presence in the eucharist (the term 'real presence' – with no proferred Latin equivalent – is perhaps too readily bandied about here, without clarification as to whether this is an historical term or a contemporary term of art) is linked with the restoration of the empire in the West under the Carolingians and the Ottonians. This insistence was accompanied by an accentuation of the eucharist in liturgical, artistic and architectural terms. In either case, precedents with an earlier period of sacral kingship in Anglo-Saxon England are rightly noted.

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But why should this have been the case? Michael Driscoll notes the contrast between the high Carolingian eucharistic theology and its characteristic critique of Byzantine image worship, but does not ask why this should have pertained. It may be that the more invisible 'representation' offered by the eucharist, combined with the greater physical 'penetration' into the human body of its power, were better suited to the exigencies of a sacral kingly exercise of power. One can note that St Ambrose's more realist account of the eucharist (on which later realist accounts drew) is paralleled (accidentally or not) by his somewhat more pro-imperialist theology, as compared with Augustine in either case (though one can perhaps exaggerate this difference).

The contemporary Italian continental philosopher, Giorgio Agamben, has suggested that the appropriation of 'rule by economy' from the divine to the earthly realm was mediated by eucharistic practice.[1] Perhaps this is most dramatically illustrated by the existence of both early Anglo-Saxon *sceattas* and later coins stamped on one side with images of the Lamb of God and other arguably eucharistic allusions.[2] The economy of our salvation underwrites the circulation of royal authority which in turn guarantees our commercial exchanges.[3]

An 'economic' rule is also suggested by the first depiction of the dead Christ on the cross under Ottonian auspices. Where one might have expected a triumphalist depiction, it is instead the case, as Driscoll notes, that the emperor Otto wishes to link his own role with that of Christ's humility.

What seemed then to be favoured during this epoch dominated by sacral kingship was a pervasive, suffusing 'incarnation' of the spiritual.

[1] Giorgio Agamben, *The kingdom and the glory: for a theological genealogy of economy and government* [*Homo sacer* II, 2], trans. Lorenzo Chiesa with Matteo Mandarini, Stanford, CA 2007.

[2] I am indebted to Anna Gannon for drawing my attention to the *sceattas*, for providing useful bibliography and especially for letting me read her forthcoming paper, 'The iconography of Series M, variant and the *Agnus Dei*', in M. Allen, R. Naismith and E. Screen (eds), *Early medieval monetary history: studies in memory of Mark Blackburn*, London, forthcoming. See also her 'Coins, images and tales from the Holy Land: questions of theology and orthodoxy', in T. Abramson (ed.), *New perspectives: studies in early medieval coinage*, Woodbridge 2011, 88–103, and *The iconography of early Anglo-Saxon coinage (6th–8th centuries)*, Oxford 2003, 60, 83–4, 117–20, 133–4; Lucia Travaini, 'Monete e sangue', in *Valori e disvalori simbolici delle monete: i trenta deneri di Giuda*, Rome 2007, 231–48; P. Radici Colace, 'Il Dio monetiere', in *Conii e scene di coniazione a cura di L. Travaini e A. Bolis*, 'Monete 2', Rome 2007, 13–25; and S. Keynes and R. Naismith, 'The *Agnus Dei* pennies of King Æthelred the Unready', *Anglo-Saxon England* xl (2011), 175–223 at pp. 180–1 nn. 13–14.

[3] On the philosophico-theological developments which accompanied the shift from merchant to finance capital in the later Middle Ages see also Éric Alliez, *Les Temps capitaux*, I: *Récits de la conquête du temps*, Paris 1991.

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In consequence, lay and clerical roles remained complex or overlapping, along with other suffusions and interminglings, such as the boundaries between ordinary and sacred meals. 'Ordination' extended to lay and female roles, while women continued to play eucharistic roles, whether in the making of bread or its distribution, besides certain contributions to eucharistic liturgical performance. Significantly, the Carolingian era sought, unsuccessfully, to move towards frequent lay communion.

The implication of the fine chapters by Gary Macy and Ian Christopher Levy is that this 'participatory realism' of the imperial era was partially eclipsed by the Gregorian reforms of the later eleventh century, combined with the rising power of canon law. In both cases one notes an increased clericalisation of practice and an increased exaltation of clerical status. Thus, ordination came to have a more confined sacerdotal denotation, and both lay men and all women, including nuns, came to be increasingly excluded from liturgical activities. Greater efforts came also to be made to distinguish eucharistic from magical transformations, whereas, as recent scholarship has shown, much of the popular success of the early Church in Western Europe depended upon blurring this boundary in this as in other instances.[4]

If, however, a highly realist theology of the eucharist could work for sacral kingship, it is clear that it could equally work for an enhanced power of an ecclesial polity. Nevertheless, a reading between the lines of this volume might lead one to wonder whether the post-Hildebrandine shift to a clerical-lay (and male-female) duality did not put a certain strain upon the integral unity of the Ambrosian tradition as developed by Radbertus, Hincmar and others, if one takes the identity of the bread and wine with the body and blood of Christ as a symbol of the merging of the earthly and heavenly in general.

This strain could show up in the mode of an *aporia*. Clerical prestige depends upon the objectivity of the eucharist, and yet also upon its link in turn with the clerical power of transformation: were it not for the learned skill of writing, there could be no miracle of the mass, as is declared in *Piers Plowman*.[5] Yet an extreme doctrine of objectivity, as Abelard earlier

[4] Valerie I. J. Flint, *The rise of magic in early medieval Europe*, Princeton, NJ 1991.

[5] I am grateful to A. M. Milbank for this detail; we need divine grace, through the eucharist, and this comes by clergy defined by their possession of learning and their capacity to write, which is in turn underwritten by Christ as writer and written as Logos. See further *The vision of William concerning Piers the Plowman in three parallel texts*, ed. W. W. Skeat (Early English Texts Society [1886], 1954), B manuscript, passus XII, lines 70–104:

> 'Ac grace is a gyfte of god · and of gret loue spryngeth;/ Knewe neuere clerke how it cometh forth · ne kynde witte the weyes . . ./ And namely clergye, for Crystes loue · that of clergye is rote./ For Moyses witnesseth that god wrote · for to wisse the

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noted, might suggest that anyone, including a woman, could enunciate the words of consecration and transubstantiation would result. Equally, a Donatistic insistence upon the need for the priest to be pious could undermine belief in the objective power invested in holy orders. The high Middle Ages sought to resolve this conundrum with practical if not theoretical coherence by ensuring that the liturgical and the clerical realms coincided, and by insisting upon clerical purity and the damnable consequences of its infraction for the clergy themselves, and by influence for those under their charge.

An interesting implication of this solution is that the visible comes to be understood in ethical terms, while the sacred becomes increasingly the reserve of the invisible and yet guarded by an hieratic and distanced visibility. Such a development coincides with that traced by Henri de Lubac (whose name is oddly absent from this book), whereby the eucharistic 'making of the Church', and the Augustinian link between the body of the elements and the body of the people, are gradually occluded. As a result, one notes a new structure: a passive 'mass' of believers confronting a miraculous eucharistic theology which is ranged spatially over against them, and no longer seen as 're-presentation' through time of Christ's one sacrifice whose direct result was to produce a new universal people.[6]

This sundering of lay participation from clerical authority could be coded as a new division between the corporeal and the spiritual. Is such a thing traceable in high and late medieval theology? One could argue that the evidence provided by this book suggests that it is. For such a reading, the Thomistic current is the exception, and it is significant that, as Stephen Lahey lucidly explains, it did not in the end prevail. Aquinas continued the Ambrosian current of eucharistic reflection, clarifying it with the use of Aristotelian categories. He was logically loyal to its realistic spirit by insisting that even when a mouse or a dog eats the consecrated host, Christ's actual body and blood pass into the animal's stomach, even if the animal receives

> peple,/ In the olde lawe, as the lettre telleth · that was the lawe of Iewes .../ The clergye that there was · conforted the womman./ Holykirke knoweth this · that Crystes writyng saued;/ So clergye is conforte · to creatures that repenten,/ And to mansed men · myschief at her ende./ For goddes body my3te nou3te be · of bred, withouten clergye,/ The which body is bothe · bote to the ri3tful,/ And deth and dampnacioun · to hem that dyeth yuel./ As Crystes carecte conforted and bothe · coupable shewed/ The womman that the Iewes brou3te · that Iesus thou3te to saue;/ *Nolite iudicare, et non iudicabimini, etc.*/ Ri3t so goddes body, bretheren · but it be worthily taken,/ Dampneth vs atte daye of dome · as the carectes dede the iewes.
>
> For-thi I conseille the for Crystes sake · Clergye that thow louye,/ For Kynde Witte is of his kyn · and neighe cosynes bothe/ To owre lorde, leue me; · for-thi loue hem, I rede;/ For bothe ben as miroures · to amenden owre defautes,/ And lederes for lewed men · and for lettred bothe [...] / Al-though men made bokes · god was the maistre,/ And seynt spirit the saumplarye · and seide what men sholde write.'

[6] Henri de Lubac, *Corpus mysticum: l'eucharistie et l'église au moyen âge*, Paris 1949.

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it 'accidentally' and not 'sacramentally', since the latter would depend upon rational discernment.

In this instance (and again Agamben's writings are relevant to this question),[7] one faces another implicit *aporia:* if, as Scripture suggests, the eucharist is for human beings only, and not for angels or animals, how can one deny animal reception without reducing human reception to a merely spiritual and angelic one? The risk of the latter is run by Bonaventure and other Franciscans (besides others) who deny that animals may eat the body and blood of Christ. For if the latter can vanish according to a spiritual intention or its absence, then what price the material *virtus* of the eucharist of which even Augustine had spoken, and why should it be needed if spiritual intention or discernment has such sway over it?

For this reason, Aquinas would appear to have come closer to resolving the dilemma. And in another way also he perpetuated and reinforced the integrity of eucharistic unity. For he insisted, in accordance with his doctrine that there can only be one substantial form within a substance, that the soul of Christ is the form of the transubstantiated body and blood of the eucharistic elements. Because these of themselves do not possess a human body or a human mind, Christ's soul has only communicated to them a 'corporeal', but not an 'animated' being. Nevertheless, the body and blood of the elements are in no sense present 'alongside' Christ's ascended body, nor his soul, nor his Godhead. Rather, the corporeal body of the elements is fully assumed into Christ's ascended body, while his soul and Godhead are 'concomitantly' present to it, since Christ's Godhead, soul and body are 'naturally' inseparable.

Aquinas's eucharistic 'integralism' extends to the 'remaining' accidents. For while his position is the very adverse of any heretical 'remanentism', which would deny that the natural substances have been altered or displaced, he nevertheless insists that the integrity of the accidents is directly sustained by the divine *esse* in which they participate. Aquinas argues that substance and accidents are not defined existentially but essentially,[8] and that since the divine power coincides super-essentially with being, it is possible for him to suspend the normal essential order and cause accidental qualities directly to inhere in the divine *esse,* with which Christ's Godhead, soul and body, are substantially identical.[9]

It is not the case, here, as Lahey claims, that Aquinas posits quantity as a 'quasi-substance' in which the accidental dross can continue to be founded. For this is only true for Aquinas at the essential level, and in no sense involves quantity playing any sort of provisional role. Rather, since normally 'all other accidents are related to their subject through the medium of dimensive quantity', this simply remains the case, according

[7] Giorgio Agamben, *The open: man and animal*, Stanford, CA 2004.
[8] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* III. 77. 1 ad 2.
[9] Ibid.

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to the very essence of accidents, after transubstantiation has taken place.[10] But the 'provisionality' or 'substitution' for the role of substance is supplied by Being itself, not by quantity.[11]

It may be the case that this point was ill-grasped by Aquinas's successors, who in general, as twentieth-century scholarship discovered, did not appreciate his metaphysics of *esse*. Their approaches to the eucharist indeed undid its integrity by abandoning the Thomistic horizons both of participation in being and of unicity of form. Rather, they tried to think of eucharistic unity in terms of mutations of quantity, plurality of form or the wielding of divine will.

Thus, as Lahey describes, Giles of Rome and Duns Scotus suggested, as against the theory of concomitance, that Christ's body, as internally variegated, might still be externally undifferentiated in relation to external realities. On this model, the assumption of the body of the elements becomes equivalent to Christ's body moving into a new place or taking up a different posture. In Scotus' case, this is tantamount to the idea that Christ's body can, in itself, contain a plurality of forms.

But the upshot is to imply a certain distancing of the eucharistic from the heavenly body, and in turn a 'Nestorian' distance of the humanity from the divinity of Christ, on pain of compromising the simplicity of God himself. If these consequences were avoided by William of Ockham, then that was because he denied the 'quantitative' character of Christ's glorified body altogether (which was admitted by Aquinas in a certain qualified sense), in line with his extreme nominalism which admitted only the external reality of substance and quality, reducing quantity to a phantom of our regard. The benefit of this view is that the presence of Christ can more immediately pervade the elements; its drawback, however, is that quantity-less body has been so eviscerated as to become indistinguishable from spiritual presence, threatening a kind of 'monophysitism'. Moreover, without either quantity or Being now able to do duty in supporting the remaining bread and wine, a shadow of merely magical 'shape-shifting' might be thought to lurk. Here Ockham, like Scotus, must appeal to the arbitrary intervention of divine power.

The upshot of this renegotiation of the metaphysical links forged by Aquinas is that, instead of a transformation brought about by the inherent power of certain words and the natural 'concomitant' consequences which ensue, there follows a set of divinely willed quasi-physical adjustments of Christological position ordained to coincide with the occasion of human institution. This can be taken to resonate with the increasingly distant eucharistic 'spectacle' which had become detached from the partaking of the elements and the continuous 'production' of the Church.

[10] Ibid. 2 resp.

[11] Ibid. 3. resp.

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One could describe this outlook as a 'disenchanted' account of eucharistic objectification. But with this corresponds a subjectivising spiritualisation of the eucharist which is represented by the Bonaventuran refusal to take the logically required step of admitting that the body and blood of Christ can enter the stomach of a mouse. The current volume at least invites the question as to whether one should link the increased validation of merely spiritual communion by the laity with this theological tendency. And one might further ask whether this is a crucial part of that excessive 'ethicisation' of religion (spiritual communion being the living of a charitable life) to which Charles Taylor attributes the eventual secularisation of the West.[12]

Reading this abundantly stimulating book has prompted in this reader the counter-intuitive thought that perhaps a high eucharistic theology is more closely aligned with sacral kingship than with high papalism. The latter would seem to have nurtured theologies which qualified the import of a realist eucharistic theology. Thus, from 1277 onwards, the papacy supported anti-Thomistic positions in this field as in others. One might venture a hidden correlation between Giles of Rome's extreme (and quasi-'physicalist') account of the papal plenitude of power, on the one hand, and his weakening of eucharistic concomitance, on the other. By contrast, is Aquinas's radicalisation of the Ambrosian tradition in some way to be linked with his more moderate account of papal authority and somewhat 'Byzantine' (and proto-Dantean) acknowledgement not just of the independent role of secular rulers, but (in his advice to the king of Cyprus) even of the Adamic and Christological sacrality of their rule?

One should not, however, take this idea too far. Canon law itself, following Gratian, as Ernst Kantorowicz long ago pointed out, in another important secondary source not cited here, appealed directly to Ambrose's idea of the transformative power of the eucharist as a source of authority for legal innovation within the Church.[13] As such, it provided the papacy with a principle of equity and adaptation which perpetuated the idea of a pliable *economia*. Yet perhaps the continuing impetus towards further clericalisation and divorce from the lay realm encouraged a drift away from such authentically 'eucharistic rule', and, at the same time, encouraged the rise of theologies which compromised the way in which the eucharistic mystery bound body and soul, secular and sacred, so intimately together.

In the final pages of his chapter, Lahey succinctly suggests that the Lollard-Hussite reaction at the end of the Middle Ages suggests a realisation that something was amiss, with a diagnosis quite unlike that of the later reformers and more penetrating.

[12] Charles Taylor, *A secular age*, Cambridge, MA 2007.

[13] Ernst Kantorowicz, *The king's two bodies: a study in mediaeval political theology* (with a new preface by William Chester Jordan), Princeton 1997.

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In the first place, John Wycliffe's metaphysical ultra-realism, for all its consequent rejection of transubstantiation, is founded upon a perception of the integrity of natural form – the bread as bread, the wine as wine – as linked with an eternal exemplarity. In his own way, he wished to defend both the integrity of the created body and an ontology of participation – from which the standard theology of transubstantiation had come so far adrift. In the second place, the Hussite demand for lay reception in both kinds, along with frequent communion, sought to recover the Augustinian link between the elements and the united congregation which a merely moralising and individualising emphasis so profoundly threatened.

This monumental and comprehensive work will serve as an indispensable resource for historians and theologians for years to come, and, given the cultural and metaphysical centrality of the eucharist during this period, and beyond, and the critical metaphysical shifts which followed in the later Middle Ages, which this volume in part anticipates, this work may serve as a pivotal compendium for reflections upon the history of intellectual thought more generally.

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# *The Eusebius Essay Prize*

The *Eusebius Essay Prize*, of £500, is offered annually for the best essay submitted on a subject connected with any aspect of early Christian history, broadly understood as including the first seven centuries AD/CE. Scholars in any relevant discipline (theology, classics, late antique studies, Middle Eastern Studies etc.), whether established in their field or graduate students, are encouraged to enter the competition. Submissions from younger scholars are particularly welcomed. The essay should not exceed 8,000 words, including footnotes, and for 2014 should be submitted by 30 September. A judgement will be made at the end of November (the editors reserve the right not to award the prize if no essay of significant quality is submitted). The essay of the successful candidate will be published in the *Journal*, probably in the number appearing in July 2015. Other submissions entered into the competition may also be recommended for publication. All essays should be sent as two hard copies, prepared to journal style, to Mrs Anne Waites, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Robinson College, Cambridge CB3 9AN.

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