

The Experience of Eucharistic Beauty in Albert the Great's *De corpore domini*¹

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AT FIRST GLANCE, the insight that links beauty and the Eucharist seems to be an obvious Catholic intuition. We surround the Eucharist with the beautiful—hymns, flowers, pressed linens. We reserve the Eucharist in ornate vessels. The monstrance in particular, which typically features jeweled rays emanating from a central host, speaks a message about the beauty concentrated in and flowing from the sacred host. Yet the monstrance could easily provoke a confused reaction reflection from someone coming into a church and seeing the Eucharist for the first time. What is it that those beautiful rays surround? A small white circle of bread. It is not colorful, nor does it feature intricate designs. It is not actually beautiful in appearance. What, then, is its relation to beauty? What is it about the sacrament of the Eucharist that makes it appropriate to depict it as a central point from which beauty flows upon the world?

While questions about Eucharistic beauty can be (and have been) traced through many authors,² this essay will investigate the beauty of the Eucharist in only one: Albert the Great, the thirteenth-century Dominican theologian, bishop, and teacher of Thomas Aquinas. For Albert, the beauty that the Eucharist bears is metaphysically grounded in the being of God. It

¹ Part of this essay was presented at the Notre Dame “Ethics and Culture Conference: You are Beauty,” November 2016.

² See, for example, Hans Urs von Balthasar’s multivolume *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, 7 vols. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), or Ann W. Astell, *Eating Beauty: The Eucharist and the Spiritual Arts in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

blossoms into human experience through the reception of the sacrament and through faith, uniting the Church, forming the moral life of believers, and ultimately shaping Albert's own artistic imagination.

Analysis of Albert on Eucharistic beauty reveals that human persons may experience various different "levels" of the beauty of the Eucharist. All these levels require engagement with the senses because of the sensible nature of sacraments. It will, however, be the condition of the one encountering the Eucharist that will determine how deeply its beauty is perceived. Those united to God through explicit faith and charity will recognize God's beauty poured out in the Eucharist and be interiorly changed by receiving it. Those who believe but who do not conform their lives to Christ's own can recognize Christ's presence but are not able to be nourished by this beauty without prior conversion. Those who do not believe may be drawn toward God by the outward beauty of the liturgy. Albert's theology has several significant implications. It suggests that an outwardly beautiful liturgy should be an important tool for teaching and evangelization. It also confirms the traditional teaching that only those in the state of grace should receive the Eucharist.³

This essay will focus primarily on Albert's treatise *De corpore domini*, a late work written most likely in the 1270s, several years after his years of pastoral concern as bishop of Regensburg.⁴ The work itself is both pastoral and doctrinal, arranged around six names for the Eucharist connected

³ There are historical precedents and doctrinal arguments for the judgment that those who are unrepentantly failing to live a life in accord with the moral truths taught by Christ should not receive the Eucharist. See John Corbett, O.P., Andrew Hoffer, O.P., Paul J. Keller, O.P., Dominic Langevin, O.P., Dominic Legge, O.P., Kurt Martens, Thomas Petri, O.P., and Thomas Joseph White, O.P. "Recent Proposals for the Pastoral Care of the Divorced and Remarried: A Theological Assessment," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 12 (2014): 601–30. Albert himself makes this judgment on systematic and historical grounds, and rightly so, since these are the grounds which decide the question. See Albert the Great, *De corpore domini*, dist. 6, tract. 4, ch. 3, in *Opera Omnia*, vol. 38, ed. Auguste Borgnet (Paris: Vives, 1899).

⁴ The authenticity of *De corpore domini* has been called into question in recent years, with important scholars on both sides of the question. In favor of Albertine authorship, see Henryk Anzulewicz, "The Systematic Theology of Albert the Great," in *A Companion to Albert the Great: Theology, Philosophy and the Sciences*, ed. Irven Resnick (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 15–68, at 64; against Albertine authorship, see Albert Fries, *Der Doppeltraktat über die Eucharistie unter dem Namen des Albertus Magnus* (Aschendorff: 1984). Even those who deny that *De corpore domini* was written by Albert recognize that the author drew heavily on Albert's theology.

to the liturgy: grace, gift, food, communion, sacrifice, and sacrament. There are large systematic sections of the work which echo the structure of articles in Albert's *Commentary on the Sentences*, but there are also poetic passages, meant to stir the devotion of the reader through beautiful language. The pastoral-devotional character of *De corpore domini* means that this work shows a stronger attentiveness to the beauty of the Eucharist than Albert's other Eucharistic writings.⁵ Albert does not explicitly analyze the beauty of the Eucharist in this work. Rather, he assumes it, refers to it, and seeks to add to it by himself surrounding the Eucharist in beautifully crafted words. Albert's other significant works which treat the Eucharist are his commentary on the Mass, *De mysterio missae*, which was written as a companion-work to *De corpore domini*, and two early works from the 1240s: a short treatise on the sacraments, *De sacramentis*, and his more detailed *Commentary on the Sentences*.⁶

Beauty in Albert

Albert defines beauty in his *Commentary on Dionysius's Divine Names*, chapter 4. Here, he gives the characteristics of beauty. (1) It is a "resplendence of accidental or substantial form [shining] upon ordered material parts, or men or actions."⁷ This is the "specific difference of beauty" and the heart of his definition. He also mentions that beauty (2) is attractive as a good and an end, (3) involves a unification and order in the beautiful

⁵ For an introduction to the history and theology of *De corpore domini*, see the introduction to the English translation: Albert the Great, *On the Body of the Lord*, trans. Sr. Albert Marie Surmanski, O.P., Fathers of the Church Medieval Continuation 17 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2017). The translations in this article have been prepared with reference to that translation but vary from it in places.

⁶ Albert the Great: *De mysterio missae*, in *Opera Omnia*, vol. 38, ed. Auguste Borgnet (Paris: Vives, 1899); *De sacramentis*, in *Opera Omnia Sancti Doctoris Alberti Magni*, Cologne ed., vol. 26, ed. Albertus Ohlmeyer, O.S.B. (Munster: Aschendorff, 1958); *Super IV Sententiarium*, in *Opera Omnia*, vol. 30, ed. Auguste Borgnet (Paris: Vives, 1894).

⁷ Albert the Great, *Super Dionysium de Divinis Nominibus*, ch. 4, q. 72, sol.: "Ratio pulcri in universali consistit in resplendentia formae super partes materiae proportionatas, vel super diversas vires vel actiones" (*Opera Omnia Sancti Doctoris Alberti Magni*, Cologne ed., vol. 37, ed. Albertus Ohlmeyer, O.S.B. [Munster: Aschendorff, 1972], 182). A segment of this work of Albert was for years attributed to Aquinas's *De pulchro et bono*. In comparing the two editions, question 72 in Albert's *De divinis nominibus* is listed as question 1, a. 2, of Aquinas's *De pulchro et bono*.

thing, and (4) comes from the first beauty, God.⁸

Albert's definition has both Platonic and Aristotelian elements. It is Platonic in that beauty comes from God, the most perfect and first beauty. Albert's language of "resplendence" shining down and through a beautiful thing is a type of Platonic emanation. His definition shows influence by Aristotelian philosophy in that each thing has its own form. The beauty of an individual thing is not merely measured by its relation to God or an ideal form, but to the proportion of its parts as ordered by its own form. In showing both Platonic and Aristotelian influences, Albert's definition of beauty is consistent with the general tendencies of his philosophy.⁹

Albert never includes beauty in a formal list of transcendentals, but he does treat it as a transcendental quality in his commentary on Dionysius's *Divine Names*.¹⁰ He sees that beauty applies analogously to various levels of being. God is the first beauty, the source of all others. He alone of all beautiful things is not made beautiful by a proportion of parts. Albert does not emphasize harmony between the persons of the Trinity in his understanding of the proportionality of divine beauty. Instead God is beautiful by being proportionate to himself in his oneness, by having multiple attributes, and by being that to which all other beautiful things are related.¹¹ Created reality is also beautiful: material beings, human persons, and actions can all be beautiful when ordered in all of their parts according to their own form. At the material level, color is part of the resplendence of beauty; on the moral level, beauty is revealed in appropriateness of action.¹²

For Albert, beauty has a strong connection to truth and goodness. The beautiful is like the true in that encountering it involves apprehension. It differs from the true in that apprehending the beautiful involves recognizing an attractive goodness in that which is apprehended. In this way, it comes after truth.¹³ It overlaps with goodness in that the beautiful is desirable as an end. In his *Commentary on the Divine Names*, Albert sometimes treats the beautiful, *pulchrum*, as a type of good, along with the simple good, *bonum*, and the honorable good, *honestum*. Albert distinguishes beauty from the two other types of good in that beauty involves an

⁸ Albert the Great, *De divinis nominibus*, ch. 4, q. 72, sol. (p. 182).

⁹ For a treatment of Platonic sources in Albert, see Henryk Anzulewicz, "Plato and Platonic/Neoplatonic Sources in Albert," in Resnick, *Companion to Albert the Great*, 595–600.

¹⁰ See Francesca Aran Murphy, *Christ the Form of Beauty: A Study in Theology and Literature* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 213.

¹¹ Albert, *De divinis nominibus*, ch. 4, q. 73, ad 1 (p. 183–84).

¹² Albert, *De divinis nominibus*, ch. 4, q. 72, sol. (p. 182).

¹³ Albert, *De divinis nominibus*, ch. 4, q. 71 (p. 181).

emphasis on the proportionate order which perfects a thing, rather than the aspect of desirability which the thing has from being perfect.¹⁴

Albert's understanding of beauty is dynamic. The beautiful form of a thing comes forth from God, but it really is part of the thing itself, shining out in the parts of the beautiful object. The dynamism is that of the "radiance" of beauty—a dynamism not of physical movement, but of creative origin and communicative power. It is the dynamism of the true which impacts the mind of the knower; the dynamism of the good which draws desire to itself. The beautiful is the true as it is revealed through a well-proportioned good; it is a good that is sought for its lovely perfection.

Albert's understanding of beauty has been called "objectivist," because for him, while beauty is perceivable, it is not caused by human perception.¹⁵ It is constituted neither in the mind itself nor by a relationship between the mind and the beautiful thing. For Albert, a radiance of form really does shine through beautiful things whether or not the lovely proportionality is recognized by mankind.

The Dynamic of Eucharistic Beauty

Albert's metaphysical understanding of beauty as unifying and dynamic applies to the Eucharist as beautiful. Eucharistic beauty connects and unifies several levels of being: the divine, the human, the moral, the ecclesial, and the liturgical. It crowns a sapiential understanding of reality as ordered by God's wisdom, offering strong suggestive arguments that the beauty of a well-ordered moral life accords best with this sacrament. The Eucharist is a *locus* of beauty because it contains Christ, who is God. Albert firmly grounds beauty in the "splendor of the divinity" which is the source and exemplar of all other beauty.¹⁶ Insofar as this nature belongs to Christ as the Second Person of the Trinity, he is the beautiful image of the Father, beautiful because the whole divine nature resides in him. Coming forth from the Father, eternally and in the Incarnation, he radiates the divine beauty to mankind. Since Christ is substantially present in the Eucharist, "there is splendor in the bread."¹⁷

¹⁴ Albert, *De divinis nominibus*, ch. 4, q. 72, sol. (p. 182). This essay does not intend to answer the often-intensely argued question about whether beauty fulfills all of the characteristics of a transcendental for the Scholastics. Here, it is enough to recognize that, for Albert, it transcends many of the categories of reality and is seen as flowing from God.

¹⁵ Umberto Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 26.

¹⁶ *De corpore domini*, dist. 1, tract. 1, ch. 6: "Splendorem deitatis."

¹⁷ *De corpore domini*, dist. 3, tract. 1, ch. 1: "In panibus splendorem habet."

Christ's presence in the Eucharist is stable and substantial, but it is a presence as spiritual food, meant to be eaten by the faithful. When we receive the Eucharist, we share in an outpouring of beauty from the Trinity. Albert links Trinitarian procession to the movement of our redemption and to Eucharistic eating, using the language of the radiation of beauty from God. He speaks about the glory or *claritas* of the divine nature, saying:

For the glory which the Father gave to the Son to be made perfect, is the glory by which he shines in all the members of the mystical body. For the glory of Christ flashes and shines in all of them. . . . He gives us his glory, which the Father gave [him] to make perfect in the world by pouring himself into us spiritually and sacramentally, and so we are one body with him. . . . For in this way the Father is shining in Christ the man in his humanity, through the consubstantial divinity.¹⁸

Albert summarizes redemption in this image of a shining forth from the Trinity. God's goodness radiates on the world through Christ, touches humanity, and through the Eucharist, brings beatified mankind back into communion with the Trinity. Albert's treatment of divine beauty in *De corpore domini* differs slightly from that in his *Commentary on the Divine Names* because Albert includes the procession of the Son from the Father in his description of the procession of divine beauty. The emphasis on the integrity of the divine nature as true divine beauty remains the same in both works.

Albert's vision is echoed in a quote by Hans Urs von Balthasar: "Whoever had been able to read the image of the Son who bled to death on the Cross, will not be really 'surprised' by the prolongation of this commitment in the Eucharist. The Eucharist will be regarded by such a person only as a dimension emerging from that first commitment."¹⁹ Like von Balthasar, Albert envisions the Eucharist as an extension of the outpouring of redemption. Albert's general theological schema of coming forth

¹⁸ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 1, ch. 5: "Claritas enim quam Pater perficiendam dedit Filio, est claritas qua claret in omnibus membris corporis mystici. In omnibus enim illis fulget et lucet claritas Christi. . . . Sic ergo influendo se nobis spiritualiter et sacramentaliter nobis suam dat claritatem, quam sibi Pater dedit in mundo perficiendam, et sic unum sumus cum ipso corpus. Et sic claret Filius in Patre secundum unam et eandem substantiam deitatis clarissimam."

¹⁹ Von Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord*, 1:440–41.

and return to God has been described in terms of *exitus—perfectio—reductio*.²⁰ He seems to be following this movement in his Eucharistic theology.

This *exitus—perfectio—reductio* movement is seen when Albert speaks of the “golden chain” of Trinitarian love described in John 17:22–23:

This is the golden chain, by which we are joined and from many are led back to the one from which we came. For the Father is entirely one, from whom as from a font the Son is born, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. Now the Holy Spirit is the bond of this union. . . . Now the form to which we are bound is the Son, the form of the eternal Father, and is the sacrament of the body and blood, by which we are incorporated into Christ and so in the Son we are led back to the heavenly Father of every good, and in him we enjoy every good of the Son in the sweetness and beatitude of the Spirit. And all who fall from this chain perish.²¹

By the Eucharist we are linked up to the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit, who is the “bond” of the union of Father and Son. Although the word beauty is not used here, the language is very similar to Albert’s earlier definition of beauty in that he speaks about how a “form,” in this case the Son’s conformity to the Father in the divine nature, orders those united to it, and is, in turn, expressed through them.

Here we see beauty as transcendental: present in the perfection of the divine nature, present in us as we know and love God and are touched by his goodness and grace. Albert gives a vision of the life of the Church as wisely ordered and made beautiful by the divine life.

Reception of Eucharistic Beauty and Virtue

How does this beauty touch and transform human experience? In Albert’s writing, Eucharistic beauty is experienced in two ways through the effective nature of the sacrament. The first of these is that the Eucharist causes

²⁰ See Anzulewicz, “Platonic Sources,” 596.

²¹ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 3, tract. 1, ch. 8: “Haec est catena aurea, qua colligamur et a multis reducimur ad unum unde exivimus. Pater enim omnino unus, a quo sicut a fonte Filius nascitur, et a Patre et Filio procedit Spiritus sanctus. Spiritus autem sanctus hujus unionis est vinculum. . . . Forma autem cui alligamur, Filius est, forma Patris aeterni, et sacramentum corporis et sanguinis est, quo Christo incorporamur, et sic in Filio ad omnis boni Patrem coelestem reducimur, et in illo fruimur omni bono Filii in Spiritus dulcedine et beatitudine. Et omnes ab hac catena recedentes, pereunt.”

an increase in love of God in those who receive it.²² This is a beautifying action in that it increases the spiritual life of the one who receives it, healing her weakness. Albert understands all of the sacraments to be remedies for sin.²³ The Eucharist brings its unique type of healing by causing “the restoration of the lack in spiritual life which man incurred through long abstinence from spiritual food.”²⁴ In this quote, Albert uses the image of feeding someone who is starving. One who finally has access to food after a period of starvation will become more beautiful as she is able to eat well again; she will also be more vivaciously beautiful in her actions now that she once again has energy.

This increase in spiritual life and charity makes the one who receives it more virtuous. To grow in virtue is to become more beautiful, more like Christ, “the most beautiful king and the font of grace.”²⁵ Albert repeatedly talks about “splendor of holiness.”²⁶ His definition of beauty itself refers to a type of beauty “resplendent in ordered deeds.” Grace overflowing into virtue orders the human person within, shining outwardly in a virtuous life. In a poetic passage, Albert says that the Eucharist “penetrates with the sublimity of divinity, wafts with the fragrance of virtue, and causes spiritual beauty by which it makes [us] like the most beautiful king.”²⁷ Thus the beauty of the Eucharist is revealed in its power to make those who receive it live beautiful lives. In this dynamic, the Eucharist does not so much act through beauty as through the divine power which nevertheless is beautiful and which causes beauty by its healing power. Then, God’s presence in the person is made visible through the holy life of the one who is united to Christ through the Eucharist.

Albert’s theological understanding draws on the first letter of John, which speaks about recognizing that the love of God is present in one who is able to keep the commandments. “And by this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments. . . . Whoever keeps his word, in him truly love for God is perfected” (1 John 2:3, 5; RSV, Catholic Edition [CE]). Keeping the commandments is a way of showing love of God.

²² Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 1, ch. 2.

²³ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 1, tract. 1, ch. 6.

²⁴ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 2, tract. 3, ch. 1: “Substantialis autem effectus est restauratio deperditi in spirituali vita, quam homo incurrit ex longa abstinencia cibi spiritualis.”

²⁵ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 1, ch. 3: “Pulcherrimo regi et fonti gratiarum.”

²⁶ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 1, ch. 6: “Splendore sanctitatis.”

²⁷ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 1, ch. 3: “Sublimitate deitatis penetrat, odore virtutum flagrat, et splendore plenae gratiae pulchritudinem inducit spirituale, qua pulcherrimo regi et fonti gratiarum assimilantur.”

Conversely, the ability to live a life which lovingly follows the commandments is a sign of the power of grace at work within a person. John's letter speaks of the "true light" of Christ "shining" in the world and in the life of those who follow Christ (1 John 2:11). Albert echoes this language when he speaks about Christ's glory "shining" through those who love him. Albert affirms that he has the theology of 1 John in mind when he quotes 1 John 3:9—"Whoever is born of God, does not commit sin, for his seed remains in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God"—to support the assertion that the body of Christ "draws man to itself by its power and transforms [him] into himself."²⁸ Albert understands that the grace of Christ given through the Eucharist powers the moral life.

Reception of Eucharistic Beauty and Mystical Experience

The second way in which the Eucharist is experienced as beautiful through its effectiveness occurs when receiving the Eucharist involves the experience of mystical love. Albert describes the one receiving the Eucharist as the bride from the Song of Songs who eats the fruit from "the tree of life, fair and beautiful."²⁹ She is not only "justified by the law" of righteousness given in the Eucharist but also tastes "the honey-flowing sweetness" of the sacrament and is so "inebriated with the most precious blood" that she boasts "that she is loved by God."³⁰ The language and thought of this section are indebted to the mystical theology of St. Bernard, love of whose thought is a signal characteristic of the genre of monastic literature by which *De corpore domini* is influenced.³¹

In another place Albert writes: "For fire penetrating into the marrow teaches the power of this love, by which Christ pours himself into us and draws us into himself; nor can anyone know this power other than by intimate love."³² There is a mystical knowledge here in which the presence of Christ is recognized through the impact on the will and emotions of the

²⁸ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 3, tract. 1, ch. 8: "Sua virtute hominem ad se trahit et in se transformat" (Biblical quotation according to Albert's text).

²⁹ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 1, ch. 2: "Fructum . . . quia nobis lignum vitae exhibuit pulchrum et decorum."

³⁰ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 1, ch. 2: "delectare in melliflua dulcedine . . . vino pretiosissimi sanguinis fuit inebriata. . . jactabat se a Deo habuisse affectus."

³¹ Jean LeClerq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catharine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1961), 103. See also, Surmanski, "Introduction," in *On the Body of the Lord*, 7–12.

³² Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 1, ch. 2: "Ignis enim in medullas penetrans erudit quae sit vis istius amoris, quo sic nobis Christus se infundit, et nos sic intrahit intra seipsum: nec alius potest scire quam amor intimus hanc virtutem."

recipient. The poetic and descriptive language that Albert uses shows that he considers this experience of Eucharistic delight to be beautiful.

Is it correct, though, to characterize the loving knowledge found in the Eucharist as a “beautiful experience”? In doing so, I am saying that it contains a delight that speaks of the union with God which is taking place. How is this delight something beautiful? Very often, especially in objectivist theories of beauty, beauty is connected to the eye and ear because of the cognitive content of sight and hearing, while for the same reason, the pleasure of eating is not understood as a gateway to beauty.³³ I remember pondering this question years ago as an undergraduate philosophy student but also the daughter of a farmer. I remembered the taste of fruit from our trees. Most often, the first bite of freshly picked apple *was* pleasant—a moment of delight. Yet this pleasure was not just a delightful sensation—it really did communicate something about the goodness and integrity of the fruit. A sound, healthy apple reveals its healthiness³⁴ in its flavor, while a wilting, wormy apple reveals its state too through the tongue of the unfortunate who bites into it. The joyful pleasure of tasting a delicious apple came not only from the sugar, but the communicated perfection of that year’s crop and God’s bounty. There was a cognitive element in the experience of taste.

Of course, when Albert speaks of delight “tasted” in the Eucharist, he is not speaking about the pleasant taste of the Eucharistic bread, but an interior delight. This is not the “taste and see” that the bread is fresh, but the “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Ps 34:8; RSVCE) of Scripture.³⁵ The love infused by the sacrament moves the will to an increase in charity. In doing so it impacts the emotions, giving an experiential knowledge of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist. This is a pleasant and desirable knowledge. It is a perception of beauty, since in it the interior ordering of charity “shines” strongly enough to give the recipient a real perception of Christ’s presence.

³³ For example, see Francis J. Kovach, *Philosophy of Beauty* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974), 58. Here, Kovach distinguishes physical or moral possession of an object from the cognitive possession of it needed for beauty, pointing out that, “there is no physical union taking place in aesthetic experience between the beholder and the beheld object, and there cannot even be any such union.” Or, see Nicolas of Cusa, Sermon 243: “Tota pulchra es, amica mea, et macula non est in te” (*Opera Omnia*, vol. 29, fasc. 3, *Sermones IV* (1455-1463), ed. Walter Andreas Euler and Harald Schwaezer [Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2002], 254–55; quoted in Astell, *Eating Beauty*, 2).

³⁴ This is so in all analogous senses of the word, since an apple really is alive, it is a sign of the state of the tree, and is healthy to the one who eats it. See Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [ST] I, q. 13, a. 5.

³⁵ Although Albert does have harsh words for those who would use inferior or sour wine for the Eucharist (*De corpore domini*, dist. 3, tract. 2, ch. 2).

These two first considerations (the beauty of virtue and the beauty of mystical awareness as both caused by the Eucharist) link conversion of heart to the beautiful. In these instances, the moral is tied directly to the aesthetic. In the first case, the beauty of Christ will only shine in the life of the one who receives him with love and wills to live by his moral law. Christ's grace powers the moral life, but the nature of virtue requires human assent and effort. Otherwise, the radiance of Christ's beauty would be thwarted, the resplendence stopped by the opacity of sin. In the second, for the interior presence of Christ to be perceived through love, love of God must burn in the heart of the person.³⁶

It is true that someone who does not love God could glimpse beauty in a supernaturally virtuous life, or could read and be moved by Albert's account of Eucharistic experience, but the fullest experience of the effective beauty of the Eucharist belongs to one who also loves. It is only in such a person that the beauty of the Eucharist would truly "shine through" all of the levels of the recipient's personality, achieving that for which it was given. If, for Albert, beauty truly is "resplendence . . . [shining] upon ordered material parts, or men or actions," the action of refusing to allow one's moral life to be ordered by the teaching of Christ would block the "shining" of the Eucharist and thereby make its reception pointless.

Reception of Eucharistic Beauty and the Church

What has been said about the Eucharist causing beauty in the life of an individual by uniting him to Christ is truer still of the Church. Albert extensively treats the way in which the Eucharist beautifully unites the Church. He references the Eucharistic body as the source of the mystical body of the Church throughout his work. He gives it special attention in distinction 4. Here, he traces the *exitus-perfectio-reductio* schema in the light of communion. Albert describes the various levels of communion that are deepened through the reception of the Eucharist. The list begins with communion with God, then continues through the angels, the saints, the mystical body, spiritual goods, sufferings, and material things through works of mercy. The *reductio* is suggested in the final chapter of this distinction which returns to God, reiterating that the Eucharist causes the "truest communion of the divine and the human."³⁷

³⁶ Jordan Aumann, O.P., considers such a contemplative awareness of God's presence to give "the soul moral certitude that it is in the state of grace" (*Spiritual Theology* [New York and London: Continuum, 2006 (orig. 1980)], 333).

³⁷ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 4, ch. 7: "Facit etiam divinarum et humanorum haec communio verissimam communionem".

A quotation from chapter 3, which treats communion with the saints, sums up the way in which Albert sees the unity and diversity of the Church as beautiful:

So we have the virtues of the patriarchs, the revelations and illuminations and enjoyments of the prophets, the justice of the lawgivers, the announcements and proclamations of the heralds of Christ announcing with John the Baptist, the honors of the apostles, the victories of the martyrs, the holiness of the confessors, the religion of the monks, the purity of the anchorites, the sound doctrine of the doctors, the purity of the virgins, the mourning of the widows, the domestic works of mercy, the concerns of the nations, the penitential laments of the penitent, the splendor of the integrity of the innocent, and all the merits of the saints, for all these things which flowed from Christ into his mystical body, come to be from the power of his body and blood and are carried and redound from one to the other through the charity of the Spirit of Christ.³⁸

This quote, consisting of rhythmically proportioned and repeated phrases all related to a central idea, poetically echoes Albert's understanding of the beautiful but diverse unity of the Church. The charity of Christ flows into and unites all of these different members into one body. The same beautiful dynamic of power flowing from the Trinity heals and orders the Church as it does the person.

It might seem odd to treat the Church *after* the individual rather than before. Albert is, indeed, aware that the Eucharist is confected within the Church. He is a strong sacramental realist who holds that an ordained priest is needed to consecrate the sacrament.³⁹ Thus, the power to cause the healing reality signified is present only in the Apostolic Church. Albert holds the strong position that those who are not in full communion with

³⁸ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 4, ch. 3: "Sic habemus virtutes Patriarcharum, revelationes et illuminationes et fruitiones Prophetarum, justitias Legislatorum, demonstrationes et praeconia praeconum Christi cum Joanne Baptista demonstrantium, dignitates Apostolorum, victorias Martyrum, sanctitates Confessorum, religionem Monachorum, puritatem Anachoritarum, doctrinas saluberrimas Doctorum, munditiam Virginum, luctum Viduarum, eleemosynas domesticas, curas gentium, poenitentiae lamenta poenitentium, splendorem honestatis innocentium, et omnia merita sanctorum: haec enim omnia quae a Christo in corpus ejus mysticum fluxerunt, in efficientia corporis ejus et sanguinis consistunt, et de quolibet in quemlibet per charitatem spiritus Christi referuntur et redundant."

³⁹ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 6, tract. 4, ch. 2.

the Catholic Church cannot confect the Eucharist meritoriously.⁴⁰

Yet, even though the Eucharist always impacts the individual as a member of the Church, Albert puts strong emphasis on the charity within the individual. It is in the forefront even when he talks about the Eucharist building up the Church. In the long quote given above, it is the grace of God received through Holy Communion which connects the individual members of the Church. Albert understand the Eucharist, and the strengthening of charity which it gives, to be what builds up the Church by binding individuals more strongly to Christ.⁴¹

Perception of Sacramental Beauty through Faith

Up to this point, our consideration of Eucharistic beauty has been tied to the Eucharist as effective in those who receive it, a beauty resplendent through its impact on the will. What about the simple perception of beauty in the Eucharist? Let us take the case we started with of someone who comes into a church building and sees the consecrated host. How is this host perceived as beautiful? We now begin to consider the Eucharist specifically as a sacramental sign or symbol.⁴² As a sacramental sign, the Eucharist has a beauty which must be read by the eyes of faith.

Albert teaches that the sacrament itself is beautiful because through it we perceive the presence of Christ. The ontological is foundational again—Christ is present, so there is beauty there to shine. Expounding Isaiah 11:10, which calls the Messiah's tomb "glorious," Albert says: "And his tomb, in which in which he was held and hidden, that is, the sacramental forms, will be glorious since in them we adore the hidden Lord Jesus Christ."⁴³ Glory, here, has to do with the perception of Christ's presence.

⁴⁰ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 6, tract. 4, ch. 2.

⁴¹ See Antonio Piolani, *Il Corpo Mistico e le sue relazioni con l'Eucharistia in S. Alberto Magno*, Studia di Teologia Medievale della Pontificia Università Lateranense 1 (Rome: Pontificia Università Lateranense, 1960), 167. Piolani finds this point to be generally consistent through Albert's theology. When Albert speaks about the sacramental character given in Baptism, he prefers to speak about it as ordered to faith or grace than to the Church. It is the shared faith and charity that are more important for him in making persons members of the Church. See for example his *Commentary on the Sentences*, where he describes character (among other definitions) as "a sign of the nature of the grace which is the effect of the sacrament [character est signum naturale gratiae quae est effectus sacramenti]" (Albert, *Super IV Sententiarum*, d. 6, a. 4).

⁴² Although, the sensible nature of the Eucharist, which is an essential part of its nature as a sacrament, was presupposed above when we spoke about people receiving the Eucharist.

⁴³ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 6, tract. 1, ch. 1: "Et sepulcrum ejus quo conditur et

Similarly, when speaking about the elevation of the host at Mass, he says that we see “the Lord who is coming . . . again showing himself exalted on the Cross.”⁴⁴ The sacrament enables the recognition of the presence of Christ.

How is the recognition of Christ possible? The recognition of Christ in the host which Albert describes would require first of all knowledge received through faith. It would also require the sensibly perceived host, as well as the knowledge that the consecration took place. What happens when the Eucharistic Christ is adored in the sacrament is not only an act of faith; it is a sacramental experience.⁴⁵ Both the knowledge of faith and the data of physical sight need to be held together in one experience for the sacrament to be truly appreciated. If beauty is the resplendence of the form of a thing shining through its appearance (according to Albert’s definition), then beauty is present here because the reality of Christ’s sacrificial presence “shines” through the host when the host is seen with the eyes of faith. This seems to be what Albert describes when he speaks about the Lord “showing himself exalted on the Cross” in the Eucharist.⁴⁶ This is not a natural physical beauty, although it is beauty manifesting itself through the sensible presence of the host.

What is the content of this “knowledge of faith” that is brought to the recognition of Christ’s Eucharistic presences? Essentially, it is that Christ, who is God and our Redeemer, is truly present through Eucharistic change. Yet faith’s content is richer than this. Albert does not want the action of the mind in perceiving the Eucharist to stop merely at the presence of Christ. He wants the one receiving communion to meditate richly on Christ, his great love for humanity, his goodness, his deep suffering, his true divinity, and many other attributes. These attributes are present in Christ in the Eucharist, but cannot be perceived directly. The recognition of how great is the One who is present, just like the fact of his presence, needs to come through the theological reflection that enriches faith. Thus, the beauty of the Eucharist will be recognized and experienced more deeply when the one perceiving the Eucharist has a deeper and more explicit faith.

absconditur, scilicet formae sacramentales, erit gloriosum: quia in ipso conditum adoramus Dominum Jesum Christum.”

⁴⁴ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 6, tract. 1, ch. 1: “Dominum venientem . . . suam in cruce exaltationem iterum ostendentem.”

⁴⁵ The word “sacramental” here is used to refer to an experience that involves the sensible sacrament. In his own terminology, by “sacramental reception of communion,” Albert always refers to actually eating the sacrament.

⁴⁶ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 6, tract. 1, ch. 1: “Dominum suam in cruce exaltationem . . . ostendentem.”

Albert admonishes his reader to spend time in meditative reflection. He says: "When we ponder the charity of Christ in that he offered himself in sacrifice for us, when we ponder his gentleness in suffering, and when we attend to his devotion in offering himself for us, his generosity in giving himself for us, [and] his kindness in bringing us to this table, our hearts become tender toward this food, and kindle in complete devotion of heart, and burn in love, and he who burns in meditation is thus digested by fire into the likeness of this food."⁴⁷ Albert skillfully paints a beautiful picture of the goodness of Christ. He wants the memory of faith to involve true doctrine, but also to be connected to beautiful and moving words and images, so that imaginative memory as well as intellectual knowledge come into play in sacramental experience.

It is important to note that, although the question that begins this section asks what content the knowledge of faith and the eye bring to the Eucharist, most of the quotes from Albert refer to someone seeing the Eucharist in a moment of adoration connected to actually physically receiving the sacrament. Albert does allow that Catholics at Mass may sometimes only receive the Eucharist "spiritually." He is almost forced into this recognition by the wide-spread custom at his time of very infrequent lay reception of the Eucharist.⁴⁸ Yet, for him, seeing should not be divorced from eating. The body of the Lord is meant to be recognized under the sacramental species as Christ giving himself as spiritual food meant to be consumed by the faithful.⁴⁹

Further, Albert's theology of perception provides a necessary element in his understanding of Eucharistic change. Albert believes that Christ is present in the Eucharist through the transubstantiation of the bread into his body. He uses the Aristotelian terminology of substance and accidents; in consecration of the Eucharist, the substance of the bread and wine is changed into Christ's body, while the accidents remain.⁵⁰ Among

⁴⁷ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 3, tract. 1, ch. 6: "Quando enim cogitamus charitatem Christi in hoc quod pro nobis se in sacrificium obtulit, cogitamus mansuetudinem patientis, et advertimus devotionem se pro nobis offerentis, largitatem se pro nobis exhibentis, benignitatem nos ad mensam hanc rapientis, dulcescit cor nostrum ad cibum hunc, et in tota cordis devotione accenditur, et fervet in amore, et sic ad similitudinem istius cibi digeritur per ignem qui exardescit in meditatione."

⁴⁸ See, Sr. Albert Marie Surmanski, O.P., "Adoring and Eating: Reception of the Eucharist in the Theology of Albert the Great," *Antiphon* 20, no. 3 (2016): 213–40.

⁴⁹ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 2, tract. 2, ch. 1.

⁵⁰ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 6, tract. 2, ch. 1.

the reasons he gives when arguing in favor of transubstantiation is that accidents have the function of signifying a substance. While the substance of the bread is there, its accidents signify the presence of the substance of bread. After the change, these accidental forms remain to signify the presence of Christ's body. Albert writes, "Therefore, the substances of bread and wine should not remain in the sacrament, but only the accidents, made to spiritually signify spiritual nourishment by the change."⁵¹ The purpose of the sacramental species remaining is to make this recognition possible. Part of the very reason why transubstantiation was the type of change divinely chosen to occur in the Eucharist is so that sensible accidents will remain unchanged to indicate the body of Christ.⁵²

Perception of Christ through Bread and Wine

Let us look more closely at the sacramental bread. I said earlier that the host does not look beautiful. Yet, in Albert's thought, it is not merely a "placeholder" that indicates the presence of Christ. Read in the light of Scripture, Albert understands the elements of the Eucharist, bread and wine, to themselves bring a depth of meaning to the sacrament, which enriches the perception of its beauty.⁵³

First, it is meaningful that Christ is given under the appearance of food. The appearance of bread and wine do not merely signify the presence of Christ's body; they signify Christ as given as "spiritual food" for the faithful.⁵⁴ This speaks about the generosity of God in his desire to care for his people. Albert compares Christ giving himself as food in the Eucharist to King Darius in the book of Daniel giving a great banquet. This banquet shows the "beauty of [Christ's] magnificence in that he made a brilliant and great feast in this sacrament for all his subjects."⁵⁵ The Eucharist given as food shows Christ's beautiful bounty.

The connection of the Eucharist to Christ's bounty suggests a further

⁵¹ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 6, tract. 2, ch. 1: "Ideo substantia panis et vini non debent manere in sacramento, sed accidentia tantum per translationem factam ad spiritualia signantia nutrimentum spirituale."

⁵² Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 6, tract. 2, ch. 1.

⁵³ For an analysis of these levels of sacramental perception in Albert, without reference to beauty, see Sr. Albert Marie Surmanski, O.P., "Sign and Symbol: Sacramental Experience in Albert's *De corpore domini*," *New Blackfriars* 97 (July 2016): 479–91.

⁵⁴ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 2, tract. 2, ch. 1: "Cibus spiritualis."

⁵⁵ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 3, tract. 1, ch. 1: "Suae magnificentiae demonstrans decorem in hoc quod tam lautam et magnam in sacramento fecit coenam omnibus vernaculis."

reason why the restriction of access to the Eucharist can be difficult for some to accept. Is not God's bounty, seen in the pouring out of Christ's blood on the Cross, given to all? Yes, but not all receive this redemption. And does not the recognition that not all may receive the Eucharistic food appropriately express that not all have allowed their souls to be washed in Christ's blood?

For Albert, bread and wine evoke also the natural goodness of creation. Albert describes bread as a "sweet and rich food."⁵⁶ With his scientific turn of mind, Albert goes through a long analysis of different foods and grains, concluding that wheat bread is the best food and noblest food known to humanity, and therefore very appropriate for use in the Eucharist.⁵⁷ He does the same to prove that wine is the best drink known to mankind.⁵⁸ Albert may go too far when he thinks he has to prove that bread and wine are the best food and drink, but it is clear that he understands that the wheat bread and grape wine used in the Eucharist evoke the beautiful and healthy properties of the natural world.

The knowledge of faith which makes sacramental experience beautiful also includes the historical—the beauty of God's kindness to the people of Israel and of Christ's love. Turning to the Old Testament, Albert draws on the Psalms to characterize bread as given "to strengthen man's heart" (Ps 104:15).⁵⁹ He invokes the manna in the desert to remind his reader of the divine origin and sustaining sweetness of the Eucharist (see Exod 16:16–17).⁶⁰ The bread of the Eucharist recalls Christ, joyfully giving himself to us at the Last Supper.⁶¹ Albert follows a similar (but even more entertaining) exercise in regard to wine "to gladden the heart of man" (Ps 104:15).⁶² Here again, the knowledge of faith, preserved through by the community

⁵⁶ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 1, ch. 4: "Dulcis et pinguis."

⁵⁷ Although Albert might be showing exaggerated concern in trying to prove that bread is the best food, I have met people with wheat allergies or celiac disease with sincere questions about why Christ chose as matter for the Eucharist something that is unhealthy for many people. While the answer must lie in weaknesses in our genetics or our way of growing or preparing wheat, the query underlines the signifying power of the matter of the Eucharist.

⁵⁸ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 3, tract. 2, ch. 1.

⁵⁹ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 1, ch. 4: "Panis cor hominis confirmat."

⁶⁰ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 1, ch. 1.

⁶¹ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 1, ch. 4.

⁶² Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 3, tract. 2, ch. 1: "Vinum laetificat cor hominis." For a more detailed analysis of how Albert "reads" the Eucharistic wine, see Sr. Albert Marie Surmansk, O.P., "The Joy of Christ in St. Albert's *De corpore domini*," in *Wisdom and the Renewal of Theology: Essays in Honor of Matthew L. Lamb*, ed. Thomas P. Harmon and Roger W. Nutt (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016), 138–48.

of the Church, adds to perception of Eucharistic beauty.⁶³

Albert seems to intend that all he has recounted will inform the one receiving the Eucharist as part of the content of faith brought to the sacrament. Thus, while the simple white circle of bread might, of itself, be physically lacking in beauty, the weight of history and imagery which it should evoke is heavy indeed.

Poetic and Liturgical Implications

This leads to a final way in which the Eucharist is a *locus* of beauty—it should inspire the Church to surround it in beauty. This has been shown already in many of the selections from Albert. *De corpore domini* is one of Albert's most beautiful works. In it, the Eucharist has become a muse for him, inspiring him to express the beauty of Eucharistic experience through the best of his own poetic prose.

In speaking about the wisdom of God in giving the Eucharist under the forms of bread and wine, Albert piles quote upon quote, image upon image, using as beautiful language as he can find in Scripture, and adding to it his own words of praise. Albert is not just adding to our information about the Eucharist. He is drawing upon all of the beauties of creation and of Biblical imagery and language, heaping them all up at the feet of Christ in the Eucharist. In places he goes so far as to wrench biblical passages out of their more obvious context. For example, the Lover from the Song of Songs “gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice” (Song 2:9) becomes Christ, looking out at us from the sacramental species of the Eucharist.⁶⁴ He can do this because, as the place where the ever-beautiful divine life is communicated to humanity, the Eucharist (considered in connection with the Incarnation and redemption) is the key to the entirety of the divine plan. Any other resplendent communication of any sort of beauty only echoes this central event.

The Church also surrounds the Eucharist in the beauty of appropriate rites and objects. Vestments are used at Mass to express the life of holiness of the priests, “the cleanness and virtues which there should belong to the ministry of so great a sacrament.”⁶⁵ Albert connects the vestments to the

⁶³ Insofar as the qualities of bread can be experienced by anyone, and anyone can read the Old Testament as literature, if not history, this level of signification is, to some extent, open to anyone gazing on the Eucharist. Of course, in itself, it is not fully explanatory. For example: It will not speak of spiritual, only physical nourishment; the Old Testament will not speak of God's real providential action in history; and if only the eloquence of bread is heard, why adore the host?

⁶⁴ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 3, tract. 3, ch. 2.

⁶⁵ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 6, tract. 4, ch. 2: “Vestes sunt de bene esse, ut osten-

effect which reception of the Eucharist has in leading to eternal life. The Church itself represents heaven, while the vestments represent the glory that will clothe the resurrected body. "A temple and all its ornaments are symbolic signs of the heavenly beauty. . . . The splendor of the vestments of the pontiff and of the priests and of the other ministers are symbolic signs of the clothing in which those blessed will be clothed in the divine light and beauty."⁶⁶ The being of the Eucharist is expressed in the simply tangibly beautiful. Since this tangible beauty speaks of the greatness of God and is meant to inspire those who see it to live in a way worthy of God's glory, there is a very serious obligation to celebrate the liturgy with beauty and dignity.

So, the expression of physical beauty with which we surround the Eucharist, in a way "completes" the outpouring of divine beauty in the Eucharist. It is a way of joyfully saying "amen" to the whole content of faith and the call to conversion given in the Eucharist. It is also a way of speaking of the beauty of the Eucharist to others—both our fellow members of the Church and others who might visit.

Analysis of Recipients

What does this overview suggest in regard to the perception of Eucharistic beauty by different "observers"? Some levels of Eucharistic signification do not require active charity to be perceived, but only faith. A believing member of the Church can attend Mass and gaze upon the host with a rich awareness of the presence of Christ and the mighty works of God. Yet the love of the recipient would color what he perceives. If beauty involves a recognition of the true as desirable (as it does in Albert's definition), living charity would be needed to appreciate Christ's Eucharistic gift as deeply beautiful—something desirable for the life of the believer which is effective as a motivation to act.

One not in the state of grace would have a different sort of desire for the Eucharist. He could experience a recognition, by faith, that the Eucharist is something desirable in itself, but would not have the same effective recognition of it as desirable for him. Perhaps he would experience an emotional nostalgia for past communions, or a desire to participate fully in the Christian community. Since the recognition of the goodness of

dant munditiam et virtutes quae in ministerio tanti sacramenti esse debent."

⁶⁶ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 6, tract. 1, ch. 1: "Templum et omnis ornatus ejus sunt signa parabolica coelestis pulchritudinis, . . . splendor vestium pontificalium et sacerdotalium et aliorum ministrorum signa sunt parabolica amictus illius quo lumine et decore divino in coelis erunt beati induti."

the Eucharist would be weaker, he would have a weaker perception of its beauty.⁶⁷ Someone who prefers some sinful obstacle over the grace of the Eucharistic Christ does not behold the desirable beauty of Christ with clear sight.

An attenuated appreciation of the Eucharist could be present even in a non-believer—the bystander mentioned in our introduction who opens the door of a Church and is confronted with Eucharistic adoration. Such a person could learn the content of the Church's faith and hold it in mind when he gazed on the Eucharist. He would not accept the teaching about Christ's presence in the host as true, but could ponder the complex synthesis of meaning in the Eucharist and the power that it exercises on believers. The agnostic lawyer "Smoky" from Caryl Houselander's *A Rocking-Horse Catholic* comes to mind.⁶⁸ Depending on how such a person understood the Church, he might find the Eucharistic "story" to be either aesthetically pleasing and intriguing or perhaps revolting and frightening. His reaction would likely be influenced by the liturgical appointments and demeanor of the worshipping congregation.

Albert himself does not investigate the question of the perception of Eucharistic *beauty* by those with different dispositions of faith and charity, but he does address the effect of the reception of the Eucharist on various recipients. Albert uses the traditional threefold schema of *sacramentum tantum* (the sacrament alone), *res et sacramentum* (the reality and the sacrament), and *res tantum* (the reality alone) to discuss the various aspects of the sacrament. In the Eucharist, for Albert, the *sacramentum tantum* is the appearances of bread and wine, the *res et sacramentum* is the true body of Christ, and the *res tantum* is the grace of deeper union with Christ. The *sacramentum tantum* and *res et sacramentum* are present in the Eucharist; the *sacramentum tantum* is the grace that it causes in a worthy recipient.⁶⁹ One who receives the Eucharist in the state of grace receives all three levels, which, in *De corpore domini*, Albert calls a reception that is both spiritual and sacramental.⁷⁰ One who eats the Eucharist without love of God (sacramental reception only) receives only the first two levels of *sacramentum tantum* and *res et sacramentum*. He commits the grave sin of sacrilege. One

⁶⁷ See Corbett, "Recent Proposals," 616, for a description of this sort of "imperfect desire" which is not strong enough to overcome attachment to some "grave obstacle to perfect communion with Christ."

⁶⁸ Caryl Houselander, *A Rocking-Horse Catholic* (London: Catholic Way, 2013).

⁶⁹ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 6, tract. 3, ch. 1. For an in-depth analysis that takes into account developments in Albert's use and understanding of these terms, see Surmanski, "Adoring and Eating," 224–32.

⁷⁰ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 6, tract. 4, ch. 3.

who has an ardent desire for the Eucharist but is prevented from receiving sacramentally, can sometimes receive the grace alone (spiritual reception).⁷¹

This threefold schema can be helpful in understanding our analysis of Eucharistic beauty. One who saw the Eucharist with no faith or knowledge of the Catholic faith, would see the *sacramentum tantum*—only the appearances of bread and wine, along with their liturgical adornments. The only beauty that would reach such a person would be that immediately accessible to the senses through the liturgy and through the virtuous lives of believers.

Someone who had faith in Christ, but not effective love, could penetrate more deeply into the beautiful reality of the Eucharist and recognize also the *res et sacramentum*—the body of Christ as present. For such a person, the knowledge of Christ's beautiful presence in the Eucharist should be a call to conversion. The beauty of a moral life which reflects Christ is lacking in such persons. Any glimpse that they have through faith of the beauty of the Eucharist should shine light upon the disharmony in their lives, confronting them with the truth that they are not living in holiness, and speaking to them of the merciful goodness of God, which should be valued above any created good.

One who gazes on the Eucharist with both faith and love, having some degree of effective love of Christ within him, would be drawn also by the *res tantum* to experience the Eucharist as desirable with supernatural charity. This person would also be able to experience the Eucharistic beauty as effective, by receiving the Eucharist fruitfully.

Conclusion

These considerations enable us to appreciate more fully the unifying power of beauty in Albert's thought. Just as the rays of a monstrance spread out from the central host, Albert's analysis connects the metaphysical reality of God's goodness to the healing effects of the redemption, personal mystical experience, the moral life, and liturgical dignity. He offers a speculative vision of reality in which everything is connected to the wise Creator and meant to be brought progressively into harmony with the grace offered by Christ. This vision helps to explain why those who are not living in accordance with the moral teachings of the Church may find the Eucharist attractive, insofar as they glimpse the truth and power of the Eucharist. It also supports traditional teaching that only those who allow their lives to be transformed by the power of the Eucharist should receive the sacrament.

In offering this vision, Albert emphasizes the practical importance that

⁷¹ Albert, *De corpore domini*, dist. 6, tract. 4, ch. 3.

everything in the Church be, as far as possible, in accordance with the beauty of the Eucharist. This would entail beautiful liturgical celebrations arranged appropriately to “speak” the beauty of the Eucharist into various cultures and places as Albert spoke it in the Latin of his time. It would entail the work of speculative theology, so that the nature of the God present in the Eucharist could be appreciated. It would entail devotional meditation, so as to help the mind and emotions assimilate the content of faith. It would entail the teaching of moral theology so the shape of a life lived in imitation of Christ could be understood clearly. It would entail moral conversion, coupled with a sincere effort to cooperate with the grace of the Eucharist so as to live in accordance with the mystery received. Albert’s vision of Eucharistic beauty is challenging, but also encouraging as it emphasizes the divine abundance offered by Christ in the sacrament.

