

**Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism: When God Left the World**, Regina Mara Schwartz, Stanford University Press, 2008 (ISBN 0-8047-5833-6), 216 pp., pb \$19.95/hb \$60.00

Regina Schwartz's *Sacramental Poetics* is a significant contribution not only to sacramental theology, liturgical history and literary studies (especially early modern English literature) but also stands as a fine example of interdisciplinary scholarship. Schwartz, a professor of English whose teaching encompasses literature, religion and law, engages in theological readings of the literature produced in the wake of the Reformation, in particular as these texts encapsulate the diffusion of sacramentality from the structures and doctrines of the church into the artistic imagination of this era.

On one level, Schwartz critiques a particular narrative of history that has not only characterized but even dominated the modern era, a narrative comprised of terms like *secularization*, *enlightenment*, *disenchantment* and *demythologization*. She writes, 'My contention is that instead of God leaving the world without a trace, the very sacramental character of religion lent itself copiously to developing the so-called secular forms of culture and that these are often thinly disguised sacramental cultural expressions' (p. 14). Her task, as described in the first chapter ('Sacramental Poetics'), is to examine 'a poetry that is sacramental, not because it is an object of worship (an idol, an artifact), not because it is believed to be a sacred leftover of a divine presence (a relic), but sacramental in that it does not contain what it expresses; rather, it expresses far more than it contains' (p. 6). Schwartz proposes that the Reformers' rejection of the doctrine of transubstantiation enables – or perhaps even necessitates – the sacramental to spill over into poetry, the arts, culture, and so on. She writes,

To . . . illustrate this sacramental poetics, it is helpful to turn to the quintessential sacrament in Christianity, the Eucharist, and to chart its movement from ritual to poetry. Obviously, by 'movement', we do not mean that the Eucharist has *left* the Church; it certainly has not. But a striking and in many ways counter-intuitive phenomenon took place during the Reformation when the doctrine of transubstantiation was rejected by many Reformers. Aspects of the Eucharist began showing up in the poetry of the Reformation, albeit in completely unorthodox ways. (pp. 7–8)

Her last statement is key, for she discovers that this 'overspill' leads to *unorthodox* expressions of sacramentality, expressions that scandalize and subvert traditional, orthodox understandings of Eucharistic theology and sacramentality, while simultaneously revealing a longing after a sacramental world-view that has been lost, perhaps irrevocably.

In Chapter 2, 'Mystical and Political Bodies', Schwartz offers a genealogy of this shift in the sacramental imagination. She provides an especially lucid and convincing reading of political history which interprets secular political structures as parodies of the sacred, e.g. the state as parody of the Church, and the political as a parody of the religious or mystical. Following the Reformers decimation of medieval churches and sacred art, ecclesiastical iconoclasm eventually gives way to political 'iconophilia', monarchical idolatry. Schwartz writes, '... when crosses were torn down, coats of arms were erected in their place – even on rood screens' (30). While this discussion seems at first like a sidebar to her stated interest in the literature of the Reformation, it becomes apparent that this is a crucial early stage in the movement of sacramentality from ecclesial ritual into secular cultural forms, first in politics, then in poetry. 'The disenchantment of the world', she writes, 'does not occur all at once' (p. 18). Schwartz, following Henri de Lubac and Michel de Certeau, traces the gradual shift in the concept of the mystical Body of Christ (*corpus mysticum*), which first refers to the Eucharist but is later transferred to the ecclesial body of Christ, the church. Well before the Reformation, then, we witness the dissemination of sacramentality from the sacred mystery of the Eucharist to the church as a social entity, and eventually, with the fragmentation of the church at the Reformation, into the 'secular' political structures that arise to take its place. The liturgies and rituals of the church gave way to equally if not more lavish state ceremonies. Schwartz observes, 'Paradoxically, when the theological doctrine of the Eucharist was most spiritualized, it was most politically manifest in the state. *With the real material body of Christ denied, it is "substantialized" in the body of the nation*' (p. 22).

Schwartz begins her literary explorations in Part Two ('Justitia Mystica'), focusing on the theme of justice in the writings of William Shakespeare and John Milton. At every stage, Schwartz is sensitive to how religious doctrines and practices are altered or abandoned, but the sense of the sacramental is still grasped after in literature. She explains:

Surely something profound was lost when Reformers attenuated the sacrifice of the Eucharist, or, to be more precise, turned it into a commemoration of a sacrifice rather than a re-enactment, a commemoration of a moment in the distant past rather than a sacrifice that occurs at the very moment when the communicant ingests the host, a moment when suffering is redeemed, a mysterious moment when our depravity is absolved. (pp. 56–7)

She turns her attention first to Shakespeare's *Othello* in Chapter 3 ('Shakespeare's Tragic Mass: Craving Justice'). In her explication of Act II, Scene 3 describes the play as containing a vision of the Mass as a perverse, diabolical ritual. While he critiques the Catholic Mass and the

doctrine of transubstantiation, Schwartz insists Shakespeare's plays 'crave for a justice no longer satisfied by the sacrament' (p. 58).

In Chapter 4 ('Milton's Cosmic Body: Doing Justice'), Schwartz suggests that, like Shakespeare, Milton rejects the various substantiationist doctrines of the Eucharist – Catholic transubstantiation, and even Lutheran consubstantiation. Yet in *Paradise Lost*, the epic poet explores and portrays such doctrine as natural, original, elemental, primordial. 'Against the doctrine of transubstantiation', Milton's theological prose 'hurls accusations of cannibalism, of profaning the body of Christ by chewing, digesting, and defecating it along with charges of idolatry, of worshipping a wafer' (p. 60), and yet, 'in *Paradise Lost*, he has delineated an entire vision of a transubstantiating universe' (p. 63). Again, the sense of sacramentality, once accessible via the liturgical life of the *ecclesia* and now so ardently rejected, lingers within the literary imagination.

Chapters on John Donne ('Donne in Love: Communion of the Flesh') and George Herbert ('Herbert's Praise: Communion in Conversation') comprise Part Three of the study ('Amor Mysticus') centered around the theme of love. Schwartz's aim here is to demonstrate how physical love, in the work of these two poets, is imbued with sacramentality. In the work of Donne, 'Physical love is sanctified, even if comically. The entire trope requires the leap that lovemaking is communion. Without recourse to what he regarded as the logic-splitting of the doctrine of transubstantiation, Donne explored the mystery of the sacrament that is based upon the Incarnation, passion, and resurrection – turning all into the mystery of making love' (p. 88). Herbert's poetic imagination is deeply biblical and shaped by his liturgical life as an Anglican priest. Poetry is a vehicle for loving communion with God and a site of evocation of the Holy. Herbert worships through his poetry, gives thanks (*eucharistia*) to God for the very possibility of such communion. Schwartz observes that Herbert's 'understanding of language is, ironically in an age when the sacraments were undergoing intense critique, also sacramental' (p. 119). However, Schwartz reminds us that Herbert, Shakespeare, Milton, and Donne 'are writing poetry and not systematic theologies . . . these poets are all asking, albeit in different ways, that their *poetry* carry the mystical force of the sacramental reenactment; hence, we discover the irony that Reformation poetry becomes the new site of transubstantiation of the Word' (p. 120). This reading of literary history provides the necessary link between the theology of the late-Middle Ages and any post-Enlightenment notion of language itself as sacramental – in both its sacred and effectual qualities – for example, in Romantic thinkers like Goethe, Holbein, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, for whom words were 'Living Things', 'living educts of the Imagination'.

In the Afterword, Schwartz confesses that finds cause for lament in the loss of the sacramental imagination made possible by the Eucharist

during the high-middle ages. And yet, she also holds out hope: 'even in the time of greatest conflict over the ritual, early modern thinkers sought to embrace the central impulse of the Eucharist: a life-world instead of a dead-universe, justice instead of the triumph of evils, love instead of utility, and conversation instead of conflict. To translate these from a church ritual into more secular, cultural achievements could be, perhaps, to save them for a future time' (p. 141). She ably demonstrates that, indeed, 'We are still haunted by the Eucharist, haunted not only by its promise of divinity but also by its promise of justice' (p. 15). Schwartz is a deft interpreter of texts, as well as an erudite theological thinker and cultural historian. Her challenging work here, and elsewhere (especially her Pulitzer Prize-nominated *The Curse of Cain*), deserves careful consideration by scholars of literature and religion.

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**Enigmas and Powers: Engaging the Work of Walter Wink for Classroom, Church, and World**, D. Seiple and Frederick W. Weidemann (eds.), Pickwick, 2008 (ISBN 978-1-55635-290-4), xi + 139 pp., pb \$19.00

Walter Wink is a New Testament scholar best known for his provocative interpretation of 'the principalities and powers' as at once the inner, spiritual dimension of powerful institutions and the outer, material dimension of the same. Aside from his writings on the powers, Wink has published on biblical hermeneutics, nonviolence in South Africa, reconciliation in international politics, homosexuality, and the historical Jesus. In 2005 Wink stepped down from his professorship at Auburn Theological Seminary, and most of the essays, letters, toasts, and prayers collected here are from his retirement party. Because of the informal nature of *Enigmas and Powers*, it is unlikely to be of interest to any but the most ardent of Wink enthusiasts. Those looking for short introduction are directed to one of Wink's own popularizations of his work. Those looking for critical extension are advised to consult Ray Gingerich and Ted Grimsrud's edited volume *Transforming the Powers: Peace, Justice, and the Domination System* (Fortress 2006).

The book opens with a series of appreciations of Wink's work from scholars representing different disciplinary perspectives. The biblical scholar Wayne G. Rollins starts the proceedings off by offering a helpful chronological framework for assessing Wink's oeuvre. The paradigm