

## BOOK REVIEW

Jessica Martin, *The Eucharist in Four Dimensions: The Meanings of Communion in Contemporary Culture* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2023).

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In *The Eucharist in Four Dimensions*, Jessica Martin considers the place of the Eucharist today using four approaches:

Dimension 1: The Point of the Eucharist

Dimension 2: Flat Eucharist

Dimension 3: The Eucharist as event

Dimension 4: The Eucharist in time

This is not a book which surveys the wide expanse of eucharistic theology but rather reflects on the place of the Eucharist today. This approach is its strength since it avoids the countless arguments and theories about eucharistic theology and instead reflects on the point of the Eucharist in the modern world.

There is a wealth of literary material employed in this book to help the reader understand the Eucharist. In Dimension 1, the point of the Eucharist, Martin discusses what she describes as that ‘tricky border between the internal workings of the mind and the outward activity of the world’ (p. 3). For modern people, as they come to understand the point of the Eucharist the rational looms large as the most trusted way to explore the world compared to any less trusted notion of what could be called ‘universal truth’ or which involves the realm of the spiritual. Here is the danger when it comes to examining the point of the Eucharist since the Eucharist cannot be approached solely through testable phenomena. And yet says Martin, Christianity is so inherently incarnational, and deliberately so in its claims that God became human in the person and work of Jesus Christ – a historical figure who lived in space and time. The life of Jesus and his work of salvation was a bodily act and yet the restoration he offered was spiritual, even if his resurrection was not just an idea but a fact. All this points to the inherent dialectic of presence and absence when we come to know the presence of Christ in the now in the Eucharist. Christ is not present as he was on earth. He is absent in that physical form and yet present to those who receive him in the Eucharist. There is a borderline between physicality and the unseen and yet real world. This is what others, such as Catherine Pickstock, have described as the proportion between things and mind and Martin’s book

points us in this direction. So, what is the point of the Eucharist? For Martin, the point is that 'in its ritual enactment, we bring into view a world beyond the finite outcomes of the one we know ... a story of loss' (p. 14) and restoration re-membered where dying becomes new life and rebirth.

In Dimension 2, flat Eucharist, the Eucharist is seen as flat because it is in two dimensions: textual and visual. This raises all sorts of difficulties for the Reformed mind who prioritises the textual over the visual and becomes suspicious of the visual as idolatry. This again raises the dialectic between presence and absence. Presence is not as it was, and so in the Eucharist, the worshipper must realize the absence in devotional imagination, which is more than a metaphor or mere memory of a past event. In such devotional imagination, Martin believes that sign and signified must 'meet and kiss' (p. 50), despite the doubts of some Reformers that people could not be trusted to look at things in the right way and not see a physical reality in the Eucharist. For some, there was a need to enclose the Eucharist in textual cement so that the right understanding could be guaranteed, but this leaves us, says Martin, with nothing but words and that is not enough. As Martin rightly assures us, this dampens the visual at the expense of the textual. This brings us once again to the need for the proportion between things and mind in what Martin describes as the 'uneasy boundary between poetics and argument, between adoration and education' (p. 52).

In Dimension 3: the Eucharist as event, Martin considers the Eucharist in a three-dimensional frame involving bodily experience, physical place and experiential duration, which work together to bring about eternal change, that is, a repeatable version of itself. Event moves past words alone and becomes in a sense 'theatre', which exists in a location. It is in this 'theatre' that sign and signified show the trauma of the fracture of the past Christ event. It is this event that allows the re-making of self in a way that is performative, using the invoked power of God.

In the last dimension, Dimension 4, the Eucharist in time, the rubber hits the road, and the Eucharist is seen as allowing Christians to 'rely upon sacramental iteration to transform the trauma of the past into the hope of the future' (p. 103). This hope concerns repetition, even ecstatic repetition (p. 104), which can be complicated by the suspicious nature of the modern mind and therefore requires a nuanced understanding of the proportion between things and mind to know the power of the signs and how they convey the signified. All this is very much dependent on how we understand remembrance in the Eucharist. Is it just a mere memory of what happened in the past in the 1<sup>st</sup> century of the Common Era? Does remembrance mean more than this and is it dynamic in its performance? For Martin, remembrance is dynamic and involves the re-instantiating of Jesus's actions at the Last Supper through the repeating forward of what Jesus did and meant. Indeed, it is in the Eucharist where the power of remembrance is known as we remember Jesus, but more importantly that he remembers us, with the effect that we know the power of his sacrifice once again, his continuing work for us, in the Eucharist.

As a person who has spent many years studying eucharistic theology, I found this book refreshing, and when it ended, I found myself being thankful that it did not engage in all the many arguments of eucharistic theology, so fiercely fought. Rather, for me, this book confirmed the power of the Eucharist and the way we come to experience hope once again through repetition and through proportion between things and mind, as we come to know the power of Jesus' work for us, in the present.

The book reinforced that the Eucharist is more than words and that we do it and ourselves a disservice by focusing on the words alone. The book allowed me to know again the power of the visual and the event in time, in physicality and in place. It is in this 'theatre' that there is hope. I am grateful for this book and thoroughly commend it.

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