

A RESPONSE TO GARY MACY

I have the privilege of thanking Professor Macy for all of us, for this most interesting and provocative piece of historical research. We are all indebted to the historian who can put the bread of detail on the empty plate of our generalized assumptions about the past. Far from being an arcane matter of interest only to specialists, this paper is a fine example of the importance of explorations in the history of doctrine, often into long neglected and forgotten texts. Henri De Lubac, whose work *The Mystery of the Supernatural* (translated 1967, dedicated to Gerard Smith, S.J., my philosophy teacher at Marquette), was the most earth moving in my own theological education, has written that "theology without historical research is only one more symptom of a church out of touch with the world."¹

I will comment on three points which I find to be major contributions of this paper, and raise a few questions for Sunday morning's discussion.

1. DISCONTINUITY BETWEEN ORDINATION AND EUCHARIST

I think it was Edward Schillebeeckx who, in his 1981 book on leadership in the Church (*Ministry*), established that for the first 1,000 years or so, the presider at the Eucharist was identified as such by way of the authority he (even sometimes she, in the earliest communities) carried of real leadership in the community. The authority of official appointment and jurisdiction was secondary and followed. Prof. Macy gives us specifics that show dramatically the relatively late connection of ordination with the role of presiding at the Eucharist. "In the middle of the twelfth century, respectable theological opinion could hold that there was no necessary connection between consecration and sacramental ordination"; and the "first official ecclesiastical document specifically linking ordination with consecration occurred in the decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215."

The force of this section of the paper I take to be that the record of the faith supports the notion that it has been thought possible for the Eucharist to be fully sacramental in its celebration and its effects (*res*) without a sacramentally (or better, "officially"?) ordained presider. That is, the Eucharist has not—and perhaps need not (intrinsically and necessarily) be dependent on the office of priesthood as presently constituted. As a historian, he probably would not want to be pushed this far into the present application of past practice. But perhaps

¹Fergus Kerr, O.P., "French Theology: Yves Congar and Henri deLubac," in *Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed., ed. David F. Ford (Cambridge MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997) 112.

that is why the history of theology also needs systematics. Obviously, because it was so does not mean it must be so; but equally obviously, because it is so now does not mean it must be so. In the interest of the integrity of our sacramental theology and its inner consistency regarding the seven privileged rituals, am I the only one for whom this research raises the many questions regarding the discrepancies between present and past, and among the sacramental processes themselves?

For example, Prof. Macy discusses Nicholas of Lyra's teaching on what animals take when they eat the consecrated bread. Nicholas's formulation was that animals receive *really* but not sacramentally. Really but not sacramentally, while a good, clear distinction, what is lacking to the sacramental is the faith, the spiritual content, the intentionality. Not only would this formulation, in my opinion, be useful language to retrieve for reflecting on the Eucharist, but it could also make sense in application to marriage. Marriages that fail are referred to as attempted marriages, but many problems of understanding would fall if they could be described as *real* marriages which are not actualized *sacramentally*; in Nicholas's terms, the *sacrament* is received, but not sacramentally.

Another example that would benefit from consistent treatment occurs to me from the discussion of spiritual communion as the common form of reception. The theology may not have yet grown up to justify and support the practice of spiritual *confession/reconciliation*, but are there not striking similarities, forced by the evolution in the practice of the faithful? The similarities between the laity's retreat from taking communion in that transition time and confessing in our time seem to me to be related to a claim of clerical privilege to transmit God's salvation.

Prof. Macy has written elsewhere that "what is needed is not more historical documentation, but a different way of looking at those documents" (*Banquet's Wisdom*, 11). Surely greater literacy in the well-known and little-known teachings and practices of our far-distant past would help to balance that peculiar Catholic form of fundamentalism, idolatrizing the recent past, but such research would have to emphasize the minority documents, those kept but little studied and less often quoted because they offer little support to present teachings. Moreover, looking generally at schools of theology, is it not true that in-depth historical study and research is the first casualty of cost cutting?

2. SPIRITUAL COMMUNION

Already named then is the second major contribution I wanted to highlight: the popular practice of spiritual communion among the laity. This information also is provocative—of thought, application, and perhaps some storytelling. It is certainly evident all around us that people make do—creating rituals and structures by which they can participate in their own salvation, and perhaps do so most aggressively when that salvation appears to belong to a class that excludes them. My mother, in a small town where the backbone of the Church is the order

of widows, knows the *missa sicca* well. They don't call it that, of course. They actually find their prayer services three times a week when Father isn't available to be a bit LESS dry. When Irma and Luanna lead the group in prayer and distribute communion, this community too sees NO difference in the effect, the *res*, of the reality. I am aware that the practice of spiritual communion is a whole different reality. But it is, I believe, another way of making do in the face of a dualistic eucharistic theology. The key for me is that we are not yet successful in articulating a right theological understanding of the relationship of nature and grace. The relationship between nature and grace, which is not embodied only in the rhetoric but in our lifestyles and ritual celebrations of blessing, has a deep effect on the spirituality and liturgical experience available to the ordinary believer. I agree with deLubac that those who held a one-sided supernaturalist theology in the 1940s were the ones most to be blamed for going to the other extreme after the 1960s. The alternatives for people's spirituality still seem to be dualist—ecclesiastical or secular.

3. THE RENEGOTIATION THAT MACY FINDS TO BE UNDERWAY

The relationship between the Church and the Eucharist appears to be key here. De Lubac argued long ago, in *Catholicism*, that it was necessary to rethink the relationship between the Eucharist and the Church so that the dualism was overcome between the Eucharist as the miracle (of transubstantiation) and the Church as the sociological entity. His hope was that we could recover the ancient symbolic inclusions as opposed to creating new dialectical antitheses (Ford, 110). This hope appears to be in sight, if Prof. Macy is correct. To reinstate a view of the Church as the *marvelous mystery*, with the Eucharist as the "mystical principle, permanently active, realizing it," would be to restore the wholeness. I would prefer to say, led by Mary Collins's presentation last evening, to say the Eucharist is "mystical principle, continuously active, realizing it." The Church and the Eucharist make each other, every day, each by the other. The renegotiation sighted on the horizon appears to be toward taking emphasis off the *differences* between clergy and lay, creation and salvation, nature and grace, toward integration of sacramental life with the whole of life. This sounds right to me, not only in terms of what I see happening among women and theology students, but what one might pray for. The dualistic view of nature and grace will not be banished by language and lectures but by the experience of my own life transformed. As Karl Rahner said: in popular parlance, the term "supernatural usually refers to otherworldly realms and their inhabitants, or to phenomena for which no natural or scientific explanation can be given. But in the Christian theological tradition, 'supernatural' refers to a divinely caused transformation of the natural possibilities and capacities of created persons."² The Eucharist in the Church is

²J. A. Di Noia, in *Modern Theologians*, 125.

being renegotiated to affirm precisely the religious or sacred character of human nature, of all human life.

I have the following questions to raise, and you will notice that most of them are designed to ask Professor Macy in effect: How far would you go with the implications of this research? As Karl Rahner also said, sooner or later we need to stop sharpening our knives and cut something!³ It is certainly not enough to say that this provocative research supports only one call—the call for more research!

1. Why, during the thirteenth century, did ordination come to be seen as irreversible, thus constituting a new ontological reality, not just a new social role? (Macy, 4) Why did similar thinking not develop with regard to the subjects of sacramental marriage, where the permanence was seen as moral responsibility rather than sacramental character?

2. Macy has shown that theology follows practice. So, how is sacramental theology (especially the theology of the Eucharist) responding to social patterns and futuristic trends? Will spiritual communion with three blades of grass be an accepted practice of the future? And will the language of *res et sacramentum* and *res* be made available for ordinary persons' understanding of sacramental efficacy?

3. Along with a new eucharistic piety comes a new set of theological questions. Are reputable historians going beyond the texts of bishops and theologians to study eucharistic pieties of the past? What kind of theological questions do you see this research raising? Is the term eucharistic pieties of the present one that makes sense? It does to me for I see many forms of it among the women who participate in our Theological Insights program, but it is quite distant from participation in the Mass as presently available. In a related question, is the "popular religiosity" of the present, not just of integral cultural forms such as Hispanic, Hmong, Eastern European, but new nature spiritualities and perhaps odd cultic practices, respected by scholars of the present? Should it be?

4. Is there anything that you know about using the historical record which can help in our discernment regarding the "substantive questions": that is, whether the current official insistence on the doctrinal character of the exclusion of women from ordination, and the necessary connection of ordination with valid celebration of the Eucharist, is historically ill-informed or legitimate development? One of my students once asked a scholar of Hebrew Scriptures if there were anything there to help figure out where God stood in a conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians. Who was right? The biblical scholar answered: "Whoever won!" I know you will do better than that!

JOAN H. TIMMERMAN
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³I heard this at a talk by Rahner on "God as Incomprehensible Mystery" given at the University of Chicago in 1968.