

Kimberly Hope Belcher. *Eucharist and Receptive Ecumenism: From Thanksgiving to Communion*. New York, NY: Cambridge UP, 2019. \$84.03.

In *Eucharist and Receptive Ecumenism: From Thanksgiving to Communion*, Kimberly Hope Belcher constructs a eucharistic theology that takes flight by engaging the wings of ecumenism and eschatology. She guides the reader through “three essential problems in contemporary Catholic eucharistic theology” that have fragmented sacramental practice and piety to this day: 1.) eucharistic conversion and conversion of real life, 2.) real presence and sacrifice, 3.) sacrifice of the cross and sacrifice of the Eucharist. Problem 1 regards how “the ontological change of the eucharistic elements (*conversio*) effects a spiritual change in the participants.” Think here of a doctrine such as transubstantiation and its imbalanced attention to the transformation of the elements over the transformed spirituality of the communicant. Understanding how the “ontological change of the elements” transforms the “spirituality” of the receiving assembly as “the ultimate purpose” of the rite, Belcher asserts that there must be recalibrated thought regarding how the Eucharist shapes the faith of the communicant (3). Problem 2 concerns how understanding the meal as an offering of sacrifice from God becomes blurred within a constellation of eucharistic developments such as the production of liturgical manuals, evolving understandings of the priesthood, receding lay leadership of the rite, and philosophical and theological emphases upon the “somatic real presence of Christ in the Eucharist” (3–4). Problem 3 mirrors Problem 2. How does the sacrifice of the cross inform the sacrifice of the Eucharist? Belcher sees it as “perhaps the most important theological problem of the Reformation: it sparked the debate on justification, for example” (4). For Belcher, Luther “very reasonably objected” to the belief that the priest offered the body and blood of Christ as atonement to the Father (*Ibid.*). Such belief associated human presiding with what only God could do, and stood in the way of communicants grasping the atoning sacrifice of the cross (4–5).

How Belcher navigates her way to new horizons of promise in eucharistic theology as the book gets underway are best left unspoiled here. As a preview, she provides a historical tour of selective figures such as Chrysostom, Calvin, Ignatius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose, St. Gregory, Thomas Aquinas, and Augustine to map out for the reader a sacramental terrain whose peaks and valleys provide views of eucharistic thought and practice over time. Belcher’s trail of intellectual thought then leads to where she sees frontiers for advancing ecumenical and eschatological interpretations of table worship. Notably, comparisons between the seventh-century Roman Canon and Ambrose’s homily *De sacramentis* and an analysis of Augustine’s *Sermon 272* provide intricate engagement of classical homiletical and liturgical artifacts from Western Christian eucharistic proclamation and ritual to delineate how consecration and offering belong together. Her analysis also shows how the eucharistic performs an eschatological vision of God’s future for the receiving assembly (99–107, 130; 117–118, 133–134). For those interested in theology and the arts, Belcher also includes a brief interlude based upon the work of Robin Jensen about how mosaics at San Vitale display how divine generosity participates in human offering (138–140). Indeed, though Belcher’s own project responds to a set of three problems, her dialogue with historical figures intends to steer readers away from merely understanding the development of table theology as growing out of debates. Rather, her program of contemporary eucharistic theology relies upon complementary and multilinear strands of argumentation that see eucharistic practices as lived soteriological theology emboldening communion with Christ and neighbor (53).

A phenomenological commitment indebted to Jean-Luc Marion propels Belcher's historical rigor toward concluding remarks about how Pope John Paul II's offering of communion to the Protestant and Reformed monk, Brother Roger Schutz of Taizé, provides just enough of a glimpse as to how ecumenical practice of the Eucharist can be capaciously Catholic in terms of tradition and ecumenical welcome. Belcher also names twelve "ritual-praxical modes," such as reciprocal recognition of baptism, sharing altars, and communion among ecumenical episcopates, that give more shape to what she means by rich ecumenical and eschatological eucharistic celebration. The book ends with an extended discussion of "real presence," by which Belcher emphasizes again the need to balance eucharistic theological thinking with attention to sacramental and devotional action—what happens ritually and congregationally. The discussion exceeds the scope of the current review. Yet one definition of presence shines in particular, "'presence' refers to laying open the center of history to the work of Christ" (203).

The historical center for Belcher includes special attention to the mundane (Ibid). Yet where is the place for everyday traditions that see communion as "ordinance"? What do we make of celebrations of communion around the world where prayer barely frames the celebration except for repeating choruses of praise music, and where the fraction is reduced to leaving the elements upon bar tables for the sake of accessibility and to "keep things real"? What do we make of eucharistic violence as detailed in Cecilia M. Gaposchkin's *Invisible Weapons: Liturgy and the Making of Crusade Ideology* (Cornell, 2017) and Lauren Winner's *The Dangers of Christian Practice: On Wayward Gifts, Characteristic Damage, and Sin* (Yale, 2018), which demythologize assertions such as William T. Cavanaugh's in *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Wiley, 1998) that the Eucharist can resolve social upheaval and usher in unprecedented unity or itself represent revelatory unity? What do we make of the hundreds of presiding priests accused of sexual sin? These kinds of questions and more require responses for a comprehensive ecumenical and eschatological eucharistic theology.

Graduate teachers and students of liturgy and worship will find in *Eucharist and Receptive Ecumenism* a formidable modern Catholic eucharistic theology that is true to the Roman tradition, panoramic in its phenomenological hopes for ecumenical celebration of table worship, and sincere in its eschatology.

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