

MEDIEVAL THEOLOGY

- Topic:** Medieval Perspectives on David Power's *Eucharistic Mystery*
Convener: Katherine M. Yohe
Presenters: Cheryl Clemons, Brescia College
Edward Miller, Gwynedd-Mercy College
Michael Driscoll, University of Notre Dame

The medieval theology session worked in tandem with the early church session in discussing David Power's *Eucharistic Mystery*. Cheryl Clemons examined the text from the perspective of medieval popular piety, in particular, the writings of St. Gertrude of Helfta. Edward Miller examined Power's work from the doctrinal perspective of Thomas Aquinas and Michael Driscoll approached it from the medieval liturgical perspective. Other experts in liturgy and the medieval period attended the session and enriched the question and discussion period with their insights.

Cheryl Clemons opened the session by noting that the infrequent sacramental communion of the populace during this period does not necessarily mean the populace had little devotion toward the Eucharist. On the contrary, infrequent reception could be just as much a sign of devotion as frequent reception. This, in part, is based on Augustine's understanding that not receiving imitates the centurion who felt unworthy to have Christ enter his household and taking the Eucharist imitates Zaccheus who received Jesus joyfully. Both responses were praised by Jesus. The women mystics are part of the initiators and practitioners of alternative forms of hearing Mass and seeking communion with Jesus through devout gazes and spiritual communion. Yet they also did much to counter the trend to infrequent communion. In Gertrude's visions, for example, Christ encouraged her to receive more frequently, stressing his desire to be present with his loved ones in communion in spite of their unworthiness.

Edward Miller pointed out that Power examined Aquinas more than any other theologian. From Miller's perspective, this section of the text suffered because of the difficulties involved in making clear Aquinas' precise Latin vocabulary in English translations and to a non-scholastic readership. Miller appreciated much of what Power did with Aquinas, but for the sake of discussion, chose to focus on areas he perceived to be insufficiently treated in *Eucharistic Mystery*. Among other examples, Miller pointed to Aquinas' non-historical and atemporal approach to how God saves God's people; Aquinas' understanding of Jesus' presence in sign, but not only as sign; and Aquinas' point that not just the church mouse, but also an unknowing human, receive *per*

accidens and not sacramentally. An underlying pastoral concern of Miller's was, in an effort to revitalize the tradition, how would one explain to a non-college educated layperson what is happening when he or she receives communion.

Michael Driscoll focused on a discussion of Power's methodology and added some comments during discussion about the liturgies and mass commentaries of the medieval period.

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