Introduction

In the most elaborate of late medieval discussions of the Eucharist, the *Exposition of the Canon of the Mass,* Gabriel Biel (†1495) discusses not only eucharistic problems in the more limited sense of the word but he also relates this sacrament to the whole range of theological discussions of his day with constant reference to the preceding tradition. Even though a quarter of his book was still to be written at Christmas 1487,[1] by 1488 it had begun its influential pilgrimage through European presses and libraries. The work of Biel had already gone into the making of another important—more allegorical—interpretation, *The Fourfold Exposition of the Mass*, by Johannes Bechofen, an Augustinian monk writing in the last decade of the century,[2] and in years to come such representative theologians and leaders as Martin Luther and Johann Eck (†1543), as well as the influential Jesuit spokesman at the Council of Trent, Jacobus Lainez (†1565), would be raised on it. In spite of the fact that for some time the reliability of the *Exposition* as a dependable guide through the various late medieval eucharistic schools of thought has been doubted,[3] it can well be claimed that Biel, on all significant points summarized by Bechofen, not only intends but also succeeds in showing at what points the main lines of the medieval discussion cross, converge, or coincide.

The two issues that emerge as the dominant themes under which most other questions can be subsumed concern the relation of the elements of bread and wine to the eucharistic presence of Christ and the relation of the two offerings, in other words the relationship of

the cross and the altar. As background to the whole relationship is to be assumed the doctrine of transubstantiation[4] or substantial conversion: After the words of consecration have been pronounced by the priest the *substance* of bread and wine are converted into the Body and Blood of Christ, whereas the *accidents* (which are the means by which the presence of a substance is communicated to our senses) remain unchanged.

Closely related to the Sacrament of the Eucharist, and to the doctrine of the sacraments as such, are the concepts *ex opere operato* and *ex opere operantis*. The first term can be translated as "on grounds of the performance of the rite," and designates the ability of an exterior rite to bring about what it signifies. The Sacraments of the New Testament were regarded by most medieval doctors to have power in this way to convey grace so long as the recipient did not provide an obstacle and the administrant had the proper intention. *Ex opere operantis* is the efficacy of a rite as determined by the interior disposition of the administrant or the recipient. The othodox interpretation of *ex opere operantis* is that a proper disposition on the part of the recipient will provide him with grace above and beyond the grace received *ex opere operato*.

Within this context there are a series of questions which naturally arise, both with respect to the Eucharist as offering and the Eucharist as communion. When, after the consecration, the historical Body of Christ becomes substance under the unchanged accidents, does the offering on the altar repeat, re-enact, or recall the sacrifice on Calvary? Is this a memorial of the offering of Christ or indeed a true immolation?[5] If Christ is, after the conversion, substantially present, does this imply that when the Host falls on the floor and is eaten by a mouse, the mouse actually eats the Body of Christ?[6] Such a question may seem to modern ears the product of an irreverent mind, but in the discussion of this issue by Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, and Bonaventura it is clear that it leads inevitably to an analysis of the duration of the presence of Christ in the consecrated Host and also —more importantly—of the degree to which the disposition of the recipient plays a role. Do the infidel, the heretic, the Christian in a state of sin, and the Christian in a state of grace all receive Christ in the same manner? Does the *ex opere operato* efficacy obliterate the

differences between these three groups? Or, to discuss the meaning of the exterior and interior presence of Christ in another way, is it more sinful to inattentively drop the consecrated Host or to pay no attention to the preached word?[7]

These were not abstract academic problems but rather religious questions of crucial importance on the lay and parish level. For proof of their importance we have only to look at the ramifications of these issues as discussed by Cardinal Cajetan, who deals with the real presence and immolation of the Body of Christ related to the devotion of the recipient, by Sylvester Prierias in his discussion of the relation between the Eucharist and the sermon, and by Cornelisz Hoen in his defense of the necessity of faith and the spiritual nature of communion against the "papal teaching" of transubstantiation.

James Cajetan (1468–1534), or Thomas de Vio as he was named after his entry in the Dominican Order (1484), came for the first time to general attention in 1494 when he crossed swords with Pico della Mirandola (†1494). Instrumental in the pre-Tridentine renaissance of Thomism and rising to places of high authority in his order, he wrote against Scotism and was himself attacked by the Parisian nominalist and disciple of Gabriel Biel, Jacob Almain (†1516). The main reason for the latter's attack was the curialism which led Cajetan to oppose the participation of Dominicans in the abortive council—depreciatingly referred to by the opponents as "Little Council," or Conciliabulum—convened in Pisa in 1511 by Maximilian and Louis XII against the wishes of the pope.[8] A year later, on June 10, 1512, speaking to the conciliar Fathers present at the Fifth Lateran Council (1512–1517) he stresses the image of the Church as the New Jerusalem, with the pope as the supreme ruler to "whom all citizens and inhabitants of the Jerusalem descending from heaven owe obedience, not only as individual persons but also all taken together."[9] The most precious treasures of this New Jerusalem are the holy things (*sacra*), the sacraments which are so powerful that through the Sacrament of Marriage, generations are brought into being, through the Sacrament of Baptism, children are reborn in God who then grow up through the nourishment of Holy Communion . . ."[10]

One is reminded of the maxim of reform formulated by Giles of Viterbo one month earlier: "It behooves men to be changed by the

holy things (*sacra*), not the holy things by men."[11] Both the Augustinian Giles and the Dominican Cajetan addressed the Fifth Lateran Council, both chose for their presentation a text from the Apocalypse of John, and both emphasized the sacred things (*sacra*), together with the necessity of communion with the See of St. Peter, as the foundation of the Church and basis of renewal. But whereas for Giles there are times in which the bride (the Church) falls asleep and the Bridegroom (Christ) returns to heaven, Cajetan does not appear to allow such discontinuity in the history of the Church; he bases his vision of the Church on the unbroken continuous succession of the papacy. In contrast to Giles he places the Church's sanctity outside the reach of the assaults of impiety,[12] since they are organized by the exterior enemies of the Church of God, Who in His mercy, forces them back in the fold and into acknowledgment of the Holy See.[13]

In July 1517 Cajetan received from Pope Leo X the cardinal's hat and was given, a year later, the weighty task of representing the pope as his legate at the important Diet of Augsburg. As few others, he was equipped by his scholarship (his most recent book dealt with indulgences) and by his experience in Church politics to subject Luther to an intensive interrogation, which proved, however, to be of no avail. Until the end of his life he would serve his Church in many missions and charges, although in the history of theology he has come down to us as a great, if not always submissive, commentator on the *Summa* of Thomas Aquinas.

Our selection from Cajetan's writings is especially relevant to the discussion of the role of late medieval nominalism in its relation to sixteenth-century thought. It has been argued that nominalistic theologians such as Occam, Holcot, d'Ailly, and Biel are responsible for what is often called "the disintegration of the medieval synthesis." By undermining truly Catholic spirituality they prepared the ground for the Reformation and should therefore be allowed to claim the title Forerunners of the Reformation. One of the more explicit spokesmen for this view is Louis Bouyer. He imputes to nominalism "what was without doubt most irreparably vitiated and corrupt in Catholic thought at the end of the Middle Ages" and calls attention to "the utter corruption of Christian thought as represented by nominalist theology."[14]

Regarding sacramental issues, especially those related to the Mass, the following short treatise of Cajetan, written in Rome, December 1510, has played one role in the past and should play another in future research. In his important study, *Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Reformation,*[15] Francis Clark has shown how Cajetan's opening remark has been widely misinterpreted by English scholars. Cajetan refers here to the "common error of many" who think that the sacrifice of the Mass yields a limited amount of satisfaction *ex opere operato.*

This "error of many" has served Anglican scholars as documentation for the thesis that in the later Middle Ages Scotists and nominalists regarded the Mass as a mechanical device which functioned apart from the right intention and faith of the recipient. Thus B. J. Kidd inferred: "The very man who, on October 12, 1518, called upon Luther to revoke his assertion that faith is necessary to the effectual reception of the sacraments thought it necessary to raise his voice against the notion of their operating mechanically on the ground that it was a widespread delusion of his own side. Further proof that the later medieval doctrine of the Eucharistic Sacrifice had degenerated into a hard and perfunctory theory as to the mode of operation can hardly be required."[16]

As a matter of fact Cajetan does not oppose as "an error of many" the notion of *ex opere operato,* which means that the proper performance of the rite has objective effects independent of the subjective condition of the priest and the participants. He holds this doctrine himself and, far from seeing it as a sign of nominalistic decay, he regards it as the cornerstone for Tridentine and post-Tridentine Roman Catholic teaching. The "error" he criticized was the Scotist-nominalist assumption that the *ex opere operato* effect of the sacrifice of the Mass is necessarily limited, since it is less than the effects of the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross.

Cajetan holds with Thomas that the objective effects of the sacrifice of the Mass are as unlimited as those of Christ's death on the Cross. This scholastic debate has continued within Roman Catholic theology until modern times. Cajetan's term "error" should not be understood as "heresy" but as "untenable opinion," however much he might have been inclined to identify these two.

So much for the role of our selection in past scholarly discussion.