

David Grumett. *Material Eucharist*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. 322 Pages. \$112.

What happens when Christians break bread, pour wine, and celebrate the Eucharist? David Grumett, a Senior Lecturer at the University of Edinburgh, seeks to revive robust theological discourse about how God transforms ordinary materials into signs and presence of Christ's Body in the world. His new book, *Material Eucharist*, invites contemporary readers into an ancient conversation about wheat and grapes, fermentation and decay, silence and song, death and resurrection. This consideration of God's activity within the physical world and the rhythms of liturgical time enriches the exploration of themes in later chapters, where the author explores current conversations about Christ's presence among Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, and Orthodox theologians. Grumett discloses and explains his own perspective as "an Anglican with Roman Catholic leanings" (4), but he engages different positions with generosity and respect, such that the book itself is a thoughtful and fascinating contribution to ecumenical dialogue.

*Material Eucharist's* first chapter gathers ancient accounts about the theological significance of ingredients that comprise eucharistic bread and wine. Grumett cites documents in which monks, priests, and theologians offer practical counsel, allegorical teachings, and biblical exegesis regarding grain, salt, olive oil, leaven, water, and grapes. For example, East Syrian monks enact the drama of Christ's passion in the bread oven: they burn incense and arrange loaves in a manner that symbolizes Christ's crucifixion between two thieves (57).

The following chapter situates the sacramental elements within the rhythms, sounds, and prayers of different Christian worship traditions. For instance, silence during a fifth century Syrian liturgy precedes the eucharistic prayer as an intense, communal expectation of the Holy Spirit's descent (73). In the Church of England, however, silence functions as an opportunity for private reflection during confession, a moment alone with God before joining one's voice with the congregation in prayer (74).

Later chapters explore how these material and liturgical commitments inform, and are shaped by, doctrinal arguments that engage with classical and secular philosophical constructs. Chapter four offers a peculiar juxtaposition of the Fourth Lateran Council's sophisticated debates on eucharistic reservation (i.e., keeping consecrated elements locked away) and Western medieval folk beliefs about the host's efficacy in making crops grow or livestock get well (108-109). The themes in the book progress from examination of documents about tangible materials and actions (wine-treading methods, congregational singing during liturgies, administration of the sacrament to the sick) to a chapter that treats more abstract philosophical discourse (the relationship of Aristotle's *Categories* to Aquinas's eucharistic theology), and, as a conclusion, second order discourse about eucharistic theology and ecumenism.

*Material Eucharist's* last chapter and epilogue consider the present-day conversation about eucharistic theology and ecumenism. Here, Grumett explains Calvin's position as the representative of the Reformed perspective, so that he can include it in the dialogue. Grumett concludes with a comparison on the role of the Holy Spirit in these traditions. Here the book takes on a beautifully ecumenical tone: there are unexpected resonances between Orthodox and Reformed theology about communal ascent to God; Lutheranism upholds a creative tension of Christ's corporal and spiritual presence with consubstantiation; Catholic transubstantiation retains a fidelity to the incarnation, even if its current articulation may be due for magisterial revision or adaptation. Perhaps Grumett's erudition and charitable attitude have rekindled this reviewer's glimmer of hope that the Body of Christ may someday reconcile around eucharistic theology.

This may seem like a lot of material for a three-hundred-page book, and, at times, *Material Eucharist* is overwhelming. Remembering the differences and similarities among examples that span second-century Greek martyrs to modern proponents of the Latin Mass can be disorienting. But the material is also an engrossing look at what matters most about the Eucharist to fellow Christians. Disagreement concerning the Eucharist has been the cause of division, excommunication, and even bloodshed among Christians, and Grumett does not ignore the ugliness of this history. Nevertheless, the book makes a compelling case that Christians can learn how to think about the Eucharist from one another, even if we do not share the same commitments. For this reason, *Material Eucharist* is a fantastic read for theologians, pastors, and seminarians who wish to further understand the tremendous diversity of practices and beliefs that surround this holy meal.

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