The Feast of Corpus Christi as a Site of Struggle

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The year 2014 marked the 750th anniversary of the feast of Corpus Christi in Orvieto, highlighted in the Roman Catholic Church with a special Jubilee Celebration, which inspired thousands of pilgrims to travel to the small, picturesque, and historically significant Italian towns of Orvieto and Bolsena. Whereas the former offered palatial quarters for the papacy during the high medieval period, the latter was the site of the legendary Miracle of Bolsena, immortalized by Raphael in a painting now found in the Vatican Chapel. Recent codicological research relevant to the legend of the Miracle of Bolsena and to the feast of Corpus Christi guide this commemorative inquiry into how and why the two events were drawn together, that is, to query both the dating and role of the Bolsena Miracle in the creation and adoption of the liturgy for the new feast day celebrating the Eucharist.

The inquiry explores three factors that weigh against the Miracle of Bolsena as a plausible source of inspiration for Saint Thomas Aquinas in his creation of the liturgy for the feast of Corpus Christi: (1) two earlier versions of the office and a history of prior celebrations, beginning with the approbation in Liège in 1246, challenge the idea of the 1264 version composed by St. Thomas Aquinas as the point of initiation; (2) the idea of blood issuing from the host was more deeply in synchrony with the theology of an earlier historical period and, in fact, contradicts the teachings of St. Thomas on the nature of the Eucharist as these appear in Summa Theologiae; and,

* A Fellowship Leave from The City University of New York and Kingsborough Community College provided an opportunity to spend a semester at Blackfriars Hall, Oxford University. I would like to express appreciation to them and to the Blackfriars community for their hospitality, to Michael Black, Blackfriars Librarian, to Roger S. Wieck and the librarians in the reading room at the Morgan Library, and to Lucio Riccetti for his helpful communications.


2. G. Macy, The Banquet’s Wisdom: A Short History of the Theology of the Lord’s Supper,
(3) a recent analysis of the codicological evidence pertinent to the relics suggests not least a different chronology for the miracle.

I

Scholarly work on the feast of Corpus Christi in the twentieth century has identified three distinct versions of the office, which were added to thirteenth and fourteenth-century manuscripts. A letter of introduction by the bishop or the papal Bull, Transitusrus, accompanied the circulation of each version.

• Animarum cibus, found in The Hague, National Library of the Netherlands, MS 70.E.4 (KB70E4);
• Sapientia (a)edificavit, SAS, found in Prague, Abbey of Strahov, MS D.E.I.7 (Strahov);
• Sacerdos in (a)eternum, SIA, found in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, latin 1143 (BNF 1143).


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brother John, «inexperienced in literary matters»⁶ during the score of years preceding a 1246 formal approbation by Liège Bishop, Robert of Thourotte. Recent scholarship highlights the agency and auctoritas ascribed to Juliana, a thirteenth-century Augustinian nun, and her leadership among a community of religious women living outside recognized orders, a community which formed in and around Liège during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries⁷. She took counsel from the Dominicans in the region, and, notes Mulder-Bakker, her hagiographer, while suggesting that John wrote the actual text, «allows no room for doubt that Juliana is the intellectual author»⁸. Likewise, Newman in her recent edition of the vita writes:

Anyone familiar with medieval accounts of inspired women will recognize that John «writes like a woman», with a kind of negative capability. The writer (of the vita) justifies the choice of such a modest vessel by alluding to 1 Corinthians 2:6 (God has chosen the foolish to confound the wise), a passage often cited to account of the inspiration of female prophet and visionaries. Like them, John trusts not in ‘his own industry or labour’ but in the prayer of a superior – «Christ’s virgin», on whose «authority» he is said to have undertaken the task. Both he and the theologians who later approve his work see it as coming not from him but «from on high» (...) Although she (Juliana) too is led by the Holy Spirit, the account stresses her authority and expertise in contrast to John’s inspiration and innocence, reversing their expected gender roles⁹.

The importance of Juliana’s authorship rests with its purpose. Her existential position, wisdom, theological erudition, and witness to key temporal conflicts in Liège during a period of shifting political allegiances in the early stages of Inquisition no doubt contributed to her urgent sense of mission¹⁰. A new feast day dedicated to the Eucharist and its liturgy might communicate to the broader population of women the nature and meaning of the central mystery of the Church during this politically perilous period.

10. Juliana’s capacious memory and intellect as described in the vita, however, idealized, remained largely underdeveloped due to the limited education available to women.
We do not have the authentic manuscript, but rather an obviously edited and composite version brought together at Tongres in 1537; however, both the vita and the surviving composite manuscript, KB70E4, indicate compositional processes resulting in planked together texts on the Eucharist by theologians from the immediately preceding generations. These texts were rearranged and set to new and somewhat formulaic melodic material. The texts range from diverse commentaries on the Eucharist by twelfth-century authorities, including Hugh of Saint Victor, to Alger of Liège, and Gratian. Taken together the incongruous views of the Eucharist in the texts pose rather than answer questions regarding the substantial nature of the Eucharist, in the wake of mandates from the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 and the vigorous persecution of «heretics».

The unstained reputation of the Liège women in the generation preceding Juliana included Marie D'Oignes, whose fame extended to both Saint Francis and Innocent III. Juliana's proximity and direct relationships with Hugh of Saint-Cher and Jacques Pantaléon (later Urban IV) in Liège, and then indirectly to Saint Thomas through them, suggest powerful influences at work in the creation of a new feast to celebrate the Eucharist. Thus it makes sense to posture the later version by Saint Thomas as a prolonged meditation and response to questions raised by her (and others) — a thirteenth-century ressourcement — focused on the incorporation of newly available ancient texts as well as studies of the Bible and biblical commentaries. Urban IV recognized Juliana as a source in his letter to Eve of Saint Martin on the day following his 1264 inauguration of the feast for the Roman Church via the Bull Transiturus.

The second version of the office liturgy, Sapientia (a)edificavit, SAS, draws its contents entirely from the Bible, relying extensively on the commentaries of Hugh of St. Cher, who is celebrated up to the present day for his theological and exegetical work. As a Dominican Provincial in Liège in 1246, Cardinal Hugh of St. Cher approved of the «original» Liège office in 1246 and later, in 1251 in Cologne, recommended the young Thomas Aquinas for a teaching position at the University of Paris.

SAS has been attributed to Saint Thomas based on the textual and musical concordances with the third version, Sacerdos in (a)eternum, SIA. The latter can be found in BNF 1143, a musical manuscript from the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century devoted exclusively to the feast of Corpus

Christi. Scholarship by Dominican and other scholars during and following the 700th anniversary of the initiation of feast leave little if any doubt that the liturgy represents the work of Saint Thomas Aquinas, most likely in 1264 while in Orvieto. While a close description and analysis of BNF 1143 exceeds the scope of this paper, suffice it to say that the liturgy therein, with its aesthetic deployment of Latin metrical forms, poetic language, verb tense and mood, reflective pairing of Old and New Testament verses, and the thoughtful use of existing chant melodies represents a masterpiece of ineffable and incomparable beatific vision.

The three versions of the liturgy as described are outlined in the Appendix in the table titled «Three Versions of the Corpus Christi Liturgy».

II

The successive versions of the office document the controversy and transformation in philosophical theology that took place between the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, where the term «transubstantiation» was mandated, and the 1264 celebration of the new Roman version of the office and Mass at the Papal Chapel. While the constitutions of the 1215 council clearly proclaimed transubstantiation as the sacramental action, the neologism, which initially appeared in around 1140, was not yet well defined:

There is truly one universal Church of the faithful, outside of which no one can be saved; in this Church Jesus Christ is the priest and sacrifice, whose Body and Blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the appearance of bread and wine, with the bread transubstantiated into his Body and wine into his Blood by divine power.

Thus, priests and the proliferating brothers in new orders and in locations remote from university centers and libraries found the neologism to be baffling, while even the urbane and educated theologians struggled to understand the Aristotelian concepts and framework as applied to the central


miracle of the Church. The intellectual milieu and taste for precision in the cultural centers, and especially Paris, were ablaze with excitement, with discussions enriched by the reception, in the university milieu, of the full Aristotelian corpus in Latin translation, even as theologians grappled with the abstractions among themselves. Notes Wainwright, «The Renaissance of the twelfth century, with its revival of Roman jurisprudence, its systematic study of canon law, and the initial recovery of portions of Aristotle’s treatises on logic, [set the stage and] allowed the theologians of the Latin Church to take a quantum leap in the history of sacramental theology» 17.

In their prose or texts, contrasts among Animarum cibus, Sapientia Aedificavit, and Sacerdos in Aeternum outline steps or stages in the intellectual revolution, a paradigm shift reflected in the philosophical theology of the Eucharist. Its point of origin might best be viewed as Animarum cibus, the liturgical text that rendered visible the contradictions, coupling twelfth-century doctrinal texts by Alger of Liège that alluded to a real presence—a corporeal presence—with those by Hugh of Saint Victor, which highlighted wisdom and an Augustinian spiritual presence. SAI in this chronology represents the culminating resolution with its full and meaningful incorporation of Aristotle, blended with Neo-Platonic philosophy and biblical Christology through the creative genius of Saint Thomas. His interpretation of transubstantiation was an abduction that bridged the ancient world of Yahweh as God in history, Greek Neo-Platonism expressed as a wholly other celestial hierarchy, and Aristotle’s nomenclature for the natural world, with the biblical revelation of Jesus as the incarnation of the Word as flesh and Messiah in a hypostatic union 18. Writes Ratzinger about the earlier debates leading up to the work of Saint Thomas:

   Earlier, in the twelfth century the mystery of the Eucharist was on the point of being torn apart by two groups, who each in its own way failed to grasp the heart of it. There were those filled with the thought: Jesus is really there. But reality for them was simply physical body. Consequently, they arrived at the conclusion: In the Eucharist we chew on the flesh of the Lord; but therein they were under the sway of a serious misapprehension. For Jesus has risen. We do not eat flesh, as cannibals would do. That is why others quite rightly opposed them, arguing against such primitive «realism». But they, too, had fallen into the same fundamental error of regarding only what is material, tangible, visible as reality. They said: Since

Christ cannot be there in a body we can bite on, the Eucharist can only be a symbol of Christ; the bread can only signify the body, but not be the body.  

Thomas Aquinas made perhaps the most significant contribution to rational thinking about the meaning of transubstantiation in *Summa Theologiae*, Part III. However, his first discursive treatment appears in the second reading for Matins in the third version of the office, as found in BNF 1143. Regarding this, Aquinas biographer Torrell notes most succinctly that Saint Thomas thought about the Eucharist in an entirely different way than earlier theologians and brought this thinking to bear in the office:

> Accidentia enim sine subjicto in eodem existent, ut fides locum habeat dum visibile invisibiliter sumitur, aliena specie occultatum, et sensus a deceptione immunes redantur, qui de accidentibus iudicant sibi notis.

The entire passage certainly appears a little bit incongruous in a liturgical celebration, but it is in fact the equivalent of a signature. The italicized words, which show to best advantage a judgment on the meaning of the Eucharistic accidents, express a position that occurs five times in this legenda. Although this point of view is not exclusively Thomas's own, his rigorous Aristotelian perspective makes him probably the only one of his contemporaries who would think to use it in such a context.

The multiple versions and chronology of the composition of the liturgy for the new feast of Corpus Christi thus call into question the dating and role of the Bolsena Miracle for two reasons: (1) the feast originated in Liège, where the first version of the office was composed, and (2) the theological thinking that gave rise to the idea of a «bleeding corpus», consumed during Mass, was more appropriately placed in an earlier historical period. Notes Wainwright, this thinking was anathema to Saint Thomas, and specifically refuted in *Summa Theologiae*, Part III; however, the rather crude idea of blood appearing in the host was perpetuated in popular imagery throughout the century and beyond, often in ways that reversed the intentions of both Juliana Mont Cornillon and Saint Thomas, who would have been revolted by the idea of consuming real human flesh.

20. The accidents, however, remain here without any subject. And this, that faith may be exercised when what is visible in invisibly received, hidden under another appearance; furthermore, that the senses, which judge of the accidents according to appearances, may be preserved from the same error.
Two recent papers by Lucio Riccetti likewise raise questions regarding the dating and role of the Miracle of Bolsena as a source of inspiration for Urban IV and Saint Thomas in composing the liturgy for the Feast of Corpus Christi. His chronology is articulated in Appendix II, "Chronology for the Miracle of Bolsena." Riccetti affirms the use of the official of term «transubstantiation» by Innocent III in the constitution set down at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. In addition to promulgations against heretics and Jews, the latter of which were required to wear special clothing so as not to deceive or entice Christians, the 1215 constitution also obliged clergy to abide by normative laws concerning the consecrated bread and wine.

Should any of the eucharist or the blood fall onto wood, stone or the ground, the blood is to be licked up, the area itself is to be wiped clean and washed, and the crumbs put in a container for holy things with any other sundry material. Should it fall onto the corporal, it is to be sucked up as carefully as possible, washed three times in the chalice and the washing water is to be drunk after the mass. The corporal is then to be put back and kept in the reliquary.

Insofar as this concerns the narrative for the Miracle of Bolsena, Riccetti's chronology is recounted on three different levels. First, he recounts the order in which the relics pertaining to the Miracle of Bolsena were officially acknowledged, beginning in 1606, when the bucette, or small cavity or hiding place in the tabernacle was opened. From the bucette, «three tiny scrolls», two in parchment and one in paper, explaining the nature of the relics emerged. Second, Riccetti estimates dates for the actual relics and their documentation. Dates for the two parchment scrolls describing these relics most likely fall within the period between 1211 and 1214, based on the handwriting, which matches that of Sarafino, a Notary in Orvieto during that period. The handwriting on the paper scroll matches that of Tommaso di Nallo, notary 1366 to 1379, specifically in the bishop's chancellery from 1373-1379, and most likely relate to an acknowledgement of the relics, «otherwise undocumented». Finally, Riccetti provides an interpretative chronology for the events related to the miracle.

Especially challenging to the Miracle legend is a visit to Orvieto by Innocent III on April 27, 1216. A page pasted onto the bottom half of MS M

25. Ibid., p. 5; translation of Guglielmo Durando's 1298 reference in Rationale divinorum officium.
26. Riccetti, A New Chronology cit., p. 3.
464, fol. 90v, the last leaf of twelfth-century bible in Latin, now in the Morgan Library, recounts events connected with this visit. Raneiro, Bishop of Orvieto initialed the page in the bottom left-hand corner between 1228 and 1248. Since new miracles require papal confirmation, the absence of any mention in the inserted document raises a number of questions regarding exactly what the relics might be. While Riccetti cites possible and historically specific political motivations for the official chronology of the Bolsena Miracle relics, Wainwright (and others) have noted a more general fourteenth-century resurfacing in popular culture of earlier and more concrete theological definitions of the real presence in the Eucharist, typically involving a «bleeding host», and of related miracle legends, often part of the chastisement of Jews or other nonbelievers. As in the case of the Miracle of Bolsena, such phenomena have also inspired artistic and crafts work of unalloyed beauty. Nonetheless, a bleeding host as such, could not possibly have inspired the composition of the liturgy for the feast of Corpus Christi by either Juliana Mont Cornillon, who omitted even consideration of such in the earliest version, or by Saint Thomas Aquinas, who wrote specifically against these misconceptions.

27. With thanks to Lucio Riccetti for sending a digital image of Raneiro's initial.
THREE VERSIONS OF THE «CORPUS CHRISTI» LITURGY

Manuscripts:
KB 70E4 The Hague, National Library of the Netherlands, MS 70.E.4 – Office A
Strahov Prague, Abbe of Strahov, MS D.E.1.7 – Office B
BNF 1143 Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Latin 1143 – Office C
BNF 755 Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Latin 755 – lectionary material with several reorganizations

Lections:
DJII Dominus Jesus ad invisibilia
IDL Immensa divine largitatis

Offices:
AC Animarum cibus
SAS Sapiencia (a)edicavit sibi
SIA Sacerdos in (a)eternum

Papal bull Transitusus:
T-1 Addressed to the Patriarch of Jerusalem; dated August 11, 1264
T-2 Addressed to the Catholic hierarchy; undated¹
T-3 Incorporated into the bull St. Dominus in sanctis eius issued by Clement V during or immediately after the Council of Vienne²

² Ibid.
### THE FEAST OF "CORPUS CHRISTI" AS A SITE OF STRUGGLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources of Introduction and Rationales:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Bishop Robert Thourotte: to combat the error of heretics; memorial; Mt 28:20</td>
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<td>2. Hugh of St. Cher: to combat heresies (does not appeal to corporeal presence); sacramental sign</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Urban IV (see T-1, T-2, T-3): to combat heresies; refers to corporeal presence; reference to Mt 28:20</td>
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<td>4. John of Flanders (1288): no mention of Urban IV</td>
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<td>5. Clementine V and John XXII in Clementines (T-3)</td>
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<th>Service</th>
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<tr>
<td>Frankish secular Monastic Roman</td>
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<th>Manuscript Context</th>
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<td>Liège Strahov Orvieto</td>
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<th>Latin texts</th>
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<th>Office</th>
<th>AC</th>
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<td>X(?)</td>
<td>T-2 (except reference to Urban IV in lection iii)</td>
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<td>Service Frankish secular Monastic Roman</td>
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<td>Use of Bible</td>
<td>9 of 45 antiphons, responses, and versicles</td>
<td>Antiphons from Psalms other Books; Responsories: each based on one biblical text; Biblical texts are unchanged.</td>
<td>Antiphons from Psalms only; Responsories: each based on two biblical texts, one OT and one NT; text is often a reflection on biblical text.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Juliana Mont-Cornillon and Prior John</td>
<td>Hugh of St. Cher or St. Thomas</td>
<td>St. Thomas Aquinas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Blended</td>
<td>Biblical</td>
<td>Salvation Narrative</td>
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<td>Sources: This summarizes the extensive tables and analysis in Zawilla’s work (Cf. Walters-Corrigan - Ricketts 2006)</td>
<td>Alger of Liège against Beranger, (1055-1131), Hugh of St. Cher (1096-1141), Gratian (d. 1179), Jacques de Vitry against the Cathars (1180-1240). Nine items from scripture; includes Mt 20:28, which is not in any other version; the verse is used by Innocent III and Urban IV in reference to corporeal presence.</td>
<td>Biblical: Two groups of biblical texts: Those part of a common theological tradition. Texts rarely employed in discussions of the Eucharist. Of those rarely employed, which consists of a group of 25 texts, all have the postilla (biblical commentaries) of Hugh of St. Cher as their source⁴.</td>
<td>Biblical: Three groups of biblical texts: * Texts common to SAS * Text proper to SIA * Texts used in pairs Those proper to SIA, especially the pairs, correspond to texts used in late Aquinas: * Summa theologica and especially the sermon Homo quidam fecit cœnsum magnam; all musical items have source chants from the existing repertory.</td>
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3. Ibid., p. 206.
4. Ibid., p. 205; see especially tables on pp. 324-25.
### «TRANSITURUS»

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<th>T-1</th>
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<td><strong>Dated August 11, 1264 and addressed to the Patriarch of Jerusalem</strong>&lt;br&gt;Contains clause: «Once when we held a lesser office we came to know that it had been divinely revealed to certain Catholics that a feast of this kind should be generally observed in the Church»³.&lt;br&gt;Contains clause: «With nine lessons, with the responsories, versicles, antiphons, psalms, hymns, and orations specifically suited to this feast, which along with the proper office of the mass, we are sending you included under our seal»⁴.</td>
<td><strong>Addressed to the Catholic hierarchy</strong>&lt;br&gt;Contains clause: «Once when we held a lesser office we came to know that it had been divinely revealed to certain Catholics that a feast of this kind should be generally observed in the Church»³.</td>
<td><strong>Incorporated into the Bull issued by Clement V</strong>&lt;br&gt;Contains clause: «Once when we held a lesser office we came to know that it had been divinely revealed to certain Catholics that a feast of this kind should be generally observed in the Church»³.</td>
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Silent Witnesses

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<th>Year</th>
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| 1215   | Innocent III    | Fourth Lateran Council:  
- Prescribes dogma of transubstantiation  
- Established how chrism and Eucharist should be kept  
- Normative law for keeping and showing relics: Roman Church alone has the authority for authentication of any new relics  
- Visited Orvieto on mission of strategic importance; also to preach the crusades |
| 1216   | Ranerio         | Author of lay and ecclesiastical orvietan chronicles Bishop of Orvieto |
| 1228-28|                 |                                                                      |
| 1248   |                 |                                                                      |
| 1280-85| Guglielmo Durando | Author of the *Rationale divinorum officium*, General auditor of court case |
ABSTRACT

Multiple versions of the liturgy for the new feast of Corpus Christi provide evidence for changes in the theology of the Eucharist during the thirteenth century. These changes give pause in crediting the Miracle of Bolsena as the source of inspiration for the 1264 version of the liturgy by St. Thomas Aquinas. An earlier version of the "original office" with approbation from Liège Bishop Robert Thourotte in 1246 and a celebration of the feast by Hugh of St. Cher in 1252 weigh against the Bolsena Miracle as the source. Moreover, the idea of a corporeal presence with blood issuing from the consecrated host would have been anathema to St. Thomas’s Eucharistic theology and doctrine as set forth in his office homily and then later in Summa Theologiae. Additionally, recent codicological evidence pertaining to the Bolsena relics likewise suggests a different local chronology. The evidence presented, herein, nonetheless, should not be interpreted so as to contradict the beliefs of the faithful.

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