

Doctrine under Development: Transubstantiation in Caesarius of Heisterbach

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The Fourth Lateran Council (1215), in its Profession of Faith, codified the language and basic content of what was then becoming the premiere theological understanding of Eucharistic Change and Eucharistic Presence: that the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ “are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the forms of bread and wine, the bread and wine having been changed in substance [*transsubstantiatis*], by God’s power, into his body and blood, so that in order to achieve this mystery of unity we receive from God what he received from us.”¹ In this exercise of the extraordinary Magisterium, Lateran IV absorbed the Latin term *transsubstantio* and a related operative definition of Eucharistic Presence into the corpus of the Church’s teaching. Nevertheless, it would not be until the “Decree on the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist” of the thirteenth session of the Council of Trent (1551) that the dogmatic contents of Eucharistic Change and Eucharistic Presence would officially attain to the magisterial significance that they continue to bear today.²

For at least a century beyond Lateran IV, medieval theologians continued to wrestle with how to speak of bread and wine becoming the body and blood of Christ.

Transsubstantio itself seems to have been applied to the Eucharist first in a sermon by

¹ Fourth Lateran Council, “Constitutions,” 1; Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1: Nicaea I to Lateran V (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990) 230.

² See Council of Trent, Session 13 (October 11, 1551), “Decree on the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist,” 2, in Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 2: Trent to Vatican II (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990) 694.

Hildebert de Lavardin, Archbishop of Tours (d. 1133), and well into the thirteenth century the term was used synonymously with *mutatio*, *commutatio*, *transitio* and *versio*, all meaning “change.” Thus the technical thought and language categories that would later be essential for presenting Eucharistic doctrine (such as substance and accident) are present only unevenly in writings on the Eucharist from the twelfth century, and often are employed in an imprecise and inconsistent manner. Yet, a charitable reading of the vast amount of Eucharistic literature from this period, in which the often-overlooked *Great Dialogue of Visions and Miracles* of Caesarius of Heisterbach (c. 1180-1240) holds a unique place, reveals the creative ingenuity of pastors and theologians wrestling to give expression to the Church’s central liturgical mystery of faith.

Throughout his *Dialogue*, Caesarius relates incredible stories of saints and demons, prelates and princes, and all other sorts and conditions of people — rich and poor, learned and unlettered — whose personal experiences of miraculous (and sometimes dubious) events seem to have been recorded to entertain as much as to edify, intending to lead one to principles of true piety and sane morality. The ninth book of the *Dialogue*, “Concerning the Body and Blood of Christ,” is aimed at promoting a deeper understanding of and appreciation for what Caesarius perceives to be the greatest of the sacraments.³ This essay will shed some light on both the content of Caesarius’ teaching and the manner of his presentation, as representative of a period in which the doctrines of Eucharistic Change and Eucharistic Presence were still evolving. By way of contrasting the *Dialogue* and the

³ See Caesarius of Hesterbach, *Dialogue on Miracles* Caesarius of Heisterbach, *The Dialogue on Miracles*, tr. H. von E. Scott and C. C. Swinton Bland (London: G. Routledge & Sons, 1929) IX.1, 105: “All the sacraments of the church are far excelled by the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ.”

Summa Theologiae of Thomas Aquinas, this essay will also consider the further trajectory of that doctrinal development later in the thirteenth century.

The *Dialogue on Miracles* of Caesarius of Heisterbach

Although book nine of the *Dialogue on Miracles* is not a *summa* of teaching on the Eucharist, and therefore seems less theologically forthcoming than works of that genre, its sixty-seven chapters nonetheless present a systematic (if also narrative) treatment of the sacrament, in which the manner of presentation itself — the ordering of the work — reveals something about the author’s Eucharistic teaching. The *Dialogue*, a conversation between a “monk” and a “novice,”⁴ is structurally complex, yet synthetic in organization. Caesarius begins with a general treatment of the Eucharist (chapter 1) that broadly outlines the theological framework within which the subsequent accounts of miracles are situated. The remaining chapters divide into four sections, each of which opens with a specific request for “demonstrations” by his conversant novice: miracles which “prove” that the presence of the true body of Christ born from the virgin is under the species of bread (chapters 2-16); miracles which “prove” that the presence of the actual blood of Christ is under the species of wine (16-25); miracles that demonstrate the virtue of worthily celebration or reception of the sacrament (26-52); and miracles that demonstrate the dangers of unworthy celebration or reception (52/53-67).⁵ These structuring “demonstrations” are theological, not only framing and determining the flow of the

⁴ Caesarius, who served as both novice master and prior of the Cistercian Kloster Heisterbach near the town of Oberdollendorf in the Rhein-Sieg district of Germany, seems to have written the *Dialogue* for the instruction of his novices.

⁵ See *Dialogue* IX.1, 108.

narrative, but also underlying and informing the Eucharistic teaching, and may therefore serve as a hermeneutical key for interpreting the miraculous accounts.

“Before I speak with you of the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ,” Caesarius writes, “I must remind you ere I approach the subject with fear and trembling, that where faith alone is operative and reason is altogether excluded, discussion cannot be held without danger.”⁶ But faith and *sight* are intimately linked in Caesarius’ thinking, for “nothing strengthens faith more than those visions, in which we behold with our bodily eyes the actual body and blood which we believe to be hidden under the species of bread and wine.”⁷ Elsewhere, after describing a vision in which human blood was seen in the chalice after the consecration, Caesarius interprets the miracle as though it were Christ saying, “If you do not believe in the sacrament, let this experience teach you the truth. And since faith is the road to sight, let this sight of my blood recall you to my faith.”⁸ This model of sight leading to faith, *per visibilia ad invisibilia*, as a sacramental inversion of the Pauline notion of faith preceding or even supplanting sight,⁹ underlies Caesarius’ project of inspiring a sense of devotion and reverence through accounts of miraculous and extraordinary visions, and is at the heart of his preference for the narrative genre. For Caesarius, belief in and understanding of the Eucharist are inspired through a sense of “awe” in one’s encounter with things that are visible, rather than by scholastic disputation; thus his inspiring and edifying examples themselves communicate theological points through his choice of narrative illustrations.

⁶ Ibid., IX.Prologue, 103.

⁷ Ibid., IX.1, 106.

⁸ Ibid., IX.28, 122.

⁹ See 2 Cor 4:18; 5:7; also 1 Cor 13:12.

Using elements of fable and parable, Caesarius' *Dialogue* operates on multiple strata. The narrative level, relative to the characters he portrays, becomes the basis for certain important theological distinctions, such as the different classes of celebrants and communicants, and of witnesses to the miracles that he describes. The didactic level, oriented towards the reading audience, is usually self-evident; at times, however, Caesarius interjects into his accounts cues intended to highlight his theological understanding of the Eucharist. For example, when Caesarius writes, "The Savior condescends. . . to show the reality of His body, in this sacrament to good priests in order that they may be comforted; to those who are wavering in their faith that they may be strengthened; to those who are living ill that they may be warned,"¹⁰ he is less in the role of the monk addressing his novice interlocutor than in the role of the teaching author, clarifying the moral of his story for those beyond the narrative or its immediate telling.

The Eucharistic Doctrine of Caesarius

In turning to his Eucharistic Doctrine, the first chapter of book nine of the *Dialogue* presents Caesarius' explicit Eucharistic teaching, identifying for the reader the position and role of the Eucharist in the sacramental economy, and offering a framework for understanding the Eucharistic teaching exemplified in the subsequent miraculous accounts. In Caesarius' estimation, "[a]ll the sacraments are far excelled by the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ,"¹¹ which is "the commemoration of the Lord's passion,"¹²

¹⁰ *Dialogue*, IX.3, 110-111.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, IX.1, 105.

¹² *Ibid.*

celebrated until the second coming of Christ. “When He appears in glory, types [i.e., the sacraments] will vanish away.”¹³

Although all of the sacraments shall fade away, Caesarius views the other sacraments as preparatory for the Eucharist: “Everything which has been said in the former books, to wit, of contrition, of confessions, of satisfaction, and by singleness of mind, are only preparations for this sacrament.”¹⁴ One may therefore posit the orientation of a Christian’s life towards the Eucharist (in spite of the ultimate disappearance of all the sacraments) by way of an anticipated eschatology: while the *sacramental* medium of participation will vanish, the Eucharist nonetheless stands foremost in the sacramental economy since it already contains an eschatological fulfillment in type. The entire Christian life is directed towards the Eucharist as the pre-eschatological counterpart of one’s eschatological participation in God. Caesarius later affirms this point when he writes, “[l]et us study so to eat it, that by its strength, we may be able to come out of the desert of our religious life into the true land of promise; in which we may win grace by His help and with Him celebrate the last and eternal Passover.”¹⁵

Caesarius posits that “three things are to be considered in this sacrament, one which is pure sacrament [*sacramentum tantum*]; and a second which is sacrament and matter [*sacramentum et res*]; and the third which is matter and not sacrament [*res et non sacramentum*].”¹⁶ These three distinctions inform and shape his presentation in both of the aforementioned strata of the work, namely, the miraculous accounts themselves and their

¹³ Ibid., 106.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., IX.67, 169.

¹⁶ *Dialogue*, IX.1, 106; the Latin terms are from Caesarii Heisterbacensis monachi Ordinis Cisterciensis, *Dialogus Miraculorum: Textum ad Quatuor Codicum Manuscriptorum Editionisque Principis Fidem*, Vol. 2, ed. Joseph Strange (Cologne: J. M. Heberle/H. Lempertz & Co., 1851) 166.

synthetic presentation for his audience, which allow the reader to gain a deeper understanding of Caesarius' Eucharistic thought by interpreting his accounts of the miraculous through each of the distinctions that underlie them.

Of Pure Sacrament. The volume of Caesarius' writing on the purely sacramental or signifying quality of the Eucharistic elements is slight, demonstrating his emphasis on the actual presence of Christ and its effects as designated in the second and third categories (sacrament and matter, and matter only, respectively). He writes that the pure sacrament is "the visible species of the bread and wine"¹⁷ and that it is called sacrament "because it is the sign of a heavenly thing; [for,] in it, one thing is seen and quite another believed to exist."¹⁸ He believes that in the sacramental species "the bread refers to the holy body [of Christ] and wine to [His] soul."¹⁹ In considering the materials permissible for consecration, Caesarius makes an indirect sacramental inference connecting the wheaten bread used for consecration and the fact that "the Lord compares Himself to a grain of corn as also to bread."²⁰ Further, Caesarius asserts that the Eucharist is the typological fulfillment of the Ark of the Covenant²¹ and the Passover lamb;²² but this fulfillment, only fully realized in the eschaton when "these types vanish away,"²³ is sacramental in the current, and hence not only mediates its underlying reality, but must also therefore possess a signifying quality that is "pure sacrament" — namely, the bread and wine that refer to the actual body and blood of Christ, the "sacrament and matter" of the Eucharist.

¹⁷ *Dialogue*, IX.1, 106.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 108.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 107.

²¹ *Dialogue*, IX.53, 157-158.

²² *Dialogue*, IX.67, 169.

²³ *Dialogue*, IX.1, 106.

Of Sacrament and Matter. Caesarius' interest in *sacrament and matter* is extensive, as attested by the fact that two of the *Dialogue's* four structuring themes deal with the actual presence of Christ in the sacrament. Here, some modified Thomistic categories will serve as a heuristic principle for better understanding and articulating the parameters and content of Caesarius' Eucharistic teaching on (A) Consecration (including the ritual, form or Institution Narrative, intention, and elements); (B) Eucharistic Change; and (C) Manner of Christ's Presence.

(A) Caesarius writes that four things are needed to effect the *Eucharistic Consecration*: ritual, form, intention, and elements.²⁴ He does not expound the ritual or liturgy of the Mass at any point in the work; he does however, posit that the *form* of the sacrament "lies in both words and actions. In words, because when these words are uttered 'This is my body,' and afterwards 'This is my blood,' the change takes place of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ."²⁵ The intention required of the priest is not explicitly addressed either, but some conclusions may be drawn from his disjunction between personal belief and the intention required for valid consecration: in his estimation, priests who do not believe in the real presence of Christ,²⁶ who doubt the Sacrament,²⁷ and whose lives are wicked,²⁸ all nonetheless consecrate the Eucharist. Certain reflective remarks later in the narrative presentation are also suggestive in this regard; for example, in the case of a sick man for whom the water from the purification of the chalice was changed into blood, the Novice asks, "What is your opinion about the blood?" to which the

²⁴ *Dialogue*, IX.27, 129-130: "Three things are required in the priest that he may be able to consecrate and these are ritual, words and intention. A fourth may be said to be the material of bread and wine."

²⁵ *Dialogue*, IX.1, 107.

²⁶ See *Dialogue*, IX.56.

²⁷ See *Dialogue*, IX.5, 18-19, etc.

²⁸ See *Dialogue*, IX.3, 6, 20, etc.

Monk responds, “I do not think it was the blood of Christ, because water is never turned into it, nor even wine without the due benediction of a priest.”²⁹ With regard to the material elements of bread and wine, Caesarius states that the wine is to be made of pressed grapes and the bread cannot be anything but wheat.³⁰ Further, the material used for the consecration must be pure so that no filth would be passed into the body of the Lord by the ministration of the priest, as he demonstrates in the account of a host miraculously ejected from the altar because an insect was baked into it.³¹

(B) Caesarius holds that after the consecration, the bread and wine — the accidents (or unessentials, as he calls them) which nonetheless remain — are *changed* into the body and blood of Christ. “The change [*modus conversionis*] takes place in an ineffable fashion. As has been said when these words are uttered: “This is My body” the bread changes [*transit*] into the body of Christ by the power of God through the ministry of the priest. The same is to be understood about the wine, the unessentials remaining nevertheless unchanged [*manentibus tamen accidentibus*], to wit, the color, weight, and taste.”³² Caesarius’ use of the term *accidens* (here translated infelicitously as “unessentials” as that which remains unchanged in the sacrament) is highly suggestive of transubstantiation as it

²⁹ *Dialogue*, IX.24, 127.

³⁰ *Dialogue*, IX.1, 107: “As the blood can only be made out of wine, and that pressed from the grape, in like manner the body of Christ can only be made out of wheat when it has been made into bread; because the Lord compares Himself to a grain of corn as also to bread.”

³¹ *Dialogue*, IX.65, 167-168: “One day when the priest was saying mass and. . . had placed the host. . . down upon the corporal, it immediately leapt off. The priest, thinking that this had happened by chance, and that the host had not been properly placed, forthwith covered the same, which as he looked, leapt again further than before. And when he tried the third time, it was hurled from the altar as if driven by a whirlwind. . . . [W]hen mass was over, [after consecrating another host], he took with him the aforesaid host, hurried to Cologne and finding the priors at the church of the Holy Apostles, he showed them the host, and told them what had taken place concerning it. . . . [O]ne of the clergy held it up against the light and saw a spot in it. When they broke it into small pieces, they found cooked into it a bug, which is commonly called a louse. . . . There is no doubt that it was rejected by the holy angels, who did not suffer that the bread polluted by so filthy a worm should pass into the body of the Lord.”

³² *Dialogue*, IX.1, 107; Latin terms from the edition of Joseph Strange (see note 16 above), 167.

will later be understood. But where he applies the term *transsubstantio*, he uses it as a synonym for “change” and does not appeal to the category of substance in discussing what of the bread or wine is transformed.³³ Though his understanding of Eucharistic Change is significantly gestural of the direction in which the doctrine of transubstantiation will develop, his use of the term remains a non-technical expression of the fact of Eucharistic Change, without specifying its manner.

(C) The great majority of Caesarius’ treatment pertains to the actual presence of Christ, related to the *manner* of that presence. First, Caesarius clearly believes that each of the sacramental species is changed independently as the direct terminus of its consecratory form. Thus, when the Novice poses the question of whether the consecration of the bread (and therefore its change) depends on the completion of the entire Sacrament by the consecration of the wine, or whether the body of Christ would be present even if the wine had not or could not be consecrated, the Monk answers, “According to the custom of our Order we are compelled to believe that the body of Christ is present, because we do not repeat the blessing of the bread but only of the chalice. My opinion is that this is the case if the priest after uttering those words ‘This is my body,’ should stop or be unable to proceed to the blessing of the chalice.”³⁴ Further, Caesarius posits that the whole of Christ is present in each species, such that even if the wine had not been consecrated, Christ’s blood would nonetheless be present in the body, since “Christ’s body is not bloodless.”³⁵ Hence, the whole of Christ is present under each species, even if a specific aspect of Christ is the

³³ Thus, in asserting the separate termini of the consecrations of the bread and wine, Caesarius writes, “Master Peter the precentor and his followers. . . say that the transubstantiation [*transsubstantiationem*] of the bread into the body of Christ cannot take place until those other words are uttered ‘This is my blood etc.’; *Dialogue* IX.27, 130; Latin from Strange, 185.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

direct terminus of conversion or is signified by one or the other of the sacramental species. In the second chapter of the *Dialogue*, Caesarius offers the vision of the priest Gotteschalk, who saw Christ appear in his hands as an infant, as evidence that the body of Christ is present before the consecration of the chalice: “[when] the transubstantiation had taken place, forthwith he found in his hands and saw with his eyes no longer the appearance of bread, but a most glorious infant, indeed, Him who is most beautiful in form compared with the sons of men on whom also angels desire to look. . . . So long as that blessed saint saw the appearance of the child, he saw there no species of bread and vice-versa.”³⁶

This and similar accounts disclose the most formative and peculiar feature of Caesarius’ Eucharistic teaching, which underlies the possibility of his presentation of the narrative miracles as “proofs” for Christ’s *actual* presence: Caesarius believes that Christ’s bodily accidents are physically present in the the Eucharist — not strictly in the mode of substance (as would be the case with Aquinas, as discussed below), but as dimensionally conditioned by the sacramental host itself.³⁷ Thus, the accidents of bread and wine serve a *concealing* role of the reality that lies beyond — the reality of Christ’s presence in a physical mode. He writes that “nothing more strengthens faith than those visions, in which we behold with our bodily eyes the *actual* body and blood which we believe to be *hidden* under the species of bread and wine.”³⁸ Such language of hiddenness, of seeing the miraculous vision inside the host (or in the place of it), all seem to reveal this underlying

³⁶ *Dialogue* IX.2, 109.

³⁷ That is, if the host is small, then the Christ within it must correspondingly be small; and if the sacramental “veil” is removed, then and only then can the size of the Christ seen underneath seem to extend beyond the dimensive limitations of the accidents. For example, in accounts of miracles related to the host, Christ is either seen *in* the host — which requires a dimensive correlation between the Christ that is present and the necessarily determinative size of the host — or Christ is seen *in place of* the host, in which cases the size of an infant, or whatever else the miracle may occasion, is observed.

³⁸ *Dialogue* IX.1, 106; emphasis added.

premise of Christ's physical or accidental presence. This becomes clear, for example, in the case of the priest Adolph, who saw the host transform into visions of the virgin and child, then into a lamb, and last of all into the crucified:

One day when this Adolph was celebrating mass and before the "Agnus Dei" had lifted up the host to break it, he saw the virgin *in the host itself*, sitting upon a throne and holding the infant to her breast. Wishing to know what was on the other side, as soon as *he turned the host* he saw a lamb *in it* and when he again turned, he saw *in it, as if through a glass*, Christ hanging on the cross with bent head. . . . When he had appeased the Lord with his tears, the sacrament took again its former appearance and he completed the mass.³⁹

Similar phenomena are reported in several of the other miraculous narratives, such as when "the Lord showed [a priest] raw flesh *in the host*,"⁴⁰ or — especially highlighting the dimensive aspect — when a wicked priest, returning to a consecrated host that he had buried, "found not the species of bread, but the figure of a man hanging upon a cross, *small indeed in size*, but wholly composed of flesh and blood."⁴¹

The same underlying premise can be in the miracles set forth to 'prove' the actual presence of Christ's blood — such as the case of the priest Heylard, who saw the appearance of human blood in the chalice, which the Monk interprets as though it were the Lord saying, "If you do not believe in the sacrament, let this experience teach you the truth. And since faith is the road to sight, let this sight of my blood recall you to my faith."⁴² Similarly, a more graphic narrative presents the case of "one of the brothers [who] saw the boy Jesus, not indeed as an infant, but as if He had already suffered upon the cross, and all His wounds were dripping blood all of which was received into a holy chalice

³⁹ *Dialogue* IX.3, 110; emphasis added.

⁴⁰ *Dialogue* IX.5, 112; emphasis added.

⁴¹ *Dialogue* IX.6, 113; emphasis added.

⁴² *Dialogue* IX.18, 122.

below them.”⁴³ The fact that Caesarius holds Christ to be present *according to his accidents* accounts for his belief that oxen,⁴⁴ bees,⁴⁵ flies,⁴⁶ mice,⁴⁷ and even the four elements⁴⁸ could recognize the unbridled “power” that extends beyond the Eucharist’s sacramental “veil”: “You see from these stories which I have told you the plainest proofs that every creature, whether, like men, rational, or like the animals, irrational, and indeed all insensible elements, such as water, earth, air, and fire plainly recognize the power of this divine sacrament.”⁴⁹

The Novice asks a very appropriate and pertinent question: “May I ask what it is that mice or worms can consume in the sacrament of the altar?” To which the Monk responds:

Only the species of bread, but in it Christ is seen and touched and it is an insult to Him if anything unworthy approaches. Because His true body lies hidden beneath it, it is glorified. And because it is immortal, it cannot see corruption; and because it is spiritual we cannot touch it. It is not even touched by the priest who takes it in his hand, except through the means of the species of bread. The species itself may be seen broken, eaten, may satisfy, may see corruption, and be insulted. When any of these things is attributed to the body of Christ, you must understand it of the species only.⁵⁰

Three things are noteworthy in his response: first, Christ may be insulted since Caesarius understands him to lie hidden with his accidents (even if he is also glorified) in the

⁴³ *Dialogue* IX.41, 144.

⁴⁴ *Dialogue* IX.7, 113-114.

⁴⁵ *Dialogue* IX.8, 114-115.

⁴⁶ *Dialogue* IX.10, 116-117.

⁴⁷ *Dialogue* IX.11, 117-118; in this case, however, the mice did not recognize Christ present in a consecrated host. Rather, though they nibbled around the perimeter, they would not touch the monogram stamped on the unconsecrated wafer. Still, Caesarius seems to subsume the mice under the category of creatures recognizing their Creator in the host; see also *Dialogue* IX.11 and IX.16.

⁴⁸ Water (*Dialogue* IX.12-13, 118-119); Earth (IX.14, 119-120); Air (IX.15, 120-121); Fire (IX.16, 121), and reference to all four elements in total as the “invisible” or “insensible” elements: IX.11, 118 and IX.16, 121.

⁴⁹ *Dialogue* IX.16, 121.

⁵⁰ *Dialogue* IX.11, 117.

sacrament. Second, the reason why Christ is impassible in the sacrament is because of the nature of his immortality and glorification, rather than the mode of his presence. Third, Christ's presence remains in the sacramental species for the duration of the sacrament's existence: his presence is not removed with the encroachment of an insult; rather, the very possibility of an insult expresses that his presence remains as such.⁵¹

Of matter and not sacrament. Caesarius takes special interest in illustrating his understanding of the effects and use of this sacrament as not only exemplified by the fact that two of his four structuring themes are about these topics, but also by the amount of theological attention and comment he offers regarding (A) the effects and use of this Sacrament in general; (B) the priest-celebrant; and (C) the lay communicants. These three topics shed light on Caesarius' understanding of the "matter and not sacrament" of the Eucharist as "[t]he mystical body of Christ, to wit, the one holy church."⁵²

(A) Caesarius distinguishes two classes of recipients or users of the sacrament: the good or worthy, and the wicked or unworthy, each of which experiences a corresponding effect (or lack thereof) from reception. He writes that the Sacrament is "received in a twofold manner, spiritually and sacramentally. The good receive it in both senses but the wicked receive it only sacramentally."⁵³ For the good, therefore, "it has a double usefulness, because by the reception of it virtue is increased, that is charity, and it is the healer of daily infirmity...."⁵⁴ The wicked, however, eat and drink it as their own

⁵¹ Caesarius also affirms this point when he asserts that the wicked do in fact receive Christ's body, but only receive it sacramentally. For example, of a priest who was seen to be chewing coals when he received the sacrament, the Novice asks the meaning of this vision, with the further question as to whether the wicked actually receive the Lord's body. The Monk replies, "Yes they receive it just as the good do, but only sacramentally..."; see *Dialogue* IX.54, 158-159.

⁵² *Dialogue* IX.1, 106.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 107-8.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 107.

condemnation — which naturally lacks the qualities of charity and healing extended to, and found within, the good.

Two further classes of recipients can be identified in the miraculous accounts: those who doubt and non-human creatures who nonetheless recognize the sacrament. Caesarius typically classifies the former according to their character, often charitably considering their situation by positing that the miracle(s) occurred to build their faith and lead them to a more profound devotion.⁵⁵ Caesarius excludes the latter — non-human creatures — from the possibility of sacramental reception, even when they recognize the power behind the sacramental “veil.” Although this point offers more insight into the way in which he conceives of the manner of Christ’s presence than his understanding of the manner of reception, it nonetheless bears on the use of the sacrament: that Caesarius understands such “wonderful power” to inhere in the sacrament allows him to posit uses of it that are not confined to the increase of charity and the healing of daily infirmity — such as when a pyx containing the host was cast into a river, causing a group of heretics to drown.⁵⁶

Regarding the effects and use of this Sacrament in general, Caesarius writes,

In this is found the way, the truth, and the life. The way, because it leads to God those who approach it worthily, wherefore it is also called *viaticum*. The truth, because those who receive it, are incorporated into Christ. Wherefore it is also called Holy Communion. The life, because it does not allow the death of the soul to pass over those who are thus incorporated into Christ. And from this it receives the name of Eucharist which means *heartly thanks*.⁵⁷

Clearly, Caesarius believes the Eucharist to be an essential part of the Christian journey, the *via* from which its designation as *viaticum* is derived. But interpreting Caesarius’ accounts of the miraculous as “proving” the flow of grace and sin, of moving towards and

⁵⁵ See *Dialogue* IX.5, 18-19 and 22.

⁵⁶ *Dialogue* IX.12, 118.

⁵⁷ *Dialogue* IX.1, 105.

away from Christ, poses a difficulty for the reader, inasmuch as such dynamics regularly would occur even in the absence of the miraculous window that “peaks” through the “veil” of the sacrament.

Regarding the purpose of the miracles in the last two structural sections of the book (miracles that “prove” the actual presence of Christ’s body, and then, his blood), Caesarius writes, “[t]he Savior condescends. . . to show the reality of His body, in this sacrament to good priests in order that they may be comforted; to those who are wavering in their faith that they may be strengthened; to those who are living ill that they may be warned,”⁵⁸ and again, “the appearance of blood is shown to some, like the good, as a reward for their devotion, and for the comfort of those who have doubts about the sacrament, and to rebuke those who are living in sin.”⁵⁹ These two passages illustrate that, for Caesarius, the miracles offer a confirmation of a reality that is to be understood as existing for all believers, even in the absence of miracles. Hence, in an account of the host appearing as the infant Christ who then turns his face away from the wicked priest holding him,⁶⁰ Caesarius intends not only to narrate a miracle (which he believes actually to have occurred), but also to impart a lesson — that Christ turns away from the communicant who approaches unworthily. Such is the function of each miraculous account, divulging insights into how Caesarius conceives the dynamic of one’s encounter with Christ in the Eucharist to occur in light of his explicit theological statements.

(B) Caesarius brings the theological framework described in the foregoing to bear when considering the priest-celebrant. He posits that “the glory of a priest’s life lies chiefly

⁵⁸ *Dialogue* IX.3, 110-111.

⁵⁹ *Dialogue* IX.16, 121.

⁶⁰ *Dialogue* IX.57, 161.

in two things, namely, chastity and knowledge. He ought to be both chaste and learned.”⁶¹

For those priests who are unlearned, he recommends that “those who have not the opportunity for outward knowledge, let them have. . . good works.”⁶² These are the qualities of the worthy priest celebrant, and Caesarius spares no words in stressing the grievousness of those priests who consecrate unworthily.⁶³ Reflecting on the story of Uzzah, the priest who was struck dead after touching the Ark of the Covenant (1 Chr 13:9-10), Caesarius draws a parallel to those priests who consecrate unworthily: “If a priest going to raise the figurative [typological] ark is punished with death. . . what punishment do you think the priests deserve if being adulterers and fornicators, they touch the true body of Christ with defiled hands. . . . [H]ow should you, a polluted sinner, presume not only to touch but as it were to shut up and imprison in a part of your defiled body. . . the whole Christ both God and man?”⁶⁴ Though wicked priests consecrate and receive at their own peril, Caesarius reinforces the point that the sacrament is celebrated independent of the moral quality of the priest, as it is by those with a fuller or less formed faith, since “Christ upon the altar is handled and received by the wicked as well as by the good...”⁶⁵ This is Caesarius’ entrée for emphasizing not only Christ’s real presence, but also the gravity of the sin involved in unworthy consecration or reception of the Eucharist.

(C) Regarding worthy reception of the sacrament, Caesarius writes, “In Exodus the Lord laid down that the paschal lamb should be eaten roast with fire and with wild herbs and with loins girt up. If this is laid down of the figurative lamb as a representation, how

⁶¹ *Dialogue* IX.26, 128.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 129.

⁶³ Additionally priests may be classified as communicants — worthy or unworthy — by the fact that after the consecration they too must receive; Caesarius outlines examples of the grievous consequences of priests who consecrate, and hence, who receive unworthily in *Dialogue* IX.54-61.

⁶⁴ *Dialogue* IX.53, 157-8.

⁶⁵ *Dialogue* IX.56, 160.

will anyone dare to come to the eating of the true lamb without the fire of charity, without bitterness of heart and purity of body...?”⁶⁶ Thus, the three features that define a worthy communicant are charity, bitterness (i.e., contrition) of heart, and purity of body. Caesarius lays great stress on charity, not only as definitional of a worthy communicant, but also as that which is offered for reception in the Sacrament itself, and as the term capturing the dynamic of the Eucharistic encounter. The monk highlights these three aspects of charity when questioned by the Novice as to the cause for the miraculous sweetness experienced by Alice, the abbess of Munster, after Holy Communion:

*The heat of perfect charity with which she was boiling, for although she was naturally always pale and emaciated chiefly from fasting and toil, it happened as often as she made her communions, that she was so kindled with love, that her face shone with a colour as of fire. We read in Exodus that the manna melted away as soon as the sun rose. The manna with its whiteness and sweetness represents Christ. . . . The sun which gives warmth and life represents perfect charity. If then the manna melted when the sun arose, it is no wonder if each archetype grows sweeter and melts under the burning of charity. And although in the holy communion material sweetness of this kind, or melting be rarer, it is not however more health-giving than that sweetness or melting which takes place spiritually in the soul.*⁶⁷

In considering the Eucharist as an encounter with Christ in an offer through and in charity, Caesarius explains why it is more beneficial for communicants to receive frequently: “Let us grant that if two are equal in charity and one of them approaches simply to the body of Christ but the other also in simplicity of heart omits to do so, in Him who communicates, I believe charity is intended, and there soon arises a difference of merit.”⁶⁸ For Caesarius, the grace of charity that is offered in the Eucharist increases in proportion to its reception and the devotion with which it is received. While those who communicate

⁶⁶ *Dialogue IX.62*, 165.

⁶⁷ *Dialogue IX.40*, 143; emphasis added.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 144.

worthily receive both spiritually and sacramentally, Caesarius also can offer examples of those who, possessing the qualities of charity and desire for reception, were able to receive spiritually through their desire, though constrained from receiving the sacrament itself.⁶⁹

Having discoursed at length regarding the importance of charity, Caesarius attempts to emphasize the lack of charity, contrition, and bodily purity in those who receive unworthily,⁷⁰ while maintaining this caveat: “Let those who use the divine sacrament for worldly gain, or what is worse wickedness, for wrong doing, consider not the guilt but its punishments. If even insects forget the reverence due to the sacrament, they will one day pay the penalty.”⁷¹ This theological commitment to the role of charity in the sacrament is a strong point of affinity with Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-1274), whose teaching provides a point of contrast with Caesarius for assaying the trajectory of development in Eucharistic doctrine through the thirteenth century.

Caesarius and Thomas in Comparison

Any comparison between Caesarius and Thomas Aquinas must attend to their respective modes of presentation. Modeled on the lecture hall’s *quaestio-disputatio-determinatio*, the treatment found in the *Summa Theologiae* III 73-83 is easily distinguishable from Caesarius’ preferred narrative method of edification, and this is the greatest point of contrast between them. The writings of the two authors are shaped by

⁶⁹ One common example would be the religious who, denied the opportunity to communicate by a superior, nonetheless “communicated spiritually even if not sacramentally”; see *Dialogue* IX.45, 148-149. Also, the narrative of the sick man for whom the water from the purification of the chalice was changed into blood prompts the Novice’s question, “What is your opinion about that blood?” to which the Monk offers a noteworthy reflection in response: “I do not think it was the blood of Christ, because water is never turned into it, nor even wine without the due benediction of a priest. But God transformed the pure elements because of the man’s devotion that he might show that all the faithful everywhere *may take* spiritually that same blood *which the priest takes daily in church sacramentally*”; *Dialogue* IX.24, 127; emphasis added.

⁷⁰ For example, see (among others) *Dialogue* IX.63-64, 165-167.

⁷¹ *Dialogue* IX.9, 116.

their intended audiences and informed by the content of their ideas; their diverging modes of presentation reveal the underlying principles of each, and exemplify some of the theologians' diverging presuppositions in their Eucharistic teaching, which may be compared and contrasted as such.

Though not absent from Caesarius, the theme of Christian life as journey plays a critically formative role in Aquinas' thought.⁷² For him, the Christian is a *viator*, a wayfarer on a journey towards and into God; the Eucharist, then, is the fuel by which one arrives at one's end (i.e., God⁷³) *and* the goal towards which one strives.⁷⁴ Thus, for Aquinas as for Caesarius, the Eucharist is the "consummation of the spiritual life," which embraces all of the other sacraments. Inasmuch as "through the sanctification of all the sacraments, preparation is made for receiving or consecrating Eucharist," the whole sacramental economy (and thus the whole Christian life) is directed towards the Eucharist.⁷⁵ The Eucharist thus holds preeminent place for both theologians: it is the ultimate *telos* or goal of the Christian life, sacramentally appropriable in this lifetime, while unmediated in the eschaton. It is this orientation above all — at once sacramental and eschatological — that is foundational to each author's respective presentation of Eucharistic doctrine.

⁷² See Joseph P. Wawrykow, *The Westminster Handbook to Thomas Aquinas* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005) 165-167.

⁷³ ST I-II, 1-2; especially see ST I-II, 2. 8 contra & c.

⁷⁴ "The sacraments of the church are ordered for assisting people in the spiritual life. . . . Just as for the spiritual life there needed to be Baptism, which is spiritual generation, and Confirmation, which is spiritual growth, so also there needed to be the sacrament of the Eucharist, which is spiritual nourishment"; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* [hereafter *ST*] III, 73.1 c; author's translated excerpts are based on *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita*, vols. 4-12: *Summa theologiae cum Supplemento et commentariis Thomae de Vio Caietani*, OP, S. R. E. cardinalis (Rome: Typographia Polyglotta S. C. de Propaganda Fide, 1888-1906); on-line at <http://www.corpusthomisticum.org/iopera.html> (accessed October 1, 2010).

⁷⁵ ST III, 73.3 c.

The entire Christian life defined in terms of a journey towards the encounter with Christ can only be understood in terms of the dynamic outworking of charity, characterizing not only the virtues of the *viator* and the effects reception of the Eucharist bestows, but also the very One who is encountered in that reception. Aquinas therefore posits that the Eucharist is itself the Sacrament of Charity.⁷⁶ In Aquinas, then, a greater emphasis is placed on the role of charity with regard to the right use of the Eucharist, as framed within his understanding of the sacraments as signs which contain something sacred ordered to human sanctification.⁷⁷ Further, right use of the Eucharist will necessarily be contextualized in terms of the Christian *journey* towards and into God, of which charity in the encounter with Christ and in relation to one's neighbor plays the central role. Aquinas excludes the possibility of other uses that do not conform to these fundamental principles, such as in "ordeals" or trials of those who were suspected of a crime, or for the probation or testing of immoral and heretical Christians.⁷⁸ This is a clear point of divergence on the use of the sacrament between the two theologians, as exemplified by Caesarius' account of how the Eucharist, when cast into the river, miraculously drowned a group of Albigensian heretics.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ ST III, 73.3 ad 3: "Baptism is the sacrament of the death and passion of Christ, as a person is regenerated in Christ in virtue of his passion. But the Eucharist is the sacrament of the passion of Christ, as a person is perfected in union with the Christ who suffered. Hence, just as Baptism is called the sacrament of faith, which is the foundation of the spiritual life, so the Eucharist is called the sacrament of charity, which is the 'bond of perfection' (see Col 3:14)."

⁷⁷ See ST III, 60.2 c and, with specific reference to the Eucharist, ST III, 73.3 c & ad 3.

⁷⁸ ST III, 80.6 arg 3: "Now and then the body of Christ is given to those suspected of crime for their manifestation...." But, "all such things seem to be a trial of God; hence, it is not possible that they be undertaken without sin. And it would seem yet more grave if by this sacrament, which was instituted for a remedy of salvation, anyone were to incur judgment of death. In no way, then, ought the body of Christ be given to anyone suspected of crime, as if for an examination"; and ST III, 80.6 ad 3.

⁷⁹ *Dialogue* IX.12, 118: "At that time when the Albigensian heresies began to show themselves some wicked men supported by the power of the devil displayed signs and wonders by which they bolstered up these heresies and overthrew the faith of many. They walked upon the waters and did not sink. A man of

Within the three-fold division of sacrament (*sacramentum tantum*), sacrament and reality (*sacramentum et res*), and reality (*res tantum*) to which both authors subscribe,⁸⁰ Aquinas holds with Caesarius that the ritual,⁸¹ form,⁸² intention,⁸³ and proper matter⁸⁴ are necessary for the consecration (although Thomas makes *explicit* the character of priestly ordination as a prerequisite).⁸⁵ Likewise both authors hold that the words “This is my body” and “This is my blood” indicate the direct terminus of the Eucharistic Change.⁸⁶ But while for both Caesarius and Thomas the bread and wine are “transubstantiated” into the body and blood of Christ (with the accidents of the elements nonetheless remaining), for Thomas, “transubstantiation” has undergone a significant conceptual development, and now possesses a technical meaning, indicating that “the whole *substance* [of the bread or wine respectively] is changed in whole.”⁸⁷

On this basis Thomas and Caesarius can be seen to diverge in their teaching over the manner of Christ’s presence. For both theologians, Christ is actually present; yet, for Aquinas, this presence is substantial, with the accidents proper to Christ’s natural (if also

sound faith and religious life perceiving this and knowing that true signs could not co-exist with false doctrine carried the Lord’s body in the pyx to the river where these men were to display their power to the people, and he said in the hearing of everybody: ‘I adjure thee, O devil, by Him whom I carry in my hands that you exercise no tricks on this river to pervert this people by means of these men.’ After these words the priest much troubled cast the Lord’s body into the stream on whose waters these men were walking. Behold the wonderful power of Christ. As soon as the sacrament touched the elements, trickery gave way to truth, and those false saints went down like lead into the deep and were drowned.”

⁸⁰ See *Dialogue* IX.1, 106, and *ST* III, 73.6 c, respectively.

⁸¹ See *ST* III, 83.

⁸² See *ST* III, 78.

⁸³ Aquinas’ understanding of the role of intention, as connected to the priestly character, is extremely important. For Aquinas, the very act of consecration seems to be a sufficient expression of intending to do in the sacrament what the Church intends to do; see *ST* III, 74.2 ad 2; *ST* III, 78.1 ad 4; and *ST* III.83.3 ad 8.

⁸⁴ See *ST* III, 74.

⁸⁵ *ST* III, 82.8 c: “Power to consecrate the Eucharist pertains to the character of the priestly order.”

⁸⁶ *Dialogue* IX.27, 130; *ST* III, 75.7 c & ad 1.

⁸⁷ *ST* III, 75.8 c.

glorified) body present only in the *mode of substance*: they lack any dimensive quality that would be present where Christ exists in the mode proper to his accidents.⁸⁸ As demonstrated above, Caesarius believes that Christ's bodily accidents are physically present in such a way that if the sacramental "veil" were removed, one would see Christ beneath or within the host. This underlying presupposition is the condition of the possibility for Caesarius' attempts to "prove" the *actual* presence of Christ through miracles of the sort related in his narrative. Hence, for Caesarius, Christ is impassible in the sacrament on account of his glorified nature, not on account of the mode of his presence. If one were to pose the hypothetical question of Aquinas to Caesarius regarding Christ's passibility in the sacrament before, during and after the Passion,⁸⁹ one would find that for Caesarius Christ would be passable in the Eucharist before and during the Passion, since both his bodily accidents are physically present and his body has yet to be glorified. For Thomas, on the other hand, although Christ had yet to be glorified, he would not have been passable in the sacrament before, during, or after the Passion, since Eucharistic Presence is in the mode according to substance only, and being present in the mode proper to accidents, i.e., physicality, is prerequisite for passivity.

Related to this point of contrast is their diversion on the recognition of Christ's presence in the Eucharist by irrational animals and the four natural elements. For Caesarius, the irrational elements do not recognize the sacrament as a sacrament

⁸⁸ ST III, 76.3 c: "Because in this sacrament the substance of the body of Christ is by the power of the sacrament, but dimensive quantity [only] from the force of real concomitance, the body of Christ is in this sacrament through the mode of substance, i.e., through the manner by which substance is under dimensions, but not through the manner of dimensions, i.e., not through the mode by which the dimensive quantity of a particular body is under the dimensive quantity of place."

⁸⁹ See ST III, 81.3 c, ad 1& ad 3.

(wherefore they are excluded from the possibility of sacramental reception⁹⁰), but only “plainly *recognize the power of this divine sacrament*” and (in his telling) respond appropriately.⁹¹ For Thomas, however, since Christ is only present in the mode of substance, he can only be recognized by those who have the capacity for sacramental recognition, and hence, reception. But precisely because it can neither recognize the Eucharistic Presence sacramentally, nor respond appropriately to it, the possibility of an irrational creature (such as mouse) eating the body of Christ poses a real risk for Aquinas, since the mouse can nonetheless eat the species of the sacrament *according to its accidents*.⁹²

For Aquinas, Eucharistic miracles of the sort that Caesarius describes do not function to remove the sacramental “veil.” Even if one could see past the accidents of the bread and wine, one could not see Christ as physically present with his bodily accidents, since he only subsists in the sacrament according to substance.⁹³ Hence, Eucharistic miracles are, for Thomas, a separate phenomenon in contradistinction to one’s understanding of, and encounter with, Christ in the sacrament.⁹⁴ The Eucharistic miracles

⁹⁰ Caesarius excludes them from his two types of reception; see *Dialogue* IX.1, 107-108.

⁹¹ *Dialogue* IX.16, 121; emphases added.

⁹² *ST* III, 80.3. ad 3: “Even if a mouse or dog were to eat the consecrated host, the substance of the body of Christ would not cease to be under the species for as long as those species remain, that is, for as long as the substance of bread remained; just as if it were thrown into the mud. Nor does this verge on detriment to the dignity of Christ, who willed to be crucified by sinners without diminution of his dignity; particularly since the mouse or dog does not touch the body of Christ itself according to its proper species, but only according to its sacramental species. But some have said that so soon as the sacrament might be touched by a mouse or dog, the body of Christ would cease to be there. This also detracts from the truth of the sacrament, as described above. *Nevertheless, it must not be said that the brute animal sacramentally eats the body of Christ, since it is not made to use it as a sacrament. Not sacramentally, then, does it eat the body of Christ, but according to the accidents, just as anyone might eat a consecrated host without knowing it to be consecrated.* And because no genus falls to division by accidents, therefore this manner for eating the body of Christ is not classified as a third, together with sacramental and spiritual eating”; emphasis added.

⁹³ See *ST* III, 76.7 c & ad 1.

⁹⁴ See *ST* III, 76.8.

that “prove” the actual presence of Christ for Caesarius would only prove to be a misunderstanding in Aquinas’ reckoning. For Thomas Aquinas, the way in which to foster a deeper understanding of the Eucharistic Sacrament would not be through miraculous narratives, but rather through an insightful and careful consideration of these different aspects of teachings on the Eucharist and, more importantly, through “an intense and unremitting life of worship.”⁹⁵

Thomas Aquinas’ Eucharistic thought exemplifies especially two aspects of development that are noticeably absent in the *Dialogue* of Caesarius of Heisterbach, namely (1) the distinction between presence in the mode of substance as opposed to the mode proper to accidents (which would have led the latter not only to have had a very different presentation, but perhaps, to have excluded many of his so-called “proofs” as more misleading than beneficial); and (2) a greater contextualization of his Eucharistic teaching in terms of the two themes of journey and charity (which may have led him to better articulate the use of the sacrament and its relation to a Christian’s ultimate end). That being said, for Caesarius, the Eucharist is awesome and powerful, possessed of rather different — and sometimes dreadful — powers than those Aquinas is willing to admit. While charity is not absent from the presentation of Caesarius, the prominence given by Thomas to the Eucharist as the “sacrament of charity” above all may be the greatest and most valuable development of the theology of the sacrament in the thirteenth century.

⁹⁵ Avery Cardinal Dulles, SJ, “The Theology of Worship: Saint Thomas,” in Matthew Levering and Michael Dauphinais, eds., *Rediscovering Aquinas and the Sacraments: Studies in Sacramental Theology* (Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2009) 1.