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Book Review: Joel Van Amberg. A Real Presence: Religious and Social Dynamics of the Eucharistic Conflicts in Early Modern Augsburg, 1520–1530.

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Joel Van Amberg, *A Real Presence: Religious and Social Dynamics of the Eucharistic Conflicts in Early Modern Augsburg, 1520–1530*.

Studies in the History of Christian Traditions 158. Leiden: Brill, 2012. ix + 270 pp. \$143. ISBN: 978–90–04–21698–3.

Perhaps more than anywhere else, the imperial city of Augsburg was riven by disagreements over the proper understanding of the Lord's Supper. In *A Real Presence*, Joel van Amberg examines the religious dissension in the city and relates it to the political and economic conditions of the 1520s. He argues that rejection of belief in Christ's physical presence in the consecrated elements went hand-in-hand with rejection of a hierarchical system with mediators who controlled access to both economic and spiritual goods. By placing the theological debate within a specific social context, van Amberg gives new insight into a convoluted controversy.

A Real Presence begins with a description of Augsburg's political and economic development through the later Middle Ages and into the sixteenth century. Fundamental for the course of the Reformation was the city's attachment to the Habsburgs, which kept its political elite from too visible a break with the Catholic Church even as the city's population became outspokenly evangelical. The magistrate's refusal to endorse publicly one specific understanding of the Eucharist allowed preachers and printers to spread a variety of interpretations. Under these circumstances, Van Amberg argues, Augsburg's artisans preferred a Zwinglian to a Lutheran interpretation of the Lord's Supper. He is justifiably cautious in identifying those who opposed the Catholic and Lutheran views of the sacrament as Zwinglians, however, for he recognizes that others besides the Zurich Reformer contributed to the sacramentarian position.

The narrative center of the book focuses on two figures who preached at the city's Franciscan church. Johann Schilling gained a large following with his attacks on clerical abuse and on sacerdotal claims to impart spiritual power to material things. His temporary removal from office almost led to a popular uprising in August 1524, but he left Augsburg before the end of the year. His successor, Michael Keller, shared Schilling's populism but not his social radicalism and so was more acceptable to the city's elite. The preaching of both men was marked by anticlericalism, anti-sacerdotalism, and an emphasis on the congregation. Their views appealed especially to sacramentarians who were also influenced by Andreas Karlstadt and Ludwig Hätzer. Van Amberg uses pamphlets written within this circle to illustrate their concerns, such as the lack of moral improvement among evangelicals and the way the clergy tried to control the laity's access to the

sacrament. By 1527 some of these sacramentarians would reject infant baptism and break entirely with the institutional church.

In his final chapter, Van Amberg analyzes the Augsburg debate over the Lord's Supper following the models of John Bossy on the Mass and Bernd Moeller on the communal appeal of Zwingli's theology. His lengthy discussion of anthropological theories of sacrifice seems out of place, since all evangelicals rejected the idea that the Mass was a sacrifice and emphasized communion instead; a consideration of anthropological approaches to ritual meals might therefore have been more appropriate. Much more fruitful is his ascription of communal values and identity not to the city as a whole, as Moeller did, but to groups within the city, such as religious confraternities and guilds. As the guilds were increasingly dominated by the civic elite and subordinated to the city council, artisans were drawn to the community around the Franciscan church, where their unity was made visible in the Eucharist understood as a communal meal.

Van Amberg's concentration on this congregation allows him to examine in detail the preachers and groups who most vigorously opposed belief in Christ's corporeal presence. As a result he notices developments overlooked in most accounts of the Eucharistic controversy. His discussion of the Schilling affair, for instance, suggests popular rejection of traditional acts of Eucharistic piety even before the published debate over Christ's presence began. At a few places he strains too much to make a point or may be guilty of reading too much into his sources. This does not detract from his overall argument, however. His book offers a new way of approaching the Eucharistic controversy in one particular geographic and socioeconomic location and helps explain the popular appeal of a Zwinglian/sacramentarian understanding of the Lord's Supper.

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