

Sign and Symbol: Sacramental Experience in Albert's *De corpore domini*.

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It is not uncommon in sacramental theology for sign and symbol to be pitted against each other. In one version of this dichotomy, sign is an experientially thin concept, tied to the metaphysics of causality, while the richer symbol serves as the locus for an experience of the one perceiving it. Under this dichotomy, Thomas Aquinas's and Albert the Great's sacramental understandings belong to the category of "sign," while Louis-Marie Chauvet, a prominent French theologian, offers a Heideggerian articulation of sacrament as symbol. In so far as they follow from incompatible philosophies these two understandings are opposed to each other, yet certain insights about the experiential richness of the sacraments as symbols can be fruitfully integrated into an Aristotelian-realist articulation of sacramental theory.¹ This compatibility is shown by certain aspects of the Eucharistic meditation in Albert's *De corpore domini*.² Specifically, Albert's reflection on the meaning of the bread and wine used in the Eucharist indicates a beginning awareness of the "symbolic" richness of the sacrament of the Eucharist which parallels Chauvet's insights in a startling way, while surpassing the merely symbolic.

The understanding of sacrament as sign has roots in St. Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*. He describes a sign as something "used to signify something else" and "a thing, which, when brought to the senses, makes something beyond the sensible species be thought."³ Signs may be natural or conventional, having either a natural causal link between the sign and the signified (smoke as sign of fire) or

¹ For an analysis of Chauvet's critique of Aquinas' theology, see Bernhard Blankenhorn, OP "The Instrumental Causality of the Sacraments: Thomas Aquinas and Louis-Marie Chauvet" *Nova et Vetera* 2006, 4 (2): pp. 255-94.

² For a sustained theological reflection which is strongly Thomistic but also values insights from the study of sacrament as symbol, see Colman E. O'Neill, OP, *Sacramental Realism*, (Michael Glazier, Delaware: 1983). Blankenhorn also suggests that some of Chauvet's insights could be complementary to Aquinas' thought, "Instrumental Causality," p. 293-4.

³ Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, CCSL 32, ed. J. Martin, 1962, 1.2.11: "*res . . . quae ad significandum aliquid adhibentur*"; 2.1.5: "*res praeter speciem, quam ingerit sensibus, aliud aliquid ex se faciens in cogitationem venire.*"

an entirely conventional connection (words as signs of ideas and things). A sign thus implies some distinction between the sign and the signified even while making a connection between them. Aquinas accepts Augustine's understanding of sign, using, for example, the second definition in his *Summa Theologiae* to explain the use of sensible elements in the sacraments to signify the spiritual effects which take place and through which God acts to bring about the spiritual effects.⁴

The term symbol has been used from the time of the Church Fathers in speech about the sacraments with varying meanings, sometimes not differing at all from sign.⁵ Karl Rahner developed the idea of "real symbol" in order to clarify the distinction between the two. According to Rahner, a sign, signal or code is conventionally understood to refer to something beyond itself. A real symbol, on the other hand, reveals its own inner being in its symbolizing function.⁶ Rahner's early articulation of symbol has roots in the nature of created reality. Rahner appeals to Thomas' understanding that all being is intelligible, although Rahner later parses this in an anthropological way. Laying out his understanding of symbol in general, Rahner appeals to the axiom "*ens est cognitum et cognoscibile, in quantum ipsum est in actu*"—a being is knowable and known insofar as it is in act.⁷ Thus the outward appearance of a being reveals its inner nature.

For Rahner, the paradigmatic example of a real symbol is the Incarnate Word. Here, Christ's divinity expresses itself through his humanity to which it is united. Christ is thus the model for the sacraments, although in discussing the sacraments Rahner applies this axiom to the sacramental action, so that a sacrament, as "real symbol" is understood to express the dynamism of grace which acts through it. At least in his early articulation of symbol, Rahner did not intend to cut himself free from the sacramental causality of the metaphysics of Aquinas, but to point to the richness and unity of the graced experience which occurs in a sacrament.⁸ In fact, Rahner's articulation of real symbol using the example of the Incarnation

⁴ *ST* III.60.4.ad.1; *ST* III.62.1.

⁵ See Herbert Vorgrimler, *Sacramental Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), p. 9-10.

⁶ Karl Rahner, "On the Theology of the Symbol," in *Theological Investigations* 4, trans. Kevin Smith, (New York: Crossroads, 1982), p. 225.

⁷ Rahner, "Symbol," 230. See, *ST* I.5.2, "*unumquodque cognoscibile est, in quantum est actu.*" Aquinas references Aristotle's *Metaphysics* IX as the source for this axiom.

⁸ Rahner notes, "Where . . . one rejects a 'physical causality' (of instrumental type), one soon finds oneself embarrassed." Rahner, "Symbol," 242 n 17. Note: Albert certainly has a causal understanding of the sacraments, speaking of them in *De corpore domini* as containing or giving grace (1.1.), but does not specify the precise way in which the sacraments act to do this. In his other works, Albert prefers to speak about the sacraments operating by means of dispositive causality, imparting an openness to grace. See Bernard

implies that there must be some validity in looking at sacraments both from the viewpoint of sign and from the viewpoint of symbol. Affirming the unity of the person of Christ does not preclude making distinctions between his human and divine natures. Rather, making distinctions between Christ's natures is necessary so that the true basis of their unity and Christ's mode of action can be properly grasped.⁹

After Rahner, the idea of symbol as something communicating its own inner density has been taken as a pre-causal Patristic understanding, a simpler and richer notion of sacrament, originally linked with Platonism, but adjustable to a modern understanding.¹⁰ Louis Marie Chauvet, adopting a Heideggerian viewpoint, chooses the language of symbol in order to articulate a sacramental system severed from what he censures as "productionistic" causality.¹¹ He describes a symbol as bringing about a "system of connections . . . that allows the social group and individuals to orient themselves in space, find their place in time, and in general situate themselves in the world in a significant way."¹² Thus the sacraments are "expressive mediations" that involve the subject, allowing him to find his place in the world and in society.¹³ While signs are about knowledge, symbols are about personal recognition.¹⁴ Chauvet prefers to work within the boundaries of symbol both because it allows a non-Aristotelian discussion of sacrament and because it gives fuller attention to the experience of the one receiving a sacrament.

Chauvet does admit that the concepts of sign and symbol are not absolutely mutually exclusive, allowing that, "in the concrete world, sign and symbol are always mixed together."¹⁵ Nevertheless, he believes that sensibility to the symbolic is severely lacking in scholastic theology, accusing the Scholastics of not merely ignoring the "semantic richness" of the bread and wine used in the Eucharist but positively excluding this richness "in principle, since the final reality of these entities was identified with their ontological substance."¹⁶ Chauvet is correct in pointing out that the reality of Christ's body and blood, signified and brought about by the sacrament is the foundational reality for scholastic thought on the Eucharist at least as

Leeming, *Principles of Sacramental Theology*. 2nd ed. (Westminster: Newman Press, 1960), p. 288-9.

⁹ As seen in the Christology of the Councils of Chalcedon and Constantinople III.

¹⁰ See for example, William R. Crockett, *Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation*, (New York: Pueblo, 1989), p. 87, 236.

¹¹ Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: a sacramental reinterpretation of Christian existence*, (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), p. 21.

¹² Chauvet, *Symbol*, p. 84.

¹³ Chauvet, *Symbol*, p. 110.

¹⁴ Chauvet, *Symbol*, p. 118.

¹⁵ Chauvet, *Symbol*, p. 111.

¹⁶ Chauvet, *Symbol*, p. 393.

expressed by Albert and Thomas, but he is wrong in suggesting that this must necessarily include an impoverished appreciation of the symbolic meanings of the bread and wine brought to the Eucharist. St. Albert's *De corpore domini* illustrates this clearly.

De corpore domini is a treatise on Eucharistic theology written at the end of the 1200s.¹⁷ Although its authorship has been disputed, there is no doubt that it was influenced by the thought of Albert the Great and stems from his milieu as a witness of medieval Dominican thought.¹⁸ It would date from the period of Albert's life after his ordination as bishop, a time when pastoral considerations would have been important to him. Reflecting this, *De corpore domini* varies in tone from the scholastic and analytic to the poetic-devotional. The lengthy work is divided into six sections, treating the Eucharist as grace, gift, food, sacrifice, communion and sacrament. It is the length and meditational tone of some parts of this work which allow space for considerations about the rich symbolic meaning of the Eucharist which might not have been included in a shorter, more focused work.

Accepting the distinction of sign and symbol, it cannot be denied that the foundational presentation of the Eucharist in *De corpore domini* falls on the side of sign. In Albert's thought, there are various levels in the sacrament in which one aspect points to and causes another. Albert teaches that in transubstantiation the substance of the bread is changed into the body of Christ through the power of God working through the words of the priest. This is not simply a change in the perception of the speaker or the recipient. It is an objective change in substance. Albert maintains that the words signify the deeper reality brought about by divine power.¹⁹ If there were no change, the words would be dishonest in what they signify.²⁰

Albert's thought again fits the category of sign when he considers the distinction between the substance of the bread and wine which are changed into Christ's body and blood and the accidents which remain for the purpose of signifying the nourishing qualities of Christ's body and blood. Albert does consider the sacrament in terms of different levels in its reality: the accidents or appearances of bread and wine, and the substance of Christ's body and blood.

¹⁷ Albert, *De corpore domini*, in *Opera Omnia* 38, ed. Auguste Borgnet (Paris: L. Vives, 1899). Citations from the text will be in terms of distinction, tractate (when applicable) and chapter.

¹⁸ In favor of Albertine authorship, see Henryk Anzulewicz, "The Systematic Theology of Albert the Great" in *A Companion to Albert the Great: Theology, Philosophy and the Sciences*, ed. Irvn Resnick (The Netherlands: Brill, 2013), p. 64; against Albertine authorship, see Albert Fries, *Der Doppeltraktat über die Eucharistie unter dem Namen des Albertus Magnus*, (Aschendorff: 1984); Jorgen Vijgens, *The Status of Eucharistic Accidents, "sine subjecto"* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag GmbH, 2013), p. 128.

¹⁹ Albert, *De corpore domini*, 6.2.1.

²⁰ Albert, *De corpore domini*, 6.2.1.

Albert argues against the idea that the substances of bread and wine might remain on the grounds that then the accidents would signify their own natural underlying substances rather than the body and blood of Christ.²¹ Fascinatingly, what Albert here identifies as a relationship of signification in the case of natural bread—the relationship between the appearance of something and its inner being—corresponds to Rahner's first example of real symbol—a being expressing itself through what it communicates outwardly. That the natural relationship between substance and accidents can be described by Albert as one of signification affirms that Albert's speech about the outward aspects of a sacrament as signifying the inner grace is not meant to fragment the sacrament.²² Even natural realities can be viewed as having various aspects to their being.

Finally, in *De corpore domini*, the reception of the sacrament signifies and brings about the spiritual nourishment of grace in the receiver.²³ God acts to have an inner effect on the recipient, an effect not simply proportional to the psychological impact of the experience of receiving the sacrament. The Eucharist is a real encounter with Christ, who takes the initiative. Albert writes, that Christ “communicates his divinity to us, and completely pours himself into us and diffuses himself completely into us.”²⁴ It is important for the recipient to recognize Christ in faith and strive to live in accordance with his teachings, but the most important impact of the sacrament comes from the action of Christ himself increasing charity in the will of the believer. The “sign” levels in Albert's *De corpore domini* could be summarized briefly:²⁵

- 1) The words of consecration signify the body and blood of Christ and through the power of God bring about the change in the bread and wine.
- 2) After the consecration, the accidents signify the body and blood of Christ which are present under them.
- 3) Reception of the body of Christ signifies union with Christ, which is brought about through this reception.

²¹ Albert, *De corpore domini*, 6.2.1.

²² Neither would recognizing the distinctness of Christ's human nature suggest a real separation from the divine person through whom it has being.

²³ Albert, *De corpore domini*, 6.1.2.

²⁴ Albert, *De corpore domini*, 1.1.2.

²⁵ This paper explores only the significance of bread and wine which become the body of Christ in *De corpore domini*. Albert also considers the significance and presence of Christ's sacrifice in relation to the Eucharist, but this is beyond the scope of the present paper. For this topic see Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, “De sacrificio missae secundum S. Albertum Magnum,” in: *Angelicum* 9 (1932): 213-224.

While the sacramental understanding shown in *De corpore domini* is certainly realist and Aristotelian, there is rich content in Albert's explication of the symbolic content in the sacraments which shapes the sacramental experience of the recipient. While the "sign-aspects" of the sacrament can be seen as the foundation of sacramental thought in *De corpore domini*, the devotional qualities of the work give room for more extended meditation on more symbolic aspects. These can be considered in the meanings that Albert reads in the use of bread and wine as the matter for the sacrament. Albert does not understand bread and wine as arbitrarily chosen so that their accidental qualities can become simple placeholders for the body and blood of Christ. They were selected by a wise ordination of God. Albert gives the meaning of bread and wine their most extensive treatment in distinction 3, when he discusses the way in which the sacrament is food. Here he meditates on the meaning of bread and wine and argues for their fittingness to be chosen as the matter for the Eucharist. His reasons for approving bread and wine roughly fall under three headings: the natural qualities of bread and wine, their significance in the Old Testament, and Christ's use of them.

Albert describes the natural goodness of bread and wine using language from the Old Testament as well as current science and human experience. He explains that, "wine brings gladness to the soul, and dissolves the heart in joy and in the good hope of future goods," echoing the testimony of Psalm 104.²⁶ Later, he argues that wine is the noblest and healthiest drink for a mature person for various medical reasons, for example, that wine is more warming and beneficial to digestion than water.²⁷ Here, the recognition of the natural goodness of bread and wine is an implicit affirmation of the goodness of creation of which bread and wine are parts. In one place Albert explicitly connects bread and wine to the primordial goodness of creation. He interprets the verse from Sir 29.21 "the chief thing for man's life is water and bread" as referring to the penitential state after the fall. Before the fall, nourishing and tasty bread and wine would have been the mainstays of human life.²⁸

The Old Testament symbolism which Albert reads in the bread and wine overlaps with the natural, since many Old Testament texts underlie Albert's understanding of the natural properties of bread and wine. Affirming the goodness of bread and wine already situates the recipient of the sacrament in the cultural history of the people of Israel who celebrated both of these foods. The Old Testament history of the people of Israel enters Albert's sacramental sensibility even more clearly in his typology. Albert understands the Eucharist to be the

²⁶ Albert, *De corpore domini*, 3.1.2.

²⁷ Albert, *De corpore domini*, 3.2.1.

²⁸ Albert, *De corpore domini*, 3.2.1.

fulfillment of various types or prefigurements of the Old Testament. Examples of these would be the manna given to the Israelites in the desert and the bread and wine offered by Melchizedek. Albert understands these Old Testament events to teach about Christ's Eucharistic presence. For example, he reads the connection to Melchizedek as showing that the Eucharist was planned by God even from the time of Melchizedek and is as miraculous and sustaining as the manna.²⁹

It is true that when reading these levels of meaning in the bread and wine, Albert does not speak explicitly about the recipient of the sacrament recognizing his place in reality through them. Albert does explain though, that when the recipient of the sacrament ponders these types he can call to mind certain qualities of Christ's offering so as to appreciate the sacrament more fully. For example, just as there was enough manna given for each Israelite who gathered it, the Christian can trust that the Eucharist will supply him with all that he needs. Albert writes:

This is the "golden urn holding," that is, containing, "the manna," (Heb 9.4) which is placed in the holy of holies, which suffices the capacity of each one. For the golden urn is the exterior form which encloses this grace.³⁰

Albert draws a teaching from his comparison of the Eucharist to manna, but in doing so he also gives an image which would speak to the experience of the one receiving communion, connecting him to the spiritual journey of the Israelites though the desert. The poetic language which Albert uses in many places makes it clear that he is not merely aiming for theological accuracy.

Finally, Albert draws attention to the fact that Christ used bread and wine at the Last Supper. This level of symbolism is the most obvious, since the Last Supper is ritually presented at every Mass. Albert continually connects Christ's institution of the Eucharist to his giving of himself in the Eucharist at Mass. Albert also connects the fact Christ called himself a vine to the use of wine at Mass.³¹ This has an ecclesiological and ethical level to which Albert adverts by considering the image of the vine. He reminds his readers that since Christ, who is received in the Eucharist, is the vine the members of the Church must remain united to him in order to bear fruit and share his life.³² Again, this discussion gives an explicit didactic lesson while implicitly providing a symbolic context for the recipient of the

²⁹ Here, Albert draws on Ambrose's *De mysteriis*, CSEL 73, ed. O. Faller, 1955, 8.45.

³⁰ Albert, *De corpore domini*, 1.1.1.

³¹ Albert, *De corpore domini*, 3.1.2

³² Albert, *De corpore domini*, 3.1.9.

sacrament to find himself within.³³ Albert does not have a fully developed modern sensitivity to the function of symbol in human life (the metacognition that would allow him to analyze what his description is giving his readers), but he is also far from blind to the semantic richness of the bread and wine used in the Eucharist.

Thus, a few places in Albert's theology which begin to provide space for a recognition of the symbolic pole of the Eucharist would be:

- 1) Considerations of the meaning carried by bread and wine from their nature and the way they were appreciated in the Old Testament.
- 2) Old Testament types seen as prefiguring the Eucharist and "focusing" the history of Israel in a particular way.
- 3) Christ's use of bread and wine.
- 4) Biblical use of the image of a vine or loaf of bread to symbolize the Church united in Christ.

These points of theological reflection are considered more fully in *De corpore domini* than in some other scholastic works of Eucharistic theology because of the unique genre of *De corpore domini*, which is neither a commentary on scripture, nor a summa of theology, nor even an exposition of the Mass, although it is a companion work to one.³⁴ The same basic points, however, are found in other works of Albert and Thomas. Albert's *De sacramentis*, an early work of his on the sacraments, devotes a question to the types of the Eucharist, as well as a question to the proper matter for the sacrament.³⁵ Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*, also (although briefly) treats the typology of the Eucharist and the fittingness of bread and wine as matter for the sacrament.³⁶

After having looked at Albert's thought, it is striking to survey Chauvet's exposition of the meaning of the bread and wine in the

³³ These three levels in Albert may have influenced by the *De sacramentis* of Hugh of St. Victor. Hugh reads the sacraments in a Trinitarian way in terms of creation, redemption and sanctification. He considers the sacramental elements in terms of the natural matter with its natural signification, the institution by Christ which specifically makes it signify something supernatural, and the grace itself which is signified and given. Hugh of St. Victor, *De sacramentis*, 9.2, PL 176.

³⁴ Albert, *De mysterio missae*, in *Opera Omnia* 38, ed. Auguste Borgnet (Paris: L. Vives, 1899).

³⁵ Albert, *De sacramentis*, in *Opera Omnia Sancti Doctoris Alberti Magni*. Ed. Colon. vol. 26, ed. Albertus Ohlmeyer O. S. B. (Munster: Aschendorff, 1958) V.1.1 and 2.

³⁶ Aquinas, *ST* III. 73.6; III.74.1.

Eucharist. Coming many centuries after Albert, Chauvet is no way derivative of Albert but does have many points of contact with him. Chauvet speaks about a three-fold symbolic dimension, the “cosmic, social and traditional” which are tied up with all corporality and so found in the action and the matter of the Eucharist.³⁷ This analysis of corporality does not exhaust Chauvet’s analysis of the Eucharist, but does represent an important part of it.³⁸

For Chauvet, the cosmic represents humanity as “being-in-the-world” or as belonging to the cosmos.³⁹ It is present in liturgy through the use of physical things, such as water, ash, light or fire. In the liturgy, these physical things become “metaphors of our own existence” reminding each person of his own goodness and connection to the world God created.⁴⁰ Chauvet affirms that in the Eucharist bread represents “the primordial *gift of God* and, by metonymy, the whole of the earth and *human work*.”⁴¹ Chauvet is more explicit than Albert in connecting the bread and wine to the whole natural creation and to the human work that produces them.

The second level and third levels are closely intertwined. The second is that of society, by which a person, through ritual, expresses and establishes his place within the society in which he lives.⁴² The level of tradition involves the meaning which is passed down in a society through time. Chauvet identifies wine as representing, “the fullness of life” which is why it is biblically connected to “messianic joy.”⁴³ This recognition is part of the social and traditional dimension of symbol, since bread and wine are cultural symbols of life, work, and joy from within the Israelite culture. Chauvet also sees bread as having social symbolism as something produced by human societies. “Bread is a *socially instituted food*.”⁴⁴ Thus the bread and wine in the Eucharist necessarily involve an experience both of nourishment and of belonging to the Church as the society within which this nourishment is provided. This is not to place the Eucharist wholly on a social plane. Chauvet recognizes that revelation is necessary to accept the Eucharist as Christ’s body. The natural symbolism of

³⁷ Chauvet, *Symbol*, p. 356, 150.

³⁸ This comparison is drawn from Chauvet’s analysis of “The Symbol and the Body” It does not exhaust his reflection on the symbolic dimensions of the Eucharist. Among other connections, Chauvet also considers the way in which the Eucharist symbolically represents Christ’s sacrifice, the moral obligations of Christians, and the way in which Christ is not visibly available to the Christian.

³⁹ Chauvet, *Symbol*, p. 356.

⁴⁰ Chauvet, *Symbol*, p. 356.

⁴¹ Chauvet, *Symbol*, p. 392.

⁴² Chauvet, *Symbol*, p. 361.

⁴³ Chauvet, *Symbol*, p. 392.

⁴⁴ Chauvet, *Symbol*, p. 397.

bread is not enough.⁴⁵ Christ's giving must be accepted in faith, remembered and handed on within the Church. Thus Chauvet realizes that the Christological must color the social and traditional. Here as well, Albert and Chauvet's considerations are not identical, but do draw on the same general realms to contextualize the sacrament. They are "reading" the bread and wine in parallel ways, although from slightly different viewpoints. Chauvet has deeper insight into the way in which the sacrament allows the recipient to recognize his own place within the three levels of meaning. Yet Albert, in using them to penetrate into the meaning of bread and wine being used in the Eucharist gives an outline which actually would result in the recipient of the sacrament recognizing his place within the cosmos, Church, and salvation history.

This difference in the viewpoints of the two men could also be examined in light of Chauvet's desire to strongly distinguish the symbolic function of the Eucharist from theological knowledge about it. Within his explication of symbol he writes, "the symbol maintains us in the order of recognition and not of cognition."⁴⁶ Chauvet could not mean that intelligible content does not come into play in the reception of the sacrament (or else why refer to the Old Testament which only becomes part of Christian experience through learning?) but that receiving the sacrament does not primarily recall information to the recipient or perhaps that it does not teach new information. Albert would not say that the sacrament is a theology lesson, but he does prefer to link cognition and recognition strongly together. As has been seen, he draws explicit lessons for his reader while more implicitly showing them the wider context within which they are invited to read their sacramental experience. Nevertheless, if a symbol presents a subject with an image or action which serves to help the subject understand himself within a wider milieu, then the bread and wine used in the sacrament do have symbolic value to Albert.⁴⁷

Maintaining therefore, that within his Aristotelian-realist sacramental theology Albert does show sensitivity to certain elements which belong to sacrament as symbol, a further question should be asked about how these two aspects of the Eucharist mutually enrich each other in his thought. This question is difficult to answer, since

⁴⁵ Chauvet, *Symbol*, p. 398.

⁴⁶ Chauvet, *Symbol*, p. 120.

⁴⁷ Albert does not simply allow any meaning at all to be read into the Mass. His theology of the Mass is known for his rejection of rememorative allegory, where the actions of the Mass are read as paralleling actions from the life of Christ. In this type of allegory for example, the priest speaking loudly after praying quietly could be interpreted as Christ returning to his preaching after having left Jerusalem for a time. See David F. Wright, "Albert the Great's Critique of Lothar of Segni (Innocent III) in the *De Sacrificio Missae*," *The Thomist* 44 (1980) 584.

Albert does not himself make the sign-symbol distinction. A first query might concern the role that Albert expects his teaching to play in regard to the reception of the sacrament itself. How much are the explicit lessons which he draws part of his theological speculation meant to deepen theological knowledge about the sacraments, and how far are they intended to influence the recipient's experience of the sacrament? This question does not yet ask how Albert integrates the causal aspect of sign with the contextualizing symbol, but it does shed light on the way sacrament as symbolic encounter is enriched by the theological teaching that must always go along with a sacrament considered as a sign, since as a sign the sacrament points to something which is other than its external appearance.

Albert suggests that explicit theological reflection can play an important role in preparing someone to receive the Eucharist. He writes about preparation to receive the sacrament, saying:

When we ponder the charity of Christ in that he offered himself in sacrifice for us, when we ponder his gentleness in suffering, and when we attend to his devotion in offering himself for us, his generosity in giving himself for us, [and] his kindness in bringing us to this table, our hearts become tender towards this food, and kindle in complete devotion of heart, and burn in love, and he who burns in meditation is thus digested by fire into the likeness of this food.⁴⁸

This is part of a protracted meditation on the process of digestion as parallel to Eucharistic reception. The analogy is inspired by Augustine's observation in his *Confessions* that the Eucharist is a food that is not assimilated to the recipient, but draws the recipient to the food, "Grow, and you will eat me, nor will you change me into yourself, like the food of the flesh, but you will be changed into me."⁴⁹ In his meditation, Albert traces the actions of the recipient from remote preparation for the sacrament through to the moral life which should follow upon sacramental reception. Thus, compunction for sin is the heat that cooks the food, meditation and devotion are the teeth that chew the food, the heat of charity warms the food in the stomach, and perseverance in love helps the food "stick" to the bodily member, that is, for the Christian to remain united to Christ.

Further, Albert links meditation on Christ's goodness not only to preparation for the sacrament but to spiritual "digestion"—the moment of growing union with Christ through charity, the immediate effect of sacramental reception. It is not entirely clear whether this glowing charity is situated by Albert at the moment of sacramental reception or whether he is describing a "spiritual communion"

⁴⁸ Albert, *De corpore domini*, 3.1.6.

⁴⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, CCSL 27, ed L. Verheijen, 1981, 7.10.15-19 "*Cresce et manducabis me. Nec tu me in te mutabis sicut cibum carnis tuae, sed tu mutaberis in me.*"

preceding reception of the sacrament which would then be a second high moment within the “digesting” heat of charity. In any case, explicit theological teaching which leads to meditation on Christ and the sacrament does play an important role for Albert in the richness of the actual sacramental encounter. Cognition contributes to recognition.

Albert would also hold that the sacramental experience, claimed by Chauvet as the realm of the symbolic, is also impacted by the sign-effect of the sacrament in giving grace. Albert suggests that the sacramental encounter with Christ does interiorly change the recipient, and through this does impact her experience. The Eucharist, “is rich with the sweetness of all devotion, since the sweetness and richness of the divinity fills both. And so every one of the faithful finds full, sweet, and rich refreshment in this food.”⁵⁰ Albert maintains that the Eucharist, worthily received, always gives interior life and strength which impact the Christian by making her able to live a virtuous life. Sometimes this inflowing of charity overflows so it is felt in the will and emotions. Albert describes such an overflowing of joy in his description:

For the beloved speaks words of love to the affection of the heart, and so that blessed soul, united to the beloved, is immediately relaxed by the warmth of love, and having been completely melted in devotion, has penetrated to him, and, united to him, is made one body with him. For this is the unity of the spirit of Christ’s charity uniting the whole body, about which it is said (Eph 4.3), “Careful to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”⁵¹

Here, rather than an encounter on the level of the psychological having internal repercussions, the hidden, interior touch of Christ in the sacrament echoes into the psychological experience of the recipient. Albert does see the sweetness of this encounter as expressed by the sweetness of the wine used in the sacrament, but there is a mutual giving of meaning here, so that the symbol of the wine speaks about the hidden enrichment of the heart given in the sacrament, then when this burning of the heart is felt, the reason for giving the Eucharist under the form of wine is understood more deeply. Here sign and symbol and interior experience intertwine as the sacrament causes what it richly and symbolically signifies.

This is certainly a fuller description of the action of the sacrament than a consideration that would see it as functioning only on the level of symbol. Of course, the worth of this last point will depend on whether it is accepted as accurately explaining sacramental experience as well as whether the anthropological structure articulated in it is accepted as valid. Nevertheless, it does show that an

⁵⁰ Albert, *De corpore domini*, 3.1.5.

⁵¹ Albert, *De corpore domini*, 3.1.8.

understanding of sacramental theology which involves causality does also have room for appreciation the symbolic richness of bread and wine, and that this richness really was discovered and appreciated by Albert, a scholastic theologian writing in the 1200s.

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