

Emmanuel Falque. *The Wedding Feast of the Lamb: Eros, the Body, and the Eucharist*. Trans. George Hughes. New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2016. 336 pages. \$36.

The Wedding Feast of the Lamb: Eros, the Body, and the Eucharist, translated by George Hughes and written by French Catholic phenomenologist and theologian Emmanuel Falque, completes a triptych of works framed by the Easter Triduum (the Passion, Resurrection, and the Eucharist) in which Falque endeavors to show how Christian claims inform everyday culture and life. Dean of the Catholic Institute in Paris, Falque has a growing readership in the United States following the reception of other French phenomenological and theological figures such as Jean-Louis Chrétien, Michel Henry, and Jean-Luc Marion. *Le Passeur de Gethsémane* [*The Guide to Gethsemane*, untranslated at the time of this review] is the first of the triad and expounds upon the narrative of the Passion to explore “anguish” and “death.” *The Metamorphosis of Finitude* is the second in the series, and investigates the resurrection to uncover “what is existential about birth” and the “resurrected flesh.” *The Wedding Feast of the Lamb* concentrates on the body itself, as received in the host of the Eucharist and as experienced within the “chaos” and “animality” of the human interior, to assert that the human body is a site where God comes to us and a corporal and spiritual gift that knits us to one other and Christ in faith and fidelity.

Falque’s style is intricate and European. Basic familiarity with phenomenology will assist his readers. Yet he also brings a layman’s attention guided by classical pastoral concerns that most researchers of Christian proclamation and worship will find accessible, with or without exposure to Falque’s earlier works, the modern interplay between French Catholicism and phenomenology, or Falque’s position within it. Allow me to quote him at length as an example:

If “we are nourished by the Body and Blood” of Christ, according to the Eucharistic Prayer, it is not simply because a banquet or a meal has brought us together (a symbolic perspective that can be justified that seems a bit threadbare today). The bread is consecrated bread, his body branched into ours so that we “become one body”; the wine is consecrated, his blood flowing in our veins. To be nourished with his body can and should be understood as a kind of organic transplant—a sharing of powers (the body) by which I live through his true corporal power, in the way of a community of life, even a transfusion of blood: ‘It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me’ (Gal. 2:20), 109.

Above, Falque takes on the question, what is “the body” that we eat at the Lord’s Supper? In subsequent chapters, Falque examines that body and its inherent animality or creatureliness with phenomenological concepts like *Jeimeinigkeit* or “mineness” to describe how the “my body” and “my blood” language articulates a bodily sacrifice and redemption where God becomes animal, as the Lamb, to rescue all of human animality from bestiality (fleshly life consumed by sin) in order to bring humanity with its fundamental creaturely difference into “carnal fidelity” with Christ (36, 43-5. 59). At the wedding feast of the Lamb, animality joins divinity in eternal love. Falque also explores flesh in terms of sexual difference and its witness to human and divine love communicated and shared at the communion table. He writes, “[i]t is not human love (eros) that serves as a model of divine love (agape), but rather divine love (agape) that, in espousing human love (eros), succeeds in integrating and transforming it at the heart of the eucharistic act” (134). In other words, divine love incorporates human love at the Lord’s Supper and transforms it to satisfy the desires of God.

Though he distinguishes sexual difference from genital difference, Falque's discussion of sexuality might reveal a heteronormative bias linked to his Catholic identity. For Falque, sexual difference between male and female is originary and comes from God (140). He mines Genesis to support a "man-woman dialectic" that intimates embodied redemption in God. Yet following his schema to its eschatological end might necessitate radicalizing the dialectic he proposes, especially if all who are thirsty are unified in a conjugal bond with Christ at the wedding feast of all time (Rev. 21). In any case, embodiedness, animality, and love constitute the three primary characteristics of the wedding feast as Falque understands it. The book's focus upon communion makes it a generative text for advanced study of worship and a deeper engagement of phenomenological approaches to sacramental theology. Its philosophical line of argumentation may also give it crossover appeal.

Gerald C. Liu, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ