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**A GIFT OF PRESENCE: THE THEOLOGY AND POETRY OF THE EUCHARIST IN THOMAS AQUINAS**, by Jan-Heiner Tück, translated by Scott G. Hefelfinger, Foreword by Bruce D. Marshall, *Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C.*, 2018, pp. xxii + 379, £76.00, hbk

An oft-repeated criticism of Thomas's theology of the Eucharist, expressed by both systematic theologians and liturgists, states that through focusing on the question of real presence and developing the doctrine of transsubstantiation, Thomas neglects other central aspects of the Eucharist, and that his theology might even lead to a certain 'reification' of the understanding of the Eucharist.

In *A Gift of Presence*, Jan-Heiner Tück gives a wide-ranging exposition of Thomas's theology of the Eucharist that engages with this critique in a double way. In part A of the book, Tück gives a systematic reconstruction of the theology of the Eucharist in the *Summa Theologiae* by presenting it as a theology in two parts: while transsubstantiation seeks to describe the *how* of the real presence, the *what* of the sacrament is to be found in the characterization of the Eucharist as *memoriale passionis Christi*. After an introductory chapter, chapter 2 on the questions about the real presence, shows these questions to be historically conditioned by the Eucharistic controversies of the ninth and eleventh centuries and argues that the concentration on the question of the real presence has its theological source in the conviction that the words of the institution narrative designate the essential centre of the Eucharist, and that therefore the discussion of the real presence at its core is a deeply biblical discussion.

Chapter three focuses on the *what* of the sacrament, on the passion of Christ, whose surrendering of life is made present in the Eucharist, and on what the ramifications of communion with Christ are for the receiver of the sacrament. A discussion of the soteriological passages in the *Summa* paves the way for showing how Thomas illuminates the representative making-present of Christ's suffering in the celebration of the Eucharist. Here the focus is not so much on the moment of the consecration, but on the celebration as a whole, on the Eucharist as a commemoration of Christ's passion, a sign of unity with Christ and ecclesial communion, and an eschatological foretaste of our union with God *in patria*.

After having presented Thomas's theology of the Eucharist in the *Summa* as a balance between questions on the how and the what of the

sacrament, part B intends to balance Thomas's theology of the Eucharist on another level: after presenting the eucharistic theology of the *Summa* in part A, part B shifts the focus to Thomas's eucharistic hymns. The book presents these hymns with great sensitivity both to the poetic style and the theological content. The thesis is that the hymns have a threefold importance for understanding Thomas's theology of the Eucharist: first, the poetic talent of Thomas allows him to compress his theological vision into what is essential. Secondly, the rhyme and metre of the hymns give didactic and catechetical opportunities, in that they function as mnemonic devices and sharpen the awareness of what happens in the Eucharist. Finally, because the hymns generally pass from memorative and narrative stanzas into stanzas written from a first person-perspective, they make known the personal involvement of the person praying, and clarify the spiritual subtext of the discussion of the Eucharist in the systematic works.

In part C the author translates the theological and historical construction of Thomas's texts on the Eucharist into an understanding of the sacrament for today. After a historical chapter on Eucharistic theology, two chapters follow that more or less parallel parts A and B of the book. In the first of these, a theological reformulation of the doctrine of transsubstantiation is presented that leans more heavily on categories of personal freedom. In the context of the last supper, cross and resurrection, Christ makes himself pneumatically present in the gifts of bread and wine. With great sensitivity to ecumenical and liturgical concerns, the author presents the presence of Christ in the Eucharist as a personal presence, bound up with the free self-gift of the crucified and risen one. The final chapter presents the fruits of this theology for a Eucharistic spirituality. Gift, presence and conversion are the basic motifs in this chapter, which includes insightful reflections on a broad spectrum of themes including time, infidelity and communion. This last chapter is especially courageous. It is not often that one finds a chapter with ramifications for lived faith at the end of a scholarly work, but these personal and insightful remarks beautifully show the existential relevance of Thomas's Eucharistic theology and poetry for today.

*A Gift of Presence* is a remarkable achievement. It plays up the strengths of Thomas's Eucharistic theology by giving a thorough interpretation of the systematic writings in the *Summa* and a sensitive and beautiful reading of the Eucharistic hymns. The third part is especially stimulating as a fresh reformulation of Eucharistic change and presence that is both faithful to Thomas's theology and full of insights for Eucharistic faith and practice in our times. The excellent translation makes this rich book now available for English readers. That is something to be grateful for.

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