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TORTURE AND EUCHARIST*

Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ

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The twentieth century could in many ways be called the Century of the Eucharist. Pope Pius X's encouragement of frequent communion, the liturgical movement, the theology of the Body of Christ, and the recognition of an ecclesiology of communion at Vatican II were not innovations, but rather served to refocus the Church's attention on the centrality of the Eucharist to the Church's life. To an outsider, these movements might seem like a purely internal affair, the rearranging of priorities with regard to the semi-private rituals of churchgoers. Catholics, however, are inclined to think that much more is at stake. If the Eucharist is what we claim it is, then it is about more than the Church's life in any narrow sense. St. Augustine comments with approval that in several Punic dialects the word used for Eucharist is simply the word for "life." The Eucharist was not a ritual action cordoned off into some "religious" dimension of life separate from more secular and mundane pursuits.

We should not be surprised, therefore, to find that the reinvigoration of Eucharistic theology and practice in the twentieth century should intersect in places with another theme that gained new prominence in

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the twentieth century—that of political theology. Again, theological reflection on political matters is not new to the tradition. Origen's reflections on Christians and the Emperor, Augustine's meditations on the two cities, and Aquinas' writings on kingship all belong to a long tradition of theological reflection on politics. But in the twentieth century "political theology" came to be recognized as a theological locus in its own right, ironically at the precise moment when secularization was loudly declared to be our fate. Perhaps political theology developed as a discipline precisely in reaction to the secularist obituary for the public relevance of religion. Now that even the most prominent advocates of the secularization thesis, like Peter Berger, have repented of it, the importance of political theology seems assured for the twenty-first century.

Interesting work is being done now on the Eucharist and politics, but the area is still relatively undeveloped. My own work in this area has been little more than exploratory. In this talk, I would like to explain a little about my work on Eucharist and politics under the military dictatorship in Chile and see if I can make some connections between that work and the broader currents of Eucharistic theology in the twentieth century, especially in the work of Henri de Lubac. In particular, I am interested in the way that de Lubac emphasized the Eucharist as social and the Eucharist as action. I will discuss the case of Chile first, aware that the experience of the Church there might have resonances with the experience of the Church here in the Philippines. I will then discuss de Lubac, and suggest that his work on the Eucharist has broader political implications than he himself acknowledged.

I. Torture and Eucharist

In the late 1980s, I lived for a couple of years in a poor area of Santiago, Chile, working as a lay associate with the Holy Cross order of priests. In those years, General Pinochet's military dictatorship was still in power, but that power was increasingly contested by street protests and other manifestations of resistance. My housemates and I participated in the protests along with our neighbors, setting up

barricades, chanting slogans and holding signs, and mostly just being out in the street in large numbers. We learned the taste of tear gas and how to play cat-and-mouse with the water cannon. It was all quite exhilarating but puzzling at the same time. Did people really think that the military dictatorship would fall just because a bunch of unarmed people went and stood in the street? I suppose the way for traffic had to be cleared, but I sometimes wondered what would have happened if the police and the army just ignored the protests.

Street protests don't do much except put bodies in public spaces where they can be seen. That a military regime armed to the teeth would find this threatening says a lot about the way political power works. Political power is largely about configuring bodies in space, creating a larger "body politic" out of individual bodies, to use the metaphor that dates back at least to ancient Greece. The image of a body politic indicates that each individual member will occupy the space that corresponds to it for the smooth functioning of the body as a whole. It also indicates that the individual members will subject themselves to being ordered by the head. The ordering of the body politic is largely realized through public ritual actions through which the roles and boundaries and goals and allegiances of the body are enacted and reinforced. Soldiers march in the street while people applaud and wave flags. Elaborate rituals surround the flag as it is saluted and people pledge their allegiance to it. High national holidays (or "holy days") are observed. Those fallen in battle on behalf of the body politic are commemorated in reverent tones and in monuments that dominate public spaces. Relics of the founding fathers are venerated in temples dedicated to the memory of the republic.

All of this is sometimes acknowledged with a cursory nod toward the importance of symbolism in politics, but somehow the idea of symbol alone does not quite capture the fullness of what is going on. "Symbol" is often used to indicate a sign that serves as a pointer to the reality that lies elsewhere. But it seems to me that what is going on here is both *sacramentum et res*, sign and reality at the same moment. Just as Catholic theology has rejected the notion that the Eucharistic elements are merely symbolic, mere place-holders for the Body of

Christ, so we should be suspicious of the notion that political rituals are made up of mere symbols, as if the symbols could be discarded but the reality would remain. The symbols are part of a larger liturgical action that scripts bodies into a performance. When I returned to the U.S. and started my doctoral studies in theology, I began to explore the parallels between the liturgies of the Church and the liturgies of the nation-state. Both are ritual enactments through which communal bodies are formed and disciplined in public space. The resulting work was my dissertation and first book, entitled *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ.*[1]

The first chapter of the book is an exploration of torture as a way of disciplining the body politic. In the eight months between returning from Chile and starting my doctoral work at Duke, I worked at Notre Dame Law School developing a data base for the archives of the Archdiocese of Santiago's Vicariate of Solidarity, which provided aid for the victims of human rights abuses under the dictatorship. As I read through case after case of people describing their own torture at the hands of the security forces, it became clear that the regime did not use torture to procure information. In all but a tiny minority of cases, the victims had no information the regime did not already have. Thousands of people were tortured into signing confessions fabricated by the secret police themselves. Torture was really about a kind of ritual drama or anti-liturgy that enacted the power of the state on the individual body of the victim. The fragmentation of the torture victim's identity was mirrored by the fragmentation of the body politic through the spread of fear and anxiety. I remember this atmosphere of fear, of whisperings about political matters, of rumors of *sapos* or informants in the neighborhood. People who were involved in no type of organization at all were picked up and tortured. Many disappeared, were never heard from again. No one was safe, and few could be trusted.

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[1]The following paragraphs are a very brief summary of the argument made in much greater detail in my book, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

The intended effect of this liturgy of fear was the reorganization of public space. The goal of the regime was to eliminate all intermediate bodies between the individual and the state that would challenge the power of the state. Despite the frequency with which the term "fascist" was hurled at the regime, the goal was quite different from fascism: instead of *zusammenmarschieren*, marching together, the goal of the regime was to atomize the body politic, to create a body of individuals who adhered only to the state and not to one another. This goal of society as nothing more than a collection of individuals was the vision of Milton Friedman, the primary economic advisor to the Pinochet regime. Every form of gathering that might threaten the power of the state—political parties, labor unions, peasant cooperatives, sports clubs, and, last but not least, church movements—was systematically repressed. In an atmosphere of fear created by the security apparatus, people did not dare to organize. As one former community organizer said of his life under the Pinochet regime, "I spent years swearing at the television set."

The reason that all of this is theologically relevant is not simply that the Catholic Church in Chile became the primary institutional locus of resistance to the military regime. The institutional strength of the Catholic Church allowed it eventually to raise a prophetic voice against the abuses of the regime, and to provide spaces for people to organize. Pinochet himself was a self-identified devout Catholic and the sensibilities of the majority of the population would have been deeply offended by any direct attack on the Church. All of this can and has been studied from a sociological point of view, and sociology has insights to share. What interested me, however, was not the Church as just one more institution of civil society, but the Church as Body of Christ that stands in tension with the body politic orchestrated by the state. It is here that Eucharistic theology comes into play. If we can see the liturgies of the state as seeking to organize bodies in space and create a kind of communal body, then it becomes possible, perhaps even necessary, to look at the Eucharist as an alternative liturgical enactment of a communal body, the Body of Christ.

In the early aftermath of the military coup in 1973, the Church's response to the Pinochet regime was cautious, often muted by a theology that emphasized the Church not as body but as the "soul of society." Many of the most progressive bishops during the military dictatorship had been formed in Catholic Action which, despite its admirable and often successful attempts to organize Catholics into groups that would bring the Gospel to societal problems, nevertheless tended to view the Church itself as a "mystical body," body which, as mystical, hovered over direct involvement in political matters. From Jacques Maritain, bishops had learned to distinguish the spiritual and the temporal planes, and expect that the Church as a body would only act to form individuals on the spiritual plane. Those individuals would then bring the Gospel spirit as individual Christians to the temporal plane, the everyday social world of politics, economics, and so on. The Church itself, however, as soul of society, would not appear as body on the temporal plane, for that would be to confuse the spiritual with the temporal. In the 1960s the more activist laity, frustrated by this model, abandoned Catholic Action *en masse* for the political parties. The bishops, however, generally held to this model and expected that the Church, in charge of souls, would continue to cooperate with the state, in charge of bodies. When the military regime took over in 1973 and began torturing and making bodies disappear, the Church hierarchy was initially caught off guard. The bishops' initial attempts to privately talk the military into moderating the repression fell on deaf ears.

The situation changed when the Church found its own priests, nuns, and layworkers being killed, tortured, and made to disappear, and when the lines of people seeking refuge and help from the Church got too long. The Church established the Pro-Peace Committee and its successor, the Vicariate of Solidarity, which provided legal help to victims of human rights abuses. The Vicariate published a biweekly magazine that was often the only source of reliable information on the human rights situation in the country, given government domination of the official media. The Vicariate became an umbrella for all kinds of organization that could take place only with the Church's protection.

The Vicariate sponsored health clinics, legal clinics, soup kitchens, buying cooperatives, house-building projects, women's groups, self-employment workshops, sewing cooperatives, and a host of other spaces to gather. The Church thus became the only body capable of gathering people in public spaces in a way that challenged the atomization of social space which the military regime was trying to implement. Moreover, the Church hierarchy saw this contest in Eucharistic terms. In 1980, a group of seven bishops issued a decree of excommunication for torturers and those enabling torture in their dioceses, a move that the Bishops' Conference as a whole would adopt three years later. The bishops involved saw the forbidding of the Eucharist to torturers as a way of making the Body of Christ *visible* where it had become invisible because of the way in which both torture victims and their torturers approached the same communion table. Father José Aldunate proclaimed that "Torture is the most vehement attack against the body of Christ." He founded the Sebastian Acevedo Movement against Torture, which performed street liturgies in front of known torture centers. At a prearranged signal, members of the group—mostly priests, nuns, and Catholic laypeople—would gather, hand out leaflets, unfurl banners, sing, and chant litanies denouncing the torture being performed in that very place. These liturgies were intended to perform the Body of Christ in public spaces from which the Body of Christ had disappeared. Members of the group suffered in their own bodies the violence of the regime, as they were usually beaten and arrested. As one observer put it, "their bodies are transformed into powerful flesh for the sacrifice in which they lovingly receive the Eucharist with those who suffer." In an analogous sense, they become Eucharist by uniting their bodies in sacrifice with the body of Christ.

My book is titled what it is because I see torture and Eucharist as two opposing movements. Torture seeks to scatter, atomizing the body politic by making all social bodies that rival the state disappear. Eucharist seeks to gather, fostering social bodies that participate in the body of Christ. Both are ways of performing bodies in public space, and both are therefore a kind of body politics.

II. Communion Ecclesiology and the Work of Henri de Lubac

It may seem odd to juxtapose torture and Eucharist in this way, but I see my work as fitting into the focus on the social dimension of the Eucharist in twentieth century Catholic thought, which is in turn a recovery of a much larger and deeper current in the Church's tradition, dating back to the scriptures themselves. The key figure in this recovery is Henri de Lubac, famously silenced by his Jesuit superiors during the 1950s and famously made a cardinal by Pope John Paul II, despite the fact that he was not a bishop. From his very first book, *Catholicism*, published in 1938 in France with the subtitle *The Social Aspects of Dogma*, de Lubac's concern was to emphasize that "in reality Catholicism is essentially social."[2] Precisely because of the mystical unity of all humanity in the image of God, sin consisted of the scattering of humanity into mutually competitive individuals. Salvation was therefore the opposite movement, the regathering of all humanity which takes place paradigmatically and actually in the Church. As de Lubac quotes St. Augustine, "The Church is the world, reconciled."[3]

De Lubac came to see that this social unity is founded in the Eucharist. Here his 1944 book *Corpus Mysticum* is the key text. De Lubac presented *Corpus Mysticum* as an historical study of the use of some technical theological vocabulary for the Church and the Eucharist in the Middle Ages, but the present-day implications of this study were profound and, I think, are just beginning to be fully explored. When de Lubac began his work, the theology of the Church as the Mystical Body was on the ascendancy. In 1936, Emile Mersch wrote of the Mystical Body doctrine: "So many theologians are now teaching it that we shall make no attempt to enumerate them, much less to class them

[2]Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard & Sister Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 15.

[3]Quoted in Henri de Lubac, *The Splendour of the Church*, trans. Michael Mason (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1956), 133.

into schools. Again, its proponents are so recent that it is as yet too early to devote a historical study to them."[4] Mersch plays loose with the terminology and finds the doctrine of the Mystical Body in the scriptures—even prefigured in the Old Testament—and throughout the Church's tradition. When de Lubac turned his attention in earnest to study the doctrine, however, he was surprised to find no application of the term *corpus mysticum* to the Church before its appearance in the famous bull *Unam Sanctam* in 1302. There is plenty of body language for the Church in the patristic writings, but no Church as mystical body. What de Lubac found is that the language of mystical body was used instead for the sacrament of the Eucharist. Here the language of "mystical" was used to distinguish the sacramental body of Christ from his historical, physical body. Mystical was related to the Greek term *mysterion*, which was translated into Latin as *sacramentum*. The mystery of the altar—never contrasted with real presence—was, says de Lubac, "more of an action than a thing."[5] "Action" here seems to refer to the gathering of bodies into the Church. The dynamic, rather than static, form of the mystery as action was related to the three different dimensions of time—past, present, and future—that the Eucharist enacted. The historical sacrifice of Christ was really present now, but the Eucharistic action also looked ahead to the eschatological consummation of the complete Body of Christ.[6]

In the patristic and early medieval periods, then, the Church was regarded not as *corpus mysticum*; it was commonly identified as the *corpus verum*, the true body of Christ which was the effect of the sacramental action—"the Eucharist makes the Church" in de Lubac's famous

[4]Emile Mersch, *The Whole Christ: The Historical Development of the Doctrine of the Mystical Body in Scripture and Tradition*, trans. John R. Kelly (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1938), 557.

[5]Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 49.

[6]de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, 55–66.

phrase.[7] The Eucharist is the effective sign of the union of peace and charity toward which humanity is reaching.[8] There is no separation of the sacramental and ecclesial bodies, no sense that the ritual action merely symbolizes something that can be sociologically described in the group behavior of Christians. As de Lubac writes, "The external sacrifice and ritual is also the sacrament of the 'true' sacrifice, of that interior and spiritual sacrifice by which the holy society of all those who belong to God is brought into being."[9]

In the eleventh-century controversies over Eucharistic presence surrounding Berengar of Tours, de Lubac notices that the ground begins to shift. Against what was perceived as an over-spiritualization of Christ's sacramental presence in Berengar's work, the gap between the historical body of Christ and his sacramental presence was closed, and the Church came increasingly to be left out of the picture. The temptation was to see "'mystical' as a watering-down of 'real' or of 'true'."[10] The flesh of the Eucharist came to be contrasted with the "spiritual flesh" of the Church, and by the twelfth century "sacramental" and "mystical" were put in opposition to each other.[11] The original terms were inverted; the Church became the "mystical body of Christ," and the elements on the altar became Christ's true body. This did not mean that the later Middle Ages did not regard the Church as truly Christ's body, just as the earlier authors did not deny that the sacrament really made Christ present in the elements. But Eucharistic piety in the later Middle Ages became overly individualistic, focused on the miracle on the altar.[12] At the same time, the sacramental origin of the Church became muted, and it became a body on analogy with other

[7]de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, 88.

[8]de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, 66.

[9]de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, 67.

[10]de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, 249.

[11]de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, 103.

[12]de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, 259.

social bodies. The term "body of the Church" would come in some instances to replace the idea of the Church as the body of Christ. Once the language of "mystical body" lost its sacramental origin and became sociologized, it became the focus of debates between champions of papal power and champions of royal power, who argued over whether pope or king was head of the body of society and whether there could be a natural, temporal body alongside the mystical body of the Church.[13] In the Protestant Reformation, the visible body of the Church would be completely dissociated from the mystical body, and Cardinal Bellarmine would respond by depicting the Church as a "perfect society," just as France was. De Lubac comments that Bellarmine said nothing about the Eucharist in his writings on the Church.[14]

De Lubac had more in mind than simply contributing to the history of the use of some technical theological terms in the Middle Ages. *Corpus Mysticum* is an extension of his project begun in his first book to show the inherently social nature of Catholicism over against the individualistic piety of his own day. The Church is a social body made by the action of Christ in the Eucharist. It is not the same as a state like France, and it can never be reduced to a merely natural body that can be sociologically described. Nevertheless, de Lubac's analysis has the effect of breaking down the notion that the action of Christ in history is reducible to an individual spiritual experience that does not touch upon natural social reality. Indeed, I would argue that the next of de Lubac's great works, *Surnaturel*, which appeared in 1946, overcomes the kind of nature/grace dichotomies that contributed to the same individualization and spiritualization of Catholic piety that *Catholicism* and *Corpus Mysticum* undermined.

As is well-known, de Lubac showed in *Surnaturel* and his later revised version of the argument in *The Mystery of the Supernatural* that the idea of a "pure nature" untouched by grace is a pure hypothetical in

[13]de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, 114–116.

[14]de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, 253–254.

Aquinas that was distorted by later commentators into an actuality. For Cajetan and Suarez, nature becomes a closed system wherein natural desires are naturally fulfilled. A further, higher realm of supernatural desires would have to be opened up by God for the supernatural fulfillment God alone can give. De Lubac showed that Aquinas did not envisage any end for human beings other than our supernatural destiny in Christ. For Aquinas, humans are paradoxical in that they are created with a natural desire for something they need external, divine help to attain. Any conscious spirit can be nothing other than an absolute desire for God. De Lubac's work was revolutionary and controversial I think in part because it questions the neoscholastic thought world where worldly pursuits such as business and politics are relegated to the purely natural sphere of endeavor. One did not need to refer directly to the sacraments, revelation, eternal life, the liturgy, prayer, spirituality, and all of the trappings of the supernatural life in order to know how to run governments, make sure the trash is picked up, fight wars, run businesses, and so on. All that had to do with the natural end of humans and was relatively untouched by the supernatural. To attack the two-tiered neoscholastic nature/grace division is therefore to attack the pure autonomy of the natural, in which politics was included.

III. Communion Ecclesiology and Politics

For all these reasons, I think that the recovery of the social dimension of the Eucharist spearheaded by de Lubac could have tremendous implications for political theology. Whether or not de Lubac himself would want to develop his own thought in this direction, however, is not entirely clear. De Lubac wrote little on political theology, and what he did was scattered in essays, some of which were published anonymously. Given his clandestine activities during World War II in resisting Nazism, however, it is clear that de Lubac was intensely interested in political engagement. "It is now clear," writes David Grumett, "that the context, motivation and implications of de Lubac's theology are profoundly

political."[15] At the same time, however, it must be said that de Lubac actively resisted the direct politicization of the Church, for the same reasons that he resisted its depoliticization: neither the reduction of the Church to a natural social body like the state nor the reduction of the Eucharist to individual piety respects the true genesis of the Church as the social body of Christ in the action of the Eucharist.

Two major events shaped de Lubac's thinking on politics: the condemnation of Action Française by Pope Pius XI in 1926 and the Nazi occupation of France. Action Française was a nationalist and monarchist movement led by the agnostic Charles Maurras that saw the Catholic Church as essential to the social cohesion of France. It attracted a great deal of Catholic support before its condemnation, as did the Vichy regime that collaborated with the Nazis. De Lubac's theological opponents were also his political opponents: the neoscholastics tended to support Action Française and Vichy.[16] De Lubac rejected both those who wanted to restore the *ancien regime* with its close links between Church and state and those who saw in Catholic Eucharistic piety nothing more than the individual's ascent to his or her supernatural destiny, because both of them allowed Vichy to happen, in the first case through active support, in the second by failure to resist. De Lubac was fighting a battle on two fronts. On the first front, he rejected the theory of the Church's "indirect power" in temporal matters, which, according to Bellarmine, included the ability to depose heads of state. To accept this idea is "to lower her—even if only temporarily and under

[15]David Grumett, *De Lubac: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 25.

[16]The most prominent example of a supporter of both Action Française and Vichy is Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., de Lubac's most influential opponent and the major voice behind the encyclical *Humani Generis*. See Richard Peddicord, O.P., *The Sacred Monster of Thomism: An Introduction to the Life and Legacy of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P.* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2005).

the holiest of pretexts—to the rank of the powers of the world."[17] On the second front, he rejected the privatization of the Christian faith in the following terms: "Since the supernatural is not separated from nature, and the spiritual is always mixed with the temporal, the Church has eminent authority—always in proportion to the spiritual element present—over everything, without having to step out of her role."[18] De Lubac continues on to say that the Church must not be limited to articulating abstract principles "above the fray": "When circumstances require it, she must be able to make decisions—that is, either approve or condemn, *hic et nunc*—about concrete activities where doctrine and morality are involved."[19]

But the crucial question is how the Church will not only make pronouncements but act to organize bodies in space and time. Wary of the direct involvement of the Church with the state, de Lubac limits the authority of the Church to ordering the individual Christian conscience.[20] "It is from the interior that faith transforms reason, that the Church influences the State."[21] De Lubac appeals to the same soul/body distinction that Maritain used; the Church is the soul of society, and cannot use corporal means to bind bodies.[22] This is right, insofar as the Church cannot use bodily coercion. But de Lubac does not do enough to consider the Church as a social body in its own right.

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[17]Henri de Lubac, "The Authority of the Church in Temporal Matters," in *Theological Fragments*, trans. Rebecca Howell Balinski (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 210.

[18]de Lubac, "The Authority of the Church in Temporal Matters," 214–215.

[19]de Lubac, "The Authority of the Church in Temporal Matters," 215.

[20]"But the Church's authority is entirely spiritual. Her divine authority is limited to the individual conscience" (de Lubac, "The Authority of the Church in Temporal Matters," 211). De Lubac makes clear that the Church does not merely give advice to consciences, but has the power to order consciences when necessary (de Lubac, "The Authority of the Church in Temporal Matters," 221).

[21]de Lubac, "The Authority of the Church in Temporal Matters," 212.

[22]de Lubac, "The Authority of the Church in Temporal Matters," 207, 209.

Because de Lubac is rightly wary of Church entanglement with the state, and because he wrongly equates politics with the state, de Lubac stops well short of the full political implications of his own work on the Eucharist. If politics is defined not as the achievement of state power but more broadly as the ordering of bodies in space and time, then we should be able to see how—as in Chile and perhaps as in the Philippines—the Church can enact Eucharistic bodies in space and time that stand as a counter-politics to both a theocratic state and to the secularization and irrelevance of the Church in the West. Care must be taken not to reduce the Eucharist to a celebration of some politics derived from worldly sources. But if the Body of Christ is not to be merely a "mystical body" hovering above the real suffering and bodily lives of his members, then we can, I think, make bold to allow Christ to order our bodies in the here and now, in anticipation of the full Kingdom to come.