

INTRODUCTION

It is only in the last decade that the literature has begun to pay anything more than minimum attention to the central question dealt with in this study: *to what extent has there been a relationship in the past between Eucharistic devotion and the devotion paid to relics?* Writings dealing with the Eucharist appeared to ignore the existence of relics, while works concerned with the cult of relics gave no sign of the existence of the Eucharist. By way of illustration the following is revealing: the 35-page bibliography accompanying the collective work *Studia Eucharistica* published in 1946¹ contains not a single title dealing with our subject and even in the 1975 dissertation by D.S. Devlin, *Corpus Christi: a study in medieval eucharistic theory, devotion and practice*, the only nod in the direction of the cult of relics is constituted by two isolated references². The reverse side of the coin is demonstrated by the two-volume work by S. Beissel on medieval devotion to the saints and their relics in Germany³ which gives no sign of a relationship between Eucharist and relics, the same applying to E.A. Stückelberg's history of relics in Switzerland⁴. This is the usual pattern in works on relics by such authors as Delehaye, Kötting, Fichtenau, Bousset or Heinzelmänn.

Two authors have, however, made the link in articles: P. Browe in 1931 and A. Andrieu in 1951. The former, whose work has represented an important source of information, wrote an illuminating statement on: "Der Segen mit Reliquien, der Patene und Eucharistie". Just as a blessing was given using the relics during a procession, so too the passage was made to giving a blessing with the Holy of Holiest during or following the procession on the feast of Corpus Christi⁵. Andrieu studied the relationship between certain reliquaries, the *ostensoria*, and the Eucharistic monstrances, underpinning his study with - among other

¹Bussum-Antwerpen, 1946.

²Devlin (1975), 238, 240.

³Beissel (1976), I, II.

⁴Stückelberg (1902).

⁵Browe (1931a), 383: "Wohl in Nachahmung dieses Brauches hat man ihn am Fronleichnamfeste während oder nach dem feierlichen Umgang mit dem Sanctissimum erteilt".

sources - the substantial works of J. Braun⁶. Using photographic material he had collected he was able to demonstrate that the *reliquaria* were 'reconstructed' in order to contain the host. He concluded his article on the origins of the cult of the Sacrament with the observation "celui-ci n'aurait sans doute pas exactement revêtu les formes extérieures que nous voyons, si la piété chrétienne n'eût trouvé d'immédiates inspirations dans les pratiques depuis longtemps imaginées en l'honneur des reliques"⁷.

More recent literature has shown a greater degree of awareness of the relationship between the two forms of devotion, but the odd remarks on the subject are not supported by further evidence nor are the underpinned by systematic research. In his 1977 work, *Miracles and Pilgrims*, R.C. Finucane agreed with Andrieu when he remarked in passing that "old attitudes towards relics, which were kept in reliquaries, carried in processions and occasionally exhibited to the public in a kind of formal 'viewing', have re-emerged in the midst of later medieval Eucharistic devotion. The same may be said of the Eucharistic miracle-stories, which treat the Host like any 'traditional' Saint's relic"⁸.

Four years later, N. Mitchell stated the following in his study of the Eucharist outside the confines of the Mass: "The cultic and devotional attitudes which in an earlier era were directed towards objects such as relics, altars, and the gospels were ritually transferred to the Eucharistic species, especially the host"⁹. Regarding the similarities with the role played by relics in miracles Benedicta Ward wrote: "the host was separated from its context to become a focus of power like the relic of a saint"¹⁰. And in 1988 Charles Zika noted regarding the effect of this that in the 15th century hosts were regarded as analogous to relics because "they possess miraculous power, confer benefit, deal out punishment when removed or tampered with, mediate power at specific locations and times or when exposed"¹¹. Finally in 1991 Meri Rubin wrote: "Whether it induced benefit or harm, the people insisted on treating the eucharist as a relic"¹².

⁶Braun (1932), (1940).

⁷Andrieu (1950), 418.

⁸Finucane (1977), 198.

⁹Mitchell (1982), 185.

¹⁰Ward (1982), 18.

¹¹Zika (1988), 47.

¹²Rubin (1991), 341-342.

The two articles mentioned above and the related statements in the subsequent literature led us to undertake further study of the link referred to, a link which we call: *Transposition of forms of reverence*, a relationship which we define thus: *the bringing up to date of forms of reverence towards the Eucharist which had already occurred at an earlier date with regard to relics*.

The link, mentioned in passing by Finucane, Ward and Zika, between relics and the host in their involvement with miracles, had already attracted Browe's attention when he classified the Eucharistic miracles in 1938, for some of his classifications were illustrated by similar miracles recorded in connection with relics. In his treatment of miracles involving light he wrote: "Wie man sich von jeher im Folklore aller Völker das Göttliche und gottgeweihte Dinge und Reliquien als durchleuchtet vorstellte, so sah man auch die Hostie, unter deren Hülle ja Christus, die Sonne und das Licht der Welt zugegen war, als Trägerin wunderbaren Glanzes an"¹³.

We checked to see if further information, gathered particularly in the field of the history of relics, could prove this suggested link and whether this would lead to more information concerning the position and regard accorded to the Eucharist and relics. The name to be given to any such link was obvious: *similarity in miraculous power*, by which we mean: *similar miraculous traits in the presentation of phenomena*.

Finally we distinguished a third link, outside the area of miracles and of much earlier date. Oaths were taken both on relics and on the Eucharist, and solemn communion - as a demonstration of innocence - is a clerical variant of oath-taking. In the pre- and early medieval period both relics and Eucharist were retained in private dwellings and accompanied a corpse to the grave as a means of protection. Within the same context, relics and the Eucharist were carried in an amulet worn by travellers. This third dimension demonstrating the link between relics and Eucharist we have typified as: *parallel application in concrete use*. This is meant when we are considering *relics and the bread of the Eucharist used for a particular end in a similar manner, either together, distinct from one another or as replacements one of the other*. Such uses occurred in early Christianity and the early Middle Ages. This category includes the daily use against dangers and two ecclesiastical forms: 'cementing in an altar stone' and 'prayer of supplication'. Attention was drawn to the former

¹³Browe (1938), 18.

phenomenon, after J. Corblet¹⁴ at the end of the 19th century and J. Braun¹⁵ in 1924, by Nicole Hermann-Mascard¹⁶ in 1975. From the 8th to the 13th century this practice, carried out during the consecration of an altar, consisted of cementing three particles of a consecrated Host - together or instead of relics - in the altar stone or *sepulcrum*. 'Prayer of supplication' was a cry for help addressed to the saint, whose relics were placed on the ground - the *humiliatio* - but also a cry for help to the Lord in his sacrament at the *clamor* in the course of the Mass.

The three linked forms that we have distinguished would seem globally to have come into being in phases: *parallel application in concrete use* began to appear in early Christianity and the early Middle Ages and continued till the 13th century, the *transposition of forms of reverence* was evident from the 13th to the 14th century and the *similarity in miraculous power* principally from the 11th and 12th centuries. This can be explained by a development that can be roughly described as the *process of independence* of the Eucharist. By this we mean: *the gradual loosening of the ties, in devotional forms, between the bread and wine and their sacramental and liturgical context, the communal meal*. From being an 'action' the Eucharist became an 'object'¹⁷.

This process was already under way in apostolic times, when the celebration of the communal meal became limited to a ritual taking of the bread and wine. During the 9th century the Eucharist as such became the object of a theological debate regarding the relationship between the historical Jesus and the Eucharistic body of the Lord. A more essential factor in the process of 'independence' was, however, the alienation of the congregation with regard to the Eucharistic liturgy: the people simply no longer understood the language.

The second controversy surrounding the Eucharistic meal, in the 11th century, once again concerning the presence in the Eucharist, resulted in the *praesentia realis*, the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist after the Consecration, being emphasised in theological statements and the many miracle stories. This led, in the 13th century, to a physico-realistic conception of the Real Presence and, around the 13th

¹⁴Corblet (1185-86), II, 79: "Du 8e au 14e siècle, dans quelques églises d'Occident on a cru pouvoir substituer aux reliques qui faisaient défaut, trois parcelles d'une hostie consacrée ou un morceau du corporal sur lequel on avait célébré".

¹⁵Braun (1924), I, 623-629.

¹⁶Hermann-Mascard (1975), 159-161.

¹⁷Mitchell (1982), 4: "how did the eucharistic *action* become a eucharistic *object* ?"

and 14th century, ended in new forms of reverence outside the context of the Mass being called for: visits to the tabernacle, the procession of the Blessed Sacrament, the exposition of the consecrated Host and the use of the Host in blessings, following which - in the 14th-15th century - the evening service of praise to the Sacrament (Benediction) came into being.

This gives an elucidation of the *transposition of forms of reverence* in the 13th-14th centuries. At the same time, the 'process of independence' goes some way to demonstrating that the gap existing between relics and Eucharist within the Church must have widened gradually. In his 1978 study of 'holy thefts' of relics, P.J. Geary pointed out that the enclosure of the consecrated Host in the altar stone was still regarded in the 9th century as "a physical relic of Christ, the host, which was to be treated like other relics (...) True, it was the most worthy because it was the body of Christ, but it functioned just as did many other relics (...) Moreover, relics, like the eucharist, might be placed on the altar"¹⁸.

He indicates an area of tension, that took form in the 10th century, and in which the Host gradually occupied the superior position, until in the 13th century it was accorded a unique position in the recently developed Christocentric form of reverence made visible in the 'elevatio'. The custom of placing particles of a consecrated Host in the altar stone gradually disappeared, since the practice no longer corresponded to the reverence required to be shown towards the Host and the goal of the Host as perceived at the time: food for the soul. Geary rendered valuable service in coupling the disappearance of this type of use to the change in the perceived relationship between relics and Host, a process brought about by the increasing 'independence' of and reverence accorded to the Eucharist. His study shows that around the 13th century not only was the practice of enclosing particles of the Host in the altar stone disappearing but the age of the apparently unchallenged *parallel application in concrete use* had passed its apogee.

It can be said that as far as official forms of reverence were concerned, sacramental piety exclusively concentrated on the consecrated Host caused a growth in the gap between relics and the Host. But as far as the ordinary people were concerned, a number of Eucharistic miracles decreased the gap between the Host and relics since the Host, deprived of its liturgical context, was perceived 'as a relic', with a corresponding power to bring about miracles.

¹⁸Geary (1978), 28.

This type of relationship could, indeed, only make its appearance when the Eucharistic miracles were, from the 11th-12th century increasingly brought to public attention. In this parallelism the *virtus* of the relic was mirrored by the miraculous power of the privatised, independent Host and, to a lesser extent, that of the wondrous blood.

Our subject begins in ancient Christian times and covers the whole of the medieval period. This circumstance means that the study of the sources is based on the very extensive literature. For both Eucharistic devotion and reverence of relics there is an extremely large amount of literature, but the two subjects are always treated independently of one another. Thus it was not our primary task to draw attention to new material but rather to search through the sources and the literature to discover the information spread here and there which would be relevant to the types of relationship we have distinguished. The source material, in its turn, proved to be in plentiful supply but again it consists almost exclusively of incidental reports, unrelated to one another, and well reported in the literature. We have verified the information in so far as which was possible. Wherever this working method led to a deviant or richer result the sources naturally come more independently into play than where our research merely confirmed what is reported in the literature. Because of the wide diversity of the sources consequent on the diachronic nature of the research, it was not always possible to provide further confirmation of their historical value. However the fact that the information often points in the same direction was considered sufficient reason to regard this as symptomatic for our hypothesis regarding the link, despite the sometimes legendary context in which the information was situated.

Though the East is not left entirely out of consideration, the main emphasis of this study is on the West. It was not always possible to avoid combining information obtained from places widely separated geographically in order to illustrate a specific aspect. When demonstrating the types of relationship we were occasionally confronted with literature concerning the Eucharist or relics which contained more information than we could do justice to. Such cases are indicated by an asterisk (*). Moreover it was essential to place certain limits whenever the treatment of an aspect thus discovered threatened to turn into a complete study in its own right.

The distinction made between the three types of relationship contains the danger of artificiality, since they sometimes overlap. However the distinction offered a framework permitting an orderly arrangement of great quantities of unstructured data and determined the

sections dividing up this work, which describes the mutual interaction between medieval Eucharistic devotion and the reverence paid to relics. This is why the two introductory chapters, which are summary in nature and mainly based on the literature, deal with these two aspects separately. The first chapter deals with the subject - in so far as it is relevant - entitled 'from martyr's grave to cult of relics'. The second describes the 'process of independence of the Eucharist', since the nature of the relationships is reflected in the extent to which the Eucharist became more independent. Various concepts which return in other contexts at a later stage are given a place in these chapters. Both chapters begin in early Christian times, whence developed the earliest type of relationship to appear: 'parallel application in concrete use', the title of the third and most extensive chapter. The Eucharistic gifts and relics then functioned to some extent parallel to one another, at first in the private domain and later more in relationship to oaths, prayers of intercession and the consecration of altars or churches. Then we take a look at the 'transposition of forms of reverence', which developed at the same rate as the 'process of independence of the Eucharist', and finally the 'similarity in miraculous power'. This, however, still leaves an intriguing question unanswered: to what extent was the Eucharist always distinguished from the relics within the three types of relationship and to what extent was that distinction reflected in the types of reverence? The chapter entitled 'the unique relic?' deals with this question, to the extent that this study provides an answer.

A diachronic study such as this is something of a reconnaissance and thus deviates from the dominant tendency in historical studies to be more specific, tied to time and place. Once we had started down this road, the experiences gained in this far too distant and long voyage of discovery soon made us realise that a search confined to a city or region could perhaps have led to a more subtle and better underpinned result. The result thus obtained could then perhaps have made a greater contribution to the still current debate on 'culture folklorique' and 'culture ecclésiastique' than has turned out to be the case. For it is a fact that many detailed studies of the Middle Ages, concerned with 'popular culture' - despite the fact that this concept is far from unambiguous and is difficult to use - are needed in order to reach any further generalisations

there may be and to take a critical look at the existing ones¹⁹. However, that culture mentioned is not the subject of this study, although some aspects of it are dealt with, explicitly as well as implicitly. But this study aims in the first place at answering a core question regarding the historical relationship between devotion to the Eucharist and that given to relics, and the development of this relationship.

The remaining pros and cons of the diachronic approach adopted we leave to the creative imaginings of the reader, apart from one final remark. This study is merely descriptive and not of a theological nature, but it does possibly contain material conducive to further theological elaboration. It can neither claim to be exhaustive nor do adequate justice to the essential and local differences which came into being in these forms of devotion in the Middle Ages. The temptation to make facile generalisations was sometimes almost irresistible, but we hope that we have avoided this pitfall. The image whose outlines we have wished to sketch with this preliminary reconnaissance will most certainly require filling in and adjusting with detailed studies in which greater attention can be given to regional and time-related differences and based on limited amounts of source material.

¹⁹Lauwers (1987), 258; the works of Goerjewitsch (or Goerjewitsj, Gurevich) are a particularly important source of information but unfortunately they are not all (yet) translated from the Russian; see Goerjewitsj (1992), 4 n. 2: *Medieval culture and society in the judgement of contemporaries: the exempla of the 13th century*, Moscow, 1989 (in the Russian); *The medieval world: the culture of the silent majority*, Moscow, 1990 (in the Russian).