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The Catholic Doctrine of Transubstantiation: An Exposition and Defense

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THE CATHOLIC DOCTRINE OF TRANSUBSTANTIATION:
AN EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE

By

Patrick Selwood

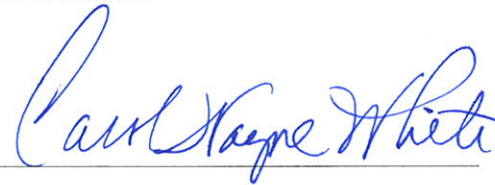
A Thesis

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INTRODUCTION

THE CATHOLIC EUCHARIST AND THE DOCTRINE OF TRANSUBSTANTIATION

*A HISTORICAL, PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL
EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE*

“In brief, the Eucharist is the sum and summary [of the Catholic] faith: “Our way of thinking is attuned to the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn confirms our way of thinking” (Catechism 2007, 1327)

There is an extensive branch of theology devoted to what Catholics believe about the Eucharist, as it is one of the most central practices and beliefs within their faith.

Perhaps one of the most mystical doctrines of the Catholic faith, eucharistic transubstantiation is certainly one of the most skeptically received, as it faces challenges from both Christians and non-Christians alike. This belief is understood by many to be completely irrational; confined and regulated simply by what someone believes. My intention, however, is to show how this is not the case.

The purpose of this thesis is to offer both an exposition and defense for the Catholic Church’s traditional understanding of eucharistic transubstantiation. I hope to show how a belief in such a doctrine is in no way irrational nor is it indefensible; but instead, the doctrine of transubstantiation makes sense when it is viewed in light of what Catholic Christians believe about who the human being is, what the human desires, and the special way in which God personally works in human history. The method I am following investigates how the doctrine of transubstantiation coheres with and follows the other beliefs that Catholics hold; that is, beginning with certain presuppositions, there is a certain rational progression to the Catholic understanding of real presence.

In order to do this, I have separated my analysis and defense into three main sections. First, I will offer a brief synopsis or history of the Catholic Christian eucharistic belief. Here I will explain that even while the conception of the doctrine was not officially formulated until centuries later, the spirit and centrality of this doctrine was

present during its initiation and has carried on through to our modern era. As I will come to show, the Church's consistency on this matter is worth noting, as it speaks to the sacrificial nature (the way in which the Eucharist works in human salvation as a matter of Christ's sacrifice) of the Eucharist, and the quintessential role it has played in the Church and the Catholic message. Secondly, I will offer a philosophical discussion and defense of the doctrine of transubstantiation. In this chapter, I will investigate the metaphysical tradition of Thomas Aquinas and how these philosophical concepts have shaped the Church's official teaching. Also, in this section I will utilize a series of other possible models which compete against transubstantiation in accounting for the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Ultimately, I will conclude that transubstantiation is the most appropriate and logical model for what Catholics believe about the Eucharist and nature in general. Lastly, I will offer a theological analysis and defense of the Eucharist. In this closing section, I will focus on how this Catholic sacrament and belief coheres with and follows the other, more basic tenets of faith; that is, this teaching appropriately follows the overall framework of the Catholic Christian message.

My analysis and defense of the Eucharist, in its three-fold approach (historical, philosophical, theological), ties together many of the uniquely Catholic characteristics of the eucharistic faith. I am not only offering a clarification of the Church's historical stance on the doctrine of real presence, but I am approaching the matter with a defense that includes multiple fronts and angles, thereby trying to show the underlying rationality of the Church's belief. In this effort, my aim is to produce an original work which intelligibly and adequately illustrates that the Church's traditional stance on the real presence.

What I hope to be a very noticeable, though not explicit, characteristic of my work, is that I am doing something that is very personal to me as a Catholic. I want the readers to know that the doctrine of eucharistic transubstantiation is an element of faith which finds itself deeply amidst the muddled debate between faith and reason; a real, active and present conflict which affects every individual in a very subjective way. In this modern era it is imperative for Catholics to understand that faith and reason are not separate or incompatible. The real presence is an article of faith which has been received with much skepticism and disbelief not only amongst the other Christian communities, but even within the Catholic Church itself. It is important for me, as a rational being, to challenge and examine my beliefs. In this way, I am investigating the 'source and summit' of my Catholic faith and I am seeking to understand both how and why this is possible. In so doing, I am following a strong tradition within Catholic Christianity whereby I cohere with a method of *faith seeking understanding*. My defense will ultimately suggest that transubstantiation does not seek to prove that any change really occurs; that is, it is not intended to offer demonstrative proof. My work will hopefully suggest that any misunderstanding of the doctrine of transubstantiation and the real presence merely reflects discrepancies and misconceptions in the other, more basic elements of the Catholic faith. In this way I am saying, in accepting certain precepts of Catholicism, it follows that transubstantiation is a necessary and fitting belief. For Catholics, the belief that the transformation has taken place is inspired by what they believe about the Incarnate reality of Christ and the salvific necessity of God's Intercedent presence.

PREFACE

THE CATHOLIC POSITION, TERMINOLOGY, AND ORIGIN:

AN EXPLANATION OF TERMS

Before moving into my analysis and defense of eucharistic transubstantiation, it is important that I first introduce my readers to both the core language and vocabulary that I will be using as well as a brief understanding of what the Eucharist is.

What is the Eucharist?

The Eucharist is one of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church. It is practiced and made available to Catholics at mass. The belief is that the priest, acting in the person of Jesus Christ, consecrates the unleavened bread and grape wine, which, upon consecration become the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ. Catholics then proceed to the altar where they receive the body of Christ in either their hand or on their tongue, and also receive the cup of Christ's blood. Both the body and blood of Christ are consumed. Catholics believe that the Eucharist is the continuing work of the same sacrifice that Christ offered by his death on the cross and resurrection into heaven.

What is the difference between the Eucharist, Real Presence, and Transubstantiation?

The Eucharist is the bread and wine that have been consecrated into the body and blood of Christ. The real presence is the belief that Jesus Christ is wholly and truly present in the Eucharist. Transubstantiation, then, is explanation that is given as to how this miracle is possible and more readily comprehensible by the human mind.

Where did it come from?

“Unlike the other sacraments that Christ instituted, this sacrament comes directly from something that Jesus said and did during his earthly life: the Institution of the Eucharist at the

Last Supper” (O’Collins and Farrugia 2003, 247)

Catholics trace their eucharistic belief directly back to its Institution at the Last Supper; which is to say that the Catholic Church sees a line of continuity between the Institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper (as recorded in the Gospels) and the teaching that the Church boasts today. The Catechism (the law book and reference guide for Catholics) supports this very assertion:

At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. This he did in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he should come again, and so to entrust to his beloved Spouse, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a Paschal banquet 'in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us' (Catechism 2007, 1323)

On what Authority do Catholics practice the Eucharist?

Like many other of the Church's teachings, their understanding and position on the Eucharist is a matter of both tradition and scripture (what is found in the Bible). Tradition is the living transmission and experience of the Catholic faith. It is that which is not recorded or written down, but was instead passed on by faith through Christ's apostles and eventually to his Church. A lot of what Catholics believe about the Eucharist is derived from tradition. While it is certain that Catholics draw upon a variety sources for the practice of the Eucharist, it should be noted with particular emphasis that they do draw significantly from scripture:

Mark 14:22-24

“While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, ‘Take; this is my body.’ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them and, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, ‘This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.’”

Matthew 26:26-28

“While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it, gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.’”

Luke 22:19-20

“Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying ‘This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.’”

Even though I eventually address this, it is important to note that Catholics have always interpreted these words that were recorded in the gospel in the most literal way possible. Christ, as it is told in the Bible, is actually—that is, substantially—present in the Eucharist.

Doctrine, Orthodox, and Grace

Lastly, it is important to note several key terms that appear rather frequently and are central to understanding the Eucharist. The term doctrine simply refers to teaching or law. The Church doctrine is that which is considered its proper teaching or law; what needs to be believed as a Catholic. Thus, transubstantiation, real presence and the Eucharist are all doctrines in so far as they have their proper teaching and understanding. “Orthodox,” which goes along with teaching, simply means of right belief. Thus, any theory which suggests that the Eucharist does not actually contain the body and blood of Christ is unorthodox. And lastly, grace is what Catholics believe the Eucharist imparts upon those who receive it. Grace is the free and undeserved gift that God gives to us to live a good life and do good things. It heals our human nature and lets us share in a life of Christ.

CHAPTER I

*HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE
DOCTRINE OF THE EUCHARIST*

I. Introduction

The Catholic Church today holds a systematic and rich doctrine on the Eucharist. The Eucharist not only occupies a vitally important role in the life of the Church, but any historian will tell you that the doctrine's formulation occupies a special place in the history of the Church as well. Catholics claim a direct line of continuity between the Institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper and the formal doctrine that the Church boasts today. Nevertheless, despite its significance and centrality to the Catholic Church, the organized and concrete reflection on the Eucharist was not made available until centuries after the Last Supper. In fact, looking at the coherency and straightforwardness of the modern Church's teaching can be quite misleading.

The history of the Eucharist is quite complicated and involved. It is certainly reasonable to acknowledge the continuity that exists between the Institution and the Church's teaching today, however, the historical development of the doctrine is exceedingly more complex than one might imagine. The teaching that the Church holds today was not clearly evident from the words that were spoken at its Institution. In looking at the history of this doctrine, it is essential to view it in light of the overall mission and progression of the Church. Both directly and indirectly, the Church's position on the Eucharist has been shaped and enhanced by the other central dogmas of faith. In this way, the Church's position on the Eucharist became more intelligible as Christian thinkers reflected on who the human being is, what the human desires, and the special way in which God personally works in human history. The teaching that Catholics hold today is a compilation of efforts directly concerning the Eucharist, as well as the

development of other articles of faith. Thus, the better they were able to understand the mystery of Christ, the better they were able to express the mystery of the Eucharist.

In this section, I will examine how the Church arrived at its present doctrinal conception. Any historical investigation the Church's teaching on the Eucharist will bring to light the extensive thought and reflection that Church thinkers have contributed in the two thousand year history of the Church: events, councils and other efforts that have both indirectly and directly shaped the formulation of the Catholic belief in the Eucharist. With the seemingly endless amount of reflection and complexity, any attempt to trace and follow the Church's long progression on the Eucharist can be quite a daunting task.

Major Themes and Structure of Analysis

Despite the ongoing efforts to establish its proper teaching, most of the Catholic Church's progress on this doctrine occurs in several stages of development. Thus, in investigating the sacrament's historical formulation, I will divide my analysis into three main contexts of explanation: (1) evidence from biblical passages; (2) the efforts from the early Church fathers; and lastly, (3) the heretical views which prompted the series of convened ecumenical councils, Church movements, and papal decrees which sought to put to rest any concerns and protests with regard to the Catholic Church's teaching. In analyzing the development of eucharistic teaching, it is certainly important to consider all major aspects and themes. For the purposes of providing a basic, yet solid, background on this doctrine, however, I have highlighted the contributions of these proceeding thinkers and Church initiatives as they relate to the central themes and beliefs within the Eucharist.

The Church's Consistency: Realism From The Beginning

Before analyzing the concrete, documented, and historical development of the Eucharist, it should be noted with particular emphasis and interest that the Church has displayed remarkable consistency in the spirit of its teaching on the doctrine of real presence in the Eucharist. What will become a distinguishing attribute as I unpack the historical development of the Eucharist is the Catholic Church's consistent stance despite centuries of criticism and opposing beliefs both from within and outside of the Church.

I raise this point, not necessarily in defense of the Church's teaching, but more importantly, to highlight the Eucharist as a central and intimate belief that the Church has maintained from the very beginning: "The Church makes the Eucharist, and the Eucharist makes the Church" (O'Collins and Farrugia 2003, 250). The doctrine of real presence is not the work or result of a single era, council or figure within the grand history of Catholicism. Rather, the doctrine serves as an expression of centuries of work and thought dedicated to unfolding and unpacking what the Church has always held and believed in the sacramental practice of the Eucharist. Like the Eucharist is the center piece of Catholic worship and life, similarly, the historical formulation of the doctrine has been at the forefront of the Church's concerns since the Eucharist's Institution at the Last Supper.

II. Origin of the Eucharist: The Last Supper and Biblical Evidence

As mentioned, Catholics believe that the Eucharist was instituted by Jesus Christ at the Last Supper. Supporters of this doctrine often cite gospel passages as verifying sources of this belief:

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it, gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.' Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins' (Matthew 26:26-28).

The Church acknowledges scripture in support of the origin of its teaching; however, Catholics do not see the gospels as the inspiration or source behind their belief. The Church believes that the sacramental practice of the Eucharist continued on from its Institution, and the Gospels, which were written decades after this event (ca. 60-100 CE) merely reflect the importance of this practice. Christian historians, O'Collins and Farrugia, support that the historical event of the Last Supper-- Christ's actual words and actions-- are the origin behind this belief, not scripture or any other verifying source: "Unlike the other sacraments that Christ instituted, this sacrament comes directly from something that Jesus said and did during his earthly life: the Institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper" (O'Collins and Farrugia 2003, 247).

Many Catholics believe that the message, as it is indicated in the gospels, was clear: Jesus Christ became truly and really present in the bread and wine. Regardless of how unequivocal and direct this belief might seem to some (may have been), the Church's teaching on the Eucharist would soon become challenged in the years ahead. Whether out of sheer disbelief or inconsistencies in the Bible (other biblical passages that seemed contradictory) many questions, concerns and ambiguities would soon arise. The message would become muddled and the scripture, which at one time had supported the Church's teaching, would appear to be inconsistent and unreliable. Thus, the early Church figures were charged with the task of applying and interpreting scripture.

It is worth pointing out, before moving into the patristic era, that with the Institution of the Eucharist the Church assigns and envisions the threefold office of bishop, priest, and deacon. The early Church, when it adopted this threefold hierarchy (which goes in order of deacon, priest, bishop, and pope), understood that the priest who was saying the words of consecration at the altar was operating *in persona Christi* (in the person of Christ). The Church draws this connection between the Institution of the Eucharist and the hierarchical offices through the biblical evidence drawn from the Last Supper. Christ, who consecrated the bread and wine into his body and blood, performed this miracle and sent out his apostles to do the same while acting in his person. Today when a priest or bishop is consecrating the gifts, the priest is acknowledging that it is really Christ who is performing the miracle, and that the priest is merely acting on his behalf. Thus, the Church seems a strong line of continuity in the relationship between its hierarchy and the Eucharist itself.

The development of this eucharistic doctrine comes through a very sporadic and contingent history. Before examining many of the competing themes and ideas that surfaced during the long history of the Church, it needs to be very clear that from the outset that the Church's teaching has always been in the *realist perspective*. That is to say, from the very beginning the early Church fathers were trying to understand how Christ is really present in the bread and the wine as it was not only recorded in the gospels, but an article of faith that was passed on by tradition (Deposit of Faith), as Kelly explains: "Eucharistic teaching, it should be understood at the outset, was in general unquestionably realist, i.e. the consecrated bread and wine were taken to be, and were treated and designated as, the Savior's body and blood" (Kelly 1978, 440).

III. Early centuries of the Church (Patristic era 100-451 CE)

Who were the Early Church Fathers?

During the early centuries, the Catholic understanding of the Eucharist can be best analyzed through examining the different camps or schools of Christian thought that were present during those times. The *patristic figures* of the early Church were those key individuals who were charged with the responsibility of establishing and developing the Catholic Church, in accordance with what was held and believed about the messages and teachings of Jesus Christ. While officially no published decree or conclusive declaration on the Eucharist was reached until the Council of Trent in 1562 CE, the nature of the Eucharist was a real and lively debate. The Church's foundation and development of the Eucharist began in these early years, or what is otherwise known as, the patristic era.

Guided by the minimal resources, the beginning era of Church would witness these early Church fathers reflect upon and discover the true meaning and nature of the Eucharist; a belief which had been with the Church fathers them since the sacrament's initiation.

What were the major themes and contributions of the Patristic era?

Their focus was not merely placed upon the sacrament's role and place in the Church, but more fundamentally, many argued over the sacred character and efficacy of the Eucharist: what was the relationship between Christ and the sacrament? How is He truly present in the bread and wine? The patristic fathers' interpretation of the Eucharist is viewed as such a monumental event in the Church in two ways (for two reasons): (1) their reflections indubitably helped to lay the foundation for the Church's official teaching. And secondly (2), their thoughts drastically shaped the way in which the

Church saw the relationship between God and His faithful. In other words, sacramental worship, particularly with the Catholic position on the Eucharist, outlined and facilitated the duties of the Church by bringing its believers closer to Christ.

Focusing primarily on the era between the first and fifth centuries, I will analyze the central figures of this time period. While, there are many thinkers who made great contributions to this important Catholic belief, I have selected the four key individuals who I believe made the strongest and most unique contributions to the Catholic Church's understanding of the Eucharist. In addition, I will also highlight the influence of several other thinkers who in one way or another stimulated thought and helped the Church to advance and better grasp the spirit of the eucharistic message. Similarly, I will also bring to light a handful of protesting individuals whose opposing views and theories on the Eucharist inevitably strengthened the Church's understanding and teaching of the doctrine.

a. Cyril of Jerusalem (313 – 386 CE)

Beginning with one of the great theologians of the Christian Church, Cyril of Jerusalem is widely considered one of the first innovators and founders of the doctrine of the Eucharist (Kelly 1978, 441). Focusing particularly on the mode of Christ's presence in the Eucharist, Cyril tries to make sense of this article of faith. He makes the distinction between how the sacrament is conducted and what the sacrament is conveying or promising to bring. In this way, Cyril is reflecting both the presence of Christ in the bread and wine, but also, the Eucharist as a sacrament. The Eucharist carries more than what meets our sensible perception; a belief which has distinguished Cyril as the *pioneer* of the conversion theory of the Eucharist.

Even the pioneer of the conversion doctrine, Cyril of Jerusalem, is careful to indicate that the elements remain bread and wine to sensible perception, and to call them the 'antitype' of Christ's body and blood: the body is given to you in the figure of bread, and the blood is given to you in the figure of wine (Kelly 1978, 441).

The significance of Cyril's theory is that it confirms the notion that from the beginning there existed the idea that the elements of the sacrament conveyed something much greater than what our sensible perception could apprehend. As I unpack the key components and points behind his theology, it is worth noting that Cyril's motivation behind this position was that he saw the Eucharist as a converting sacrament; in such a way that we became of one body with Christ and of each other. In fact, Cyril's profound reflection upon the unitive effects of the Eucharist provides better understanding of what is meant by his *conversion* theory.

In distinguishing Cyril as 'the pioneer of the conversion doctrine,' there are three serious statements that are being made. First, he is making the fundamental assertion that there takes place a change in the sacramental gifts of the bread and the wine by the words of the consecration. It is worth noting that Cyril was in no way subscribed to the figurative or symbolic view of real presence; rather, it is suggested that he found support for real change in the story of the parable of Christ changing water into wine (Kelly 1978, 442). This is a serious and vitally important claim, as it becomes the building block of further theological explanation. Secondly, he is claiming that the Eucharist produces conversion effects on the individual person. This is what later theologians mean when they say the *Eucharist perfects the person*. Lastly, these conversion effects on the individual, in turn, produce change on the community. This is what the Church considers to be the mystery of this sacrament; the bringing together of God's people in the Body of

Christ. While Cyril was no where near the formulation of a solid doctrine or explanation (which we will later find in the later councils) the reality is that Cyril of Jerusalem paid serious reflection on the nature of the Eucharist as a sacrament, and his notion of change and conversion set into motion much of the efforts of proceeding theologians.

Cyril's conversion theory was soon picked up and further developed by Gregory of Nyssa, who brought profound reflection to the notion of conversion or change in his dealings with the predicament of how Christ's body can be unique in every sacrifice (multiplicity of hosts). In trying to resolve this apparent dilemma, Gregory of Nyssa discusses his notion of "traselementation"; whereby he offers a description of the change in the Eucharist. Just as the human body digests and transforms the nourishment that it is given, so too, the elements of the eucharistic sacrifice are 'traselemented' with Christ. Essentially, Gregory of Nyssa wants to say that the bread and the wine are changed by the effects of Christ's Body and Blood:

His theory is to the effect that when the Word incarnate nourished Himself with bread and wine, He assimilated them to His flesh and blood. Thus they were transformed into the nature of His body... We should observe that he describes 'the nature of the visible objects' as being 'traselemented'. What he envisages would seem to be an alteration in the relation of the constituent elements of bread and wine, as a result of which they acquire the 'form' of the Lord's body and blood, and corresponding properties (Kelly 1978, 443).

Gregory of Nyssa's idea of 'traselementation' serves as the first real attempt to offer some sort of a metaphysical explanation of how there takes place change within the Eucharist.

Their respective contributions made Cyril of Jerusalem and Gregory of Nyssa two pivotal figures in introducing the notion of conversion or change within the Eucharist. On

a similar note, it is important to consider an opposing view that surfaced towards the second half of the fourth century. Nestorius (386-451 CE), the archbishop of Constantinople, preached a conversion theory that had drastically different implications than both Cyril of Jerusalem and Gregory of Nyssa. Like Cyril, Nestorius suggested that a real change or conversion takes place in the Eucharistic sacrifice. For Nestorius, however, the conversion that takes place was merely a change from bread and wine to the physical body and blood of Christ. The Eucharist then is not life-giving in the same sense that it is for Cyril and Gregory of Nyssa. Nestorius suggested that conversion merely brought about the physical flesh of Christ. To better understand the basis of this idea, it is worth pointing out, what is now considered the Nestorian heresy. Basically, the Nestorian heresy was the belief that Christ exists as two natures: the man Jesus and the divine Son of God, rather than as a unified person. Though the Church addressed the issue of the Nestorian heresy at the Council of Ephesus in 431 CE, the effects of Nestorius' view on the nature of Christ had impacts on later eucharistic development. Nestorius did not see the Eucharist as life-giving simply because he did not see Christ as one person who is fully God and fully man. The Eucharist, then, merely expressed the human person of Jesus Christ, without any sacred character.

What was significant about Nestorius' heretical view is that it propelled the Church to discern what the right and wrong interpretations were. The Church's handling of this opposing view on the Eucharist illustrates the very involved and complex process that many Church fathers were dealing with. In order to properly and fundamentally combat Nestorius' sacramental views, it is necessary to approach his position on the nature of Christ as both God and man. For Nestorius not to see Christ as both God and

man, it seems consistent for him to have such fallacious and opposing beliefs about the Eucharist; thus, exemplifying the importance and connection of the Eucharist to the rest of the Church. In this way, Nestorius was a landmark of historical and theological achievement in the sense that his heretical views illustrated the paralleled and connected development of the Eucharist and the nature of Christ (a rich idea that I address more thoroughly in the theological section).

Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory of Nyssa and Nestorius are all individuals who in one way or another served as pivotal figures in the development of the doctrine of the Eucharist. Their respective contributions may not be explicitly seen by looking at the doctrinal formulation, but Cyril and Gregory both are distinguished as two central figures in the Eucharist's foundation.

b. St. Athanasius (293 –373 CE)

Perhaps the most influential and dominant figure of the Church in the fourth century, Athanasius was considered an authority on Christology (nature of Christ) and ecclesiology (nature of the Church). It is important to understand, Dennis Billy suggests, that Athanasius does not deal with the Eucharist in the same way that other thinkers of his time did; rather, his contributions to the Eucharist should be understood in light of his more general theological concerns: "To begin with a proper understanding of Athanasius' teaching on the Eucharist requires a knowledge of his larger theological vision" (Billy 2010, 134). In this way, what Athanasius has to say about the Eucharist develops out of his understanding of God's redemptive plan for humanity (Billy 2010, 131). Even with his vast theological vision, Athanasius' eucharistic theology can be broken down into two

main facets: (1) the Eucharist as a sacrament, and (2) the relationship between the Incarnation and the Eucharist.

(1) In his position on the sacramental and symbolic view of the Eucharist, Athanasius makes the important distinction that the Eucharist ‘*brings to us a level of spiritual nourishment.*’ Thus, Athanasius says that there is a distinction between the visible materials of the sacrament and the spiritual nourishment it brings: “[Athanasius] clearly distinguishes the visible bread and wine from the spiritual nourishment they convey” (Kelly 1978, 441). His theology stresses a symbolism between the bread and wine and the reality of Christ’s body and blood. An underlying, though critical, component of Athanasius’ thought is that the visible materials of sacrament are not mere symbols. Rather, they both point to and contain the reality to which they symbolize:

It must not be supposed, of course, that this ‘symbolical language’ implied that the bread and wine were regarded as mere pointers to, or tokens of, absent realities. Rather were they accepted as signs of realities which were somehow actually present though apprehended by faith? (Kelly 1978, 441-442)

This is a characteristic of the Eucharist which makes it unique amongst other sacraments. There exists a deeply involved and intricate connection between the Church, the Eucharist and God’s eternal presence. Just as Christ is both God and man, so too is the Eucharist; Athanasius adamantly defends the dual nature of this sacrament: “Just as Jesus is both God and man, so is the Eucharist both spiritual and material” (Billy 2010, 136).

(2) Much of what Athanasius has to say regarding the Eucharist is derived from his reflections on the Incarnation, “Athanasius’ teaching on the Eucharist flows from this larger theological vision and offers the means by which God’s divinizing grace touched people through history” (Billy 2010, 137). In his theological work, *De Incarnatione Verbi*

(On the Incarnation), Athanasius discusses the need for Christ, and how his becoming man (“Incarnation”) was necessary for our human condition. Christ brought humanity a tangible and real connection to the divine. Athanasius, then argues, that this need is carried on through history. Even after the life, death and resurrection of Christ, human beings still have that same need for divine contact. Thus, our need for the Incarnation, Athanasius says, was foreshadowing our need for the Church and ultimately our need for the Eucharist: “The Eucharist, for Athanasius, is a primary point of contact between the human and the divine. It offers Christians the concrete means through which God’s love touches and transforms them” (Billy 2010, 134). As Athanasius, himself says, the human need for salvation, Christians argue, is the connection between the Eucharist, the Church, and the Incarnation: “He, indeed, assumed humanity that we might become God. He manifested Himself by means of a body in order that we might perceive the Mind of the unseen Father. He endured shame from men that we might inherit immortality” (Athanasius 1977, 93).

Athanasius’ contributions to this doctrine are not straightforward or easily understood. As I will come to show in my theological section, to best understand what Athanasius believes about the Eucharist, it is necessary to understand his position on both the Church and the Incarnation—that is, the strength and efficacy behind the Eucharist is that it is directly tied to the primary and originating beliefs of the Christian faith. Nevertheless, from a historical context, Athanasius’ involvement in the formulation of this doctrine is his acknowledgement of the symbolic nature of this sacrament and the way in which it relates to Christ; a belief which eventually becomes a key feature of Catholic sacraments, particularly in the Eucharist.

c. Ambrose of Milan (340-397 CE)

The third major figure to discuss is Saint Ambrose. One of the four original Doctors of the Church, Ambrose's theological efforts dealt mostly with interpretations of the Old and New Testaments. His involvement and achievement with regard to the Eucharist was best recognized in the western Church. Ambrose's most recognized and featured contribution, in the realm of eucharistic theology, were his thoughts surrounding the notion of change or conversion within the bread and wine. Ambrose in some ways is seen as continuing the conversion theory already set into motion by Cyril and Gregory of Nyssa. Ambrose's theory of conversion, however, was more specific in the sense that he was proposing some sort of a metaphysical change in the elements of the sacrifice. He stresses the notion of 'actual change' because he believes that it is a critical and essential characteristic of the Eucharistic sacrifice:

The word he employs (*transfigurantur*), as Tertullian had pointed out long before, connotes an actual change of something from what it previously was to a fresh mode of being. Ambrose does not discard, it should be noted, older forms of expression, and can speak of Christ's body as being 'signified' by the bread and wine being 'called' His blood after the consecration. That sacrament is received in a likeness, but conveys the virtue of the reality it represents... it effects an actual change in the elements, being a quasi-creative act which alters their natures into something which they were not before (Kelly 1978, 446).

What then ought we to understand as the historical significance of Ambrose's theology? Ambrose argues for a conversion which brings about a 'new mode of being'; a belief which suggests a real change has taken place. Coming after Cyril of Jerusalem and Saint Athanasius, Ambrose's emphasis of the actual change of being is a very intricate

belief. To say that these elements underwent a change in their substance is to acknowledge and accept the necessity of Christ's presence. The change or conversion that Ambrose claims takes place in the Eucharist is one of essential character. If Christ were to be present in the bread and wine, a sacramental necessity which both Ambrose and Athanasius argue for, then it must be the case that a real change has taken place: "Externally viewed the oblation consists in the repetition by the priest of Christ's efficacious words; but internally it consists in His perpetual intercession for us before the Father, offering His death on behalf of us all (Kelly 1978, 453). Thus, the motivation and spirit behind Ambrose's reliance on the conversion theory stems from the belief that Christ must be present in the Eucharist as a matter of salvific necessity. Sacraments, like the Eucharist, receive their efficacy from the Church and in turn from Christ (a notion I unpack further in my theological section).

Ambrose distinguishes this metaphysical change as a change in nature, whereby the act of Christ becoming present in the bread and wine inherently changes the nature of the elements to the Body and Blood Christ:

Be convinced that this is not what nature has formed, but what the blessing has consecrated. The power of the blessing prevails over that of nature, because by the blessing nature itself is changed... Could not Christ's word, which can make from nothing what did not exist, change existing things into what they were not before? It is no less a feat to give things their original nature than to change their nature (Catechism 2007, 1375).

The above thinkers—Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory of Nyssa and Saint Ambrose—all made significant achievements in the development of this teaching. These three in particular provided much insight in the way of change or conversion within the Eucharist. While their theologies might seem a bit inadequate or distant compared to the thorough

formulation that we see in the Catechism today, these respective thinkers help to lay the foundation of this teaching. Such contributions would prove much useful, when in later ecumenical councils many Church leaders called upon and worked off of these very thinkers in trying to decipher the true meaning and understanding of the Eucharist. Undoubtedly three great authors of this doctrine, neither Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory of Nyssa, nor Saint Ambrose approach the Eucharist in the same way as the fourth key contributor of this doctrine: Saint Augustine of Hippo.

d. St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE)

Like Ambrose, Saint Augustine was one of the four original Doctors of the Church (*New Advent: The Catholic Online Encyclopedia*, 2009 ed.). And like Athanasius, Augustine is renown for his vast reflections on many different aspects of the Christian faith. Even today, he is praised for the brilliance and cohesiveness of his overall theological vision. While many before him commented upon the mystery of the Eucharist, none provided as gripping or complex a theological analysis as Augustine. His teaching on the Eucharist is many-sided and very difficult to comprehend. Nevertheless, in any attempt to understand what he has to say about the Eucharist, and other sacramental practices, it is important to note that Augustine was unquestionably a realist when it came to the belief in the real presence:

There can be no doubt that he shared the realism held by most of his contemporaries and predecessors. It is true that his thought passes from Christ's sacramental to His mystical body. It does so, first, because the consecrated bread and wine themselves, composed as they are of a multitude of once separated grains of wheat and grapes, are a manifest symbol of unity; and secondly, in a more profound sense, because the fact that the faithful participate in the Eucharist is a sign of their membership of the Church" (Kelly 1978, 447).

As I will come to explain, the idea of realism and symbolism which previously seemed to be two opposing aspects of the Eucharist, are both present and equally significant in his Augustine's theology.

Augustine's emphasis of the Eucharist as a sacrament is two-fold: (1) sacraments are physical, tangible objects that serve as symbols and reminders of supernatural things; and secondly (2), sacraments participate and contain the spiritual reality that they represent. Thus, the Eucharist is distinguished by both a symbolic and sacred character. For Augustine, this is a significant feature for sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, as it brings us contact to the Divine through tangible, perceptible means: both the symbolic and realist dimensions of the Eucharist, are necessary for our human faith. "In the Eucharist there is both what one sees and what one believes; there is the physical object of perception and the spiritual object apprehended by faith, and it is the latter which feeds the soul" (Kelly 1978, 448). This dual nature of sacraments, the symbolic and realist, serve as the groundwork for Augustine's teaching on the eucharistic body.

Aside from the sacramental aspect, the second key component to Augustine's eucharistic theology concerns the efficacy of the Eucharist. What relation does the Eucharist have with the actual, historical body of Jesus Christ? How do we make the distinction between the spiritual and material in the real presence of the Eucharist? And, what effect does the Eucharist have on those who receive it? In response to the relationship between Christ's physical body and the body that we receive in the Eucharist, Augustine suggests that the body consumed in the Eucharist is not strictly identical with the actual, historical body of Christ. Augustine makes the distinction that we ought not to see the eucharistic body as the bloodied flesh of Christ; this is not the meaning of real

presence. Rather, he suggests that the Eucharistic body is not the sensible flesh; we instead receive the essence of his body (Kelly 1978, 449). It is important to note the context in which Augustine is writing. He is not suggesting that Christ is not actually present in the Eucharist, rather, he is concerned over the belief that the physical and bloodied flesh is what is consumed.

Turning then to the last two questions, Augustine states that the Eucharist brings the gift of life. It is a spiritual gift which suggests that eating and drinking are spiritual processes. In this practice Christians eat and drink the bread and wine—not Christ’s actual, physical body. Though the process of consuming is part of the symbolic nature of the sacrament, the Eucharist is also characterized by its realism: the belief that the essence or spiritual substance of Christ’s body and blood—the essence of his sacrifice.

[Augustine’s] real point, however, is that Christ’s body and blood are not consumed physically and materially; what is consumed in this way is the bread and wine. The body and blood are veritably received by the communicant, but are received sacramentally or, as one might express it, *in figura* (Kelly 1978, 449).

Augustine’s thoughts on the Eucharist are unlike anything that existed at the time. While many other theologians and Church fathers sought to deal with the real presence of the sacrament, Augustine tried to understand the Eucharist as a sacrament and how it would function in the life of the Church and the believer. Thus, Augustine made significant and unique progress in the development of the Eucharist.

To wrap up this portion of my historical analysis, the patristic era provides much of the foundation for the eucharistic doctrine. While there was no proposed agenda or organized method in explaining the spirit of this article of the faith, these four figures are widely recognized as the key individuals responsible for setting this eucharistic theology

into motion. Amongst their many contributions, the fact that they defended their belief in *the realness of Christ's presence in the Eucharist* is perhaps their most timeless and enriching accomplishment. Nevertheless, as the Church neared the beginning of the sixth century, and the close of the patristic era, the Catholic position on the Eucharist remained quite ambiguous, incomplete and unofficial—a situation that would soon make the Catholic Church vulnerable to strong opposition and competing beliefs both from within and outside the faith.

IV. Heretical Views and Ecumenical Councils

The Catholic Church today is distinguished by its formal and established laws, customs and teachings. The historical development of Church doctrine is not as straightforward and simple as one might imagine. The laws and articles of faith which characterize the Catholic Church certainly find their basis in the profound and loving messages and teachings of Jesus Christ. The formulation of these doctrines and beliefs, however, was not clearly evident from the beginning. The faith brought by Christ would soon become distorted; as the human mind naturally began to doubt and question. In fact, it is this aspect of our finite and limited nature that propelled the Church to construct and express its faith in the form of organized doctrine.

As I will come to show, the Church's mission to teach the word of Christ was far from a unanimous and unambiguous task. In its attempt to clarify and search for the right and true teachings, the Catholic Church would inevitably become involved in serious disagreement and conflict. Despite this tense and difficult position, the Church used every

opportunity to strengthen and better understand its own teachings in the face of opposition; regardless of how grave and damaging the defiance might have been:

The endless controversies with heretics have been indirectly the cause of most important doctrinal developments and definitions formulated in councils to the edification of the body of Christ (New Advent: The Catholic Online Encyclopedia, 2009 ed., s.v. “Heresy”).

Nevertheless, it is this fundamental role of the Church—to interpret and express the teachings of Christ—that precisely characterizes the historical development of the Eucharist.

The Catholic Church’s systematic theology on the Eucharist is the result of centuries of developing teachings. This is an aspect of the Catholic faith that is often overlooked and misunderstood. The mystical character of the Eucharistic made it especially hard for the Church to concretely explain what was going on in their belief of real presence. The idea that bread and wine can substantially contain the body and blood of Jesus Christ is a belief which can be quite unimaginable for many. Because of the nature of this eucharistic mystery—the way in which the human mind can hardly conceive and words can hardly express—doubts have been raised. These doubts, Neuner and Dupuis claim, call for explicit clarification by the Church; “Doubts have called for a clear affirmation of the Church’s faith by official documents” (Neuner and Dupuis 1975, 381). As has been the case with many aspects of the Church’s faith throughout history, this inexplicability brought upon many problems and would force the Church to seek rational expression:

During the first millennium of Christianity this faith remained tranquilly possessed. It is not surprising, however, that this aspect of the mystery, which the human mind can hardly conceive and words can hardly express, gave rise to

questions. Doubts have called for a clear affirmation of the Church's faith by official documents (Neuner and Dupuis 1975, 381).

These problems came in the forms of heresy, and their solutions resulted from the ecumenical councils and papal decrees that sought to address and resolve them.

Heresies are theological or religious beliefs that directly oppose and undermine Catholic orthodoxy (recall, orthodoxy simply means: the right or true teaching). These false views or beliefs occur within members of the Church and they contradict that which is foundational to the Catholic faith. Having encountered a seemingly endless battle with heresy, the Church has had difficulties in spreading and teaching the messages of Christ against constant opposition. Therefore, the Church has been forced to deal with the more prominent and substantial heretical claims. The Church's efforts to combat and defend itself against these views come in the form of ecumenical councils and papal decrees.

In the two thousand year history of the Church, there have been only twenty-one ecumenical councils; beginning with the First Council of Nicaea (325 CE) and the most recent being Vatican II (1962-1965 CE). Councils for the most part serve to resolve specific heretical beliefs; however, they are also convened in order to address growing concerns and establish proper Church teaching. "Councils are legally convened assemblies of ecclesiastical dignitaries and theological experts for the purpose of discussing and regulating matters of church doctrine and discipline" (*New Advent: The Catholic Online Encyclopedia*, 2009 ed., s.v. "General Councils."). While these councils have been the most significant contributors in establishing Church doctrine—especially with regard to the Eucharist—the Church's efforts to express orthodoxy have also come in other forms. Encyclicals, decrees, bulls and other papal documents have been largely

significant in orchestrating proper Church teaching. Ecumenical councils are typically reserved as a last resort Church action. Papal documents are authored by the pope and are often circulated amongst the whole Church. Other times, these encyclicals and other decrees may be directed towards to particular individuals, whom the pope has sought to specifically approach.

Over its long history, the Church has gone through different opinions and tendencies when categorizing its documents; in fact, a document's 'type' largely depends on the method of writing or format that it follows and it is often the case that all three documents seem similar in tone and intent. To offer just a brief synopsis, a *papal bull* (other times referred to as an *apostolic constitution*) is simply a papal document which is marked with the seal of the pope and concerns matters of faith, morals or regulation. It typically is held as law and is applicable to the whole Church: "A papal document that is solemn in form, legal in content, and ordinarily deals with matters of faith doctrine or discipline that are important for the universal Church or especially significant for a particular diocese. It is usually issued in the form of a bull, so called because it is issued with a seal (Latin, *bullata*), and may be signed by the pope himself" (McBrien 1995, 76). A decree, which is a more general term than both encyclical and bull, refers to a variety of different types of papal and Church documents. Ordinarily, when it is authored from the seat of the pope it is merely "an order or law made by a superior authority for the direction of others" (*New Advent: The Catholic Online Encyclopedia*, 2009 ed., s.v. "Decree."). Though, Richard McBrien points out, when a decree is directed from an ecumenical council, it is the statement or findings of that council concerning a particular theological or ecclesial matter. Lastly, a papal encyclical, which is the most commonly

referenced type of Church document, is a later written from the office of the pope and typical deals with matters of faith, morality, doctrine or regulation: “A formal pastoral letter written by, or under the authority of, the pope concerning moral, doctrinal, or disciplinary issues and addressed to the universal Church. (McBrien 1995, 465)” Encyclicals are intended to reflect upon a theological point or objection and they are intended to serve the common good and teaching of the Church and its community (McBrien 1995, 465).

The use of these sorts of papal documents is to *put out fires*, so to speak. They typically concern controversial subjects, whereby they map out the Church’s position on issues of morality, dogmatic beliefs and other issues that are of central importance to the Church and the Catholic faith. Many of these Ecumenical councils and papal initiatives have in one way or another had some influence on the teaching of the Eucharist. However, I am going to highlight the most important of these which directly and explicitly made serious strides in elucidating the Church’s position. Amongst the twenty-one ecumenical councils, there were four that stand out among the rest for their importance and impact upon the Catholic position on real presence. Similarly, I will also highlight several Papal encyclicals, Bulls and other documents which were supplementary in the formation of this doctrine.

In proceeding through this era of the Church, it becomes quite remarkable to witness how the beliefs and reflections of the Patristic fathers are brought to life once again in the progression of the Ecumenical and Papal efforts. This facet of the Church’s history ultimately reveals the originality and consistency that has existed from the very beginning.

a. The Berengar Heresy (1059 and 1079 CE)

The first council to be convened with the sole purpose of addressing the Eucharist, dealt primarily with the notion of *change of substance*. The Council of Rome (1059 CE) was a local council that was convened in order to reestablish the traditional Church eucharistic teaching, which in recent years had succumbed to more contemporary explanations of Christ's modes of presence. In this council, the Catholic Church was particularly interested in the errors of Berengar (999-1088 CE). Born in Tours (modern day France) at the end of the tenth century, Berengar's studies of art and theology would soon earn him a well-respected reputation as a prominent Church thinker. He would eventually become the head of the school of St. Martin of Tours, where in 1047 CE, he would infamously become the first to deny the change in substance (Neuner and Dupuis 1975, 384).

Berengar believed in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, however, his theology lacked the understanding of the real change that the Catholic Church has always held. Berengar, instead, emphasized the Eucharist as a symbol of our spiritual union with Christ (Neuner and Dupuis 1975, 384). The Church was hesitant in condemning the views of this brilliant Church thinker, as Berengar lived in a time where Church teaching was rapidly spreading and exploring new modes of thought. Truthfully, Berengar followed the tutelage of a long line of thinkers who possessed similar views on the Eucharist; thus, his views were not as new and radical as some might have thought. The question, however, became: was he merely stressing the sacramental and unitive aspects of the Eucharist, or did he truly not believe in the change of substance? When the council met in 1059 CE, Berengar appeared before the assembly and stated that he believed in the

real presence as merely a spiritual reality. While the Church did not possess the language and terminology to precisely identify what was wrong with Berengar's position, Catholic officials maintained that the real presence—while undoubtedly a spiritual matter—was the product of a real change that takes place within the bread and wine.

The errors of Berengar are extremely insightful into the corrective measures taken by the Catholic Church, as many of the same errors are committed still today. Berengar was a rationalist who was trying to understand this doctrine through the limits of reason and sense capacities (*New Advent: The Catholic Online Encyclopedia*, 2009 ed., s.v. "Berengar."). His inability to see, taste and hear any change taking place in the bread and wine led Berengar to believe that the change was merely spiritual. He, along with many others, failed to grasp how the *real* body of Christ could be present in the Eucharist. Berengar's refusal to accept this sacred character was a result of not only his reliance on sense and cognition, but more gravely, he was unwilling to accept divine authority: "With God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26). For this reason, Catholic officials deemed Berengar's views to be heretical. Catholic authorities then were faced with the essential question of Christ's presence in the Eucharist. A dilemma to which they resorted to the patristic thinkers:

Is the body of Christ present in the Eucharist, and in what manner? (...)For Berengar the body and blood of Christ are really present in the Holy Eucharist; but this presence is an intellectual or spiritual presence. The substance of the bread and the substance of the wine remain unchanged in their nature, but by consecration they become spiritually the very body and blood of Christ. This spiritual body and blood of Christ is the *res sacramenti*; the bread and the wine are the figure, the sign, the token, *sacramentum* (*New Advent: The Catholic Online Encyclopedia*, 2009 ed., s.v. "Berengar.").

Not only did the Council diagnose and correct the error surrounding Berengar's theology, but they also demanded that he take an oath which stated that the eucharistic symbols of bread and wine are not mere signs, but Christ's presence is really present by an actual change.

The Council of Rome and the Berengar heresy stand as a monumental event in Church history. In this assembly, (1) the Church made great strides in its understanding of real change—which would eventually become the foundation for transubstantiation; and also, (2) it marks the Church's first real efforts to gather and synthesize its traditional eucharistic beliefs against the threat of heresy; providing the Church with the language and concrete theology to readily identify the errors and further develop their eucharistic teaching.

b. The Fourth Lateran General Council (1215 CE)

Acknowledged as the most important council of the Middle Ages the Fourth Lateran Council stands out as one of the more significant and historically remembered Church assemblies, as it will forever be remembered as one of the high points in ecclesiastical and papal authority. Commenced during the reign of Pope Innocent III, the Council set quite lofty aims for itself. Amongst the Council's many contributions to the eucharistic doctrine, the Council's handling of the doctrine of transubstantiation is an achievement that should not be overlooked.

The Fourth Lateran Council is actually the first time that the word *transubstantiation* appears in an official Church document. This, however, should not be misconstrued in any way. The concept of transubstantiation had been around for quite some time. While the idea employs a strong use of Greek philosophy, the term

transubstantiation is entirely a contribution of Latin theologians (*New Advent: The Catholic Online Encyclopedia*, 2009 ed., s.v. “The Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist”). In fact, it is widely acknowledged that the term was first introduced by a theological writer, Peter Comestor from the middle of the twelfth century (Nichols 2002, 61). Nevertheless, what is worth noting from this council is the way in which these Church authorities employed the use of the word. Having learned from the Berengar heresy and other Church initiatives to establish its eucharistic teaching, Catholic authorities knew that they needed a way of understanding how the real change takes place in the bread and wine. Thus, transubstantiation became a way in which the Catholic Church described how the bread and wine changed into the body and blood of Christ.

The expression of transubstantiation used at the council was very incomplete and far less extravagant than the conception that the Church holds today. The significance, however, is illustrated in the way in which the term was used. While these thinkers might not have known the philosophical language and roots that existed behind the Greek inspired word, the council knowingly used transubstantiation in the description of the real change that takes place in the Eucharist. In this case, their faith was guiding their rationality; in so far as, they were attempting to explain how Christ could at one moment be fully and entirely present, without any sensible confirmation. Transubstantiation had now become a tool for Church expression. The situation then became, what kind of change actually takes place, and how does transubstantiation describe this?

c. Martin V: Bull *Inter Cunctas* (1418 CE)

The Bull *Inter Cunctas*, issued by Pope Martin V in the beginning of the fifteenth

century, was a reformatory effort of the Church that undoubtedly foreshadowed a very difficult and somber era that Catholics would soon face in the sixteenth century: the Protestant Reformation. This Papal document was a testament to the adverse and heretical views that were taking shape. Thus, the primary concern in Pope Martin V's *Inter Cunctas* were the growing heretical views that were present at the time.

John Wycliffe (1324-1384 CE) and John Hus (1369-1415 CE) are widely considered to be two of the most egregious heretics in Church history. Their theological and ecclesiastical opposition to Catholicism not only won them the label of heretics, but eventually led to their excommunication from the Church. In the early fifteenth century, the Church was faced with a revival of these two heretical figures, as contemporaries and followers of both Wycliffe and Hus were restoring objections against the Church. Amongst the many heretical beliefs that *Inter Cunctas* sought to address, there were two in particular which provided much insight into the Catholic teaching on the Eucharist.

The first error concerns itself with how the real change takes place within the bread and wine. These contemporaries, or so called "Reformers", offered a view of Eucharistic conversion that would later be adopted by the leading figures of the Protestant Reformation: "Among the errors of the followers of Wycliffe and Hus condemned by Martin V several are related to the Eucharist. First is condemned the opinion according to which the reality of the bread and wine continue to exist after the consecration" (Neuner and Dupuis 1975, 387). The belief that after the consecration, the Eucharist hosted both the real presence of Christ as well as the nature of the bread and wine itself, is a theory that would later be called *consubstantiation* (which will be

discussed at a great length in following sections). Martin V's response to this claim—which would later be the foundation of the Catholic Church's response against Martin Luther—states that the purpose for the Eucharist is bring us the same salvific grace that Christ achieved for us through His death and resurrection. In this way, Christ's presence is whole and entire because the Eucharist serves a salvific purpose. After the consecration then, the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ, and are charged with a new purpose—a new essence. Thus, the nature or essential character of the bread and wine cannot coexist with Christ, as the Eucharist has but one essence.

The second error, which Martin V addresses in his papal document, centers upon a more intricate aspect of the eucharistic doctrine. The Wycliffe and Hus reformers emphasized the spiritual union aspect of the Eucharist; quite similar to Berengar. These contemporaries emphasized the sacramental and symbolic nature of the Eucharist, whereby the true value was in the act of communion. In response, Martin V highlighted both the symbolic nature of this sacrament, as well as, the sacrificial realness of it. This would become a lively debate in later centuries: whether the Eucharist acts in the same way as other sacraments, or does it possess a different realness?

d. Scholasticism (1050-1350 CE)

Scholasticism is particular branch of Christian theology that lays emphasis upon the rational justification and systematic presentation of Christian belief. The *Scholastic era* of the Catholicism is considered the high point in the Church's discussion between faith and reason. This era of Christian thought saw the rise of a number of theological schools dedicated to bringing the truths of the Christian faith to the intellectual level. In fact, it was during this time that Christian theology began to enter the universities

(McGrath 2006, 196). The scholastics, or “schoolmen”, were those key individuals who were largely responsible for the synthesis of faith and reason during this era. Of these individuals who made important contributions to a number of areas within Christian theology, there were none more prolific than Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 CE). Unquestionably the most notable and influential figure of this era, Aquinas was largely responsible for introducing the role of Aristotelian logic and metaphysics in Christian theology.

It was during this medieval movement that the Catholic Church witnessed a tremendous shift from the Platonic influence of the patristic era towards a more systematic philosophy seen in the rise of Aristotelianism: “[The patristic] era inclined to Platonism and underestimated the importance of Aristotle. The Fathers strove to construct on Platonic principles a system of Christian philosophy” (*New Advent: The Catholic Online Encyclopedia*, 2009 ed., s.v. “Scholasticism”). As an advocate of Aristotelian philosophy, Aquinas’ introduction of Aristotelianism proved very useful in articulating particular Church doctrines. In fact, the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation is perhaps the most well received teaching when it comes to the application of Greek philosophy.

Trying to understand the indubitable Catholic belief in real presence through the preexisting notion of transubstantiation, Aquinas used much in the way of Aristotle’s metaphysics. It was his use of *substance* and *accidents*, however, which proved to be the most elucidating when it came to the doctrine of transubstantiation:

By the late eleventh century some theologians began to use the noun ‘transubstantiation’ ... A few years later in 1215 CE, the Fourth Lateran Council employed the verb ‘transubstantiated’ to describe the metaphysical mutation in the eucharistic elements: the bread and wine are ‘transubstantiated’ into body and blood of Christ. Later in

the same century Thomas Aquinas was to elaborate this teaching by adopting terms from Aristotelian philosophy: the words of consecration bring a change in ‘substance’ of the bread and wine, while the accidents (the secondary characteristics that do not belong essentially to substance) remain (O’Collins and Farrugia 2003, 262).

According to Aquinas, after the words of consecration said by the priest, the bread and wine are changed substantially into the body and blood of Jesus Christ. That is to say, the essence or substance of the bread and wine become Christ, while the accidental properties remain the same. Accidental properties are those features of thing that are nonessential: its texture, smell, taste, would all be nonessential characteristics to bread and wine. Jesus Christ becomes wholly and truly present in the Eucharistic gifts, but the accidental properties remain the same; the dimensions of Christ’s body do not become present (Aquinas’ eucharistic theology will be discussed more thoroughly in the philosophical section).

Aquinas’ reflection upon the Eucharist, as well as the whole scholastic movement in general, brought stability and peacefulness to the Catholic Christian faith for some time. In fact, it was not until centuries later, during the Protestant Reformation, that the efficacy of the Eucharist came under fire: “After centuries of peaceful endorsement, eventually two eucharistic themes were to become controversial: first, the presence of Christ in or under the elements, and later, the Eucharist as sacrifice” (O’Collins and Farrugia 2003, 259). Thus, this new and more precise understanding of the real presence would become the official stance of Church doctrine at the Council of Trent.

e. The General Council of Trent (1545-1563 CE)

The culminating point in the development of the eucharistic doctrine occurred during a time which is now considered one of the most significant eras of Christian

history: the Protestant Reformation (1517 CE-1648 CE). As significant and altering as the Reformation would be to the Christian faith, the Protestant community's heretical propositions would inevitably press the Catholic Church into a counter-reformation of its own; an assembly that would last nearly two decades, and be presided over by five different popes. The Council of Trent was convened in order to both defend the Church against the Reformer's claims, as well as strengthen and further develop the Catholic teachings of the messages of Christ:

It was convoked to examine and condemn the errors promulgated by [Martin] Luther and other Reformers, and to reform the discipline of the Church. Of all councils it lasted longest, issued the largest number of dogmatic and reformatory decrees, and produced the most beneficial results...Its main object was the definitive determination of the doctrines of the Church in answer to the heresies of the Protestants... (New Advent: The Catholic Online Encyclopedia, 2009 ed., s.v. "The Twenty-One Ecumenical Councils", "The Council of Trent").

Amongst the many ecclesiastical and theological doctrines that the Catholic leaders reassessed and solidified during this time, perhaps the most insightful was the progress and clarity the Church made on the eucharistic theology. The Council of Trent became the culminating movement of the Church's doctrine for several reasons, though the Council's handling and affirmation of transubstantiation would eventually become the keynote move:

The Council of Trent affirmed the doctrine of 'transubstantiation' more vigorously than Lateran IV, distinguished between the 'substance' and 'outward appearances (species)' of bread wine, but refrained from employing the pair of terms 'substance' and 'accidents', which after Aquinas had become the normal usage in eucharistic theology....This was the careful attempt of Trent to find a middle ground between a purely symbolic and crudely realistic view of the presence of Christ's body and blood in the Eucharist. 'Transubstantiation' became the

preferred terminology and touchstone of orthodoxy' (O'Collins and Farrugia 2003, 262-263).

In the twenty-five sessions that comprised this eighteen year long council, there were two sessions that stand out with particular importance. In these two sessions, the Council of Trent defined and summarized four main articles, namely: (1) *the affirmation of real presence*, (2) *declaration on transubstantiation*, (3) *relationship of the real presence and the consecration*, and (4) *the sacrificial character of the Eucharist*.

Thirteenth Session: Decree on the Most Holy Eucharist (1551 CE)

The council's discussions began as early as 1547 CE, but it was not until the Trent's thirteenth session, in 1551 CE, that any decree on the Eucharist was published. The situation at the time required Catholic officials to reemphasize and clarify the points that were being opposed by the Reformers; it is important to realize that the Church was not intending on composing a doctrine (Neuner and Dupuis 1975, 390). The Council's decree issued from the thirteenth session reflects upon five main themes, all of which add greater detail and comprehension to the eucharistic mystery. Nevertheless, the most important aspect of this Council was its discussion of the relationship between transubstantiation and the belief in real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. This really became the focal point of Trent's deliberation on the sacrament; an aspect of the dogma that would reveal itself as essential in understanding the rest of the teaching.

Amongst the many conclusions found in this decree, perhaps what the Council declares in its fourth chapter is the most definitive and telling:

Because Christ our Redeemer said that it was truly His body that He was offering under the species of bread and wine, it has always been the conviction of the Church of God, and this holy Council now again declares that, by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of bread into the substance

of the body of His blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly named transubstantiation (Neuner and Dupuis 1975, 394).

Borrowing heavily from Scholastic theology (Aquinas), the Church explicitly states its belief regarding not only scriptural interpretation, but more profoundly, this passage offers a precise description of the function of transubstantiation in the conversion of the bread and wine. What should be noted about this statement is the fact that the Church relies entirely on the way in which the sacrament was founded: '*Because our Redeemer said...* The Council of Trent willingly admits that the efficacy of the Eucharist is a great mystery of the Christian faith. Trying to rationalize this mystical belief, the Council of Trent affirmed and further elaborated on transubstantiation as its rational model of explanation. The change which occurs in the Eucharist is a change in substance, whereby the bread and wine are converted into the body and blood of Christ. This marks a special molding or synthesis of Christian thought. Not only is the Church building from the Fourth Lateran Council, but the wording used in this decree also employs language and concepts used in Greek philosophy and later the scholastic era of Catholic theology. In fact, Trent's conception of the doctrine follows almost exactly the thoughts of Aquinas during the scholastic era. It should be noted with exceptional clarity, however, that the term *transubstantiation* is a uniquely Catholic idea. It is a common misconception that thinkers from the scholastic era borrowed the idea from Aristotelian metaphysics. The term was derived from the pre Lateran Council era, and was later taken up and further elaborated by the scholastics. Thus, as I quoted (on page thirty), the Church did not formally use the language of Aquinas, as Catholic leaders were weary of drawing explicit connection to Greek influence (which was famously the case with scholasticism—

particularly Aquinas). Though it is undoubtedly clear and accepted that the model of transubstantiation affirmed at Trent was largely impacted by Thomas Aquinas. As I will come to show in my philosophical section, Aquinas uses only parts of Aristotle's metaphysics in his expression of transubstantiation:

Contrary to common misconception, transubstantiation is not dependent upon Aristotelian philosophy, since some notion of the concept goes back to the earliest days of the Church, when Aristotle's philosophy was not known. The eastern Fathers, before the sixth century used the Greek expression *metaousiosis*, or 'change of being,' which is essentially the same idea (Armstrong 2003, 80).

Twenty-Second Session: Doctrine on the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass (1562 CE)

The twenty-second meeting of Trent is seen as the most conclusive session, as “this decree brings the eucharistic doctrine of the Council to completing” (Neuner and Dupuis 1975, 400). Not only did it provide a conclusive address on the Church's position, but equally important, this decree discussed the sacrificial importance of the sacrifice. Like the ones before it, this decree has organized its discussion into four main points. What appears to be the most significant and overarching theme amongst these topics, however, is the Eucharist's relationship to the Christ's death and resurrection. What explanation can be given about the sacrificial nature of this sacrament? What is different—or perhaps the same—about the eucharistic sacrifice and the one that Catholics believe Christ made?

The sacrificial aspect of the Eucharist is a very involved and intimate reality of the Church. In trying to understand the deeper message and connection, Council members and Church leaders would reach back to the patristic fathers. Saint Athanasius, and his theology on the Incarnation and the nature of the Church, would be an underlying source

in elucidating the Church's position. The Church states that salvation was achieved for mankind through Christ's life, death on the cross and His resurrection into Heaven. The sacrifice of the Mass (the Eucharist) is not an independent or arbitrary sacrifice—there is a special relationship between the two. Catholics believe that the eucharistic sacrifice affords the same graces as that of Christ's sacrifice; in fact, they are of the same plan of salvation: “[The Sacrifice of the Mass] is not a sacrifice independent of the cross; it is the sacrifice of the cross now offered by the Church, whenever, following Christ's command, she celebrates the ritual of the Last Supper in which Christ offered Himself” (Neuner and Dupuis 1975, 400).

Catholics claim that the Church has always held the same, consistent view on the nature of the Eucharist—one of great importance and centrality in the Church: “The Eucharist is the Church's greatest treasure. It is the summit of her liturgy, the center of her life, the source of her power, the visible sign on which her unity is built” (Neuner and Dupuis 1975, 381). While this seems to be a fair and historically supported claim, the belief in the Eucharist suffered greatly as the Church failed to develop any documented, systematic understanding of this sacred belief. Even though the Church did not intend to produce these doctrinal formulations, the Council of Trent stands as one of the most defining times in Church history as it established what the Church believed on a wide variety of issues:

The Ecumenical Council of Trent has proved to be of the greatest importance for the development of the inner life of the Church. No council has ever had to accomplish its task under more serious difficulties, none has had so many questions of the greatest importance to decide” (New Advent: The Catholic Online Encyclopedia, 2009 ed., s.v. “The Council of Trent.”).

With the closing of the Council of Trent also came the completion of the doctrine of the Eucharist. Thus, with its concrete doctrine in place, Catholics would soon enter a new era of its history, whereby much of the Church's teaching would come in the form of discussion and papal documents. It should be noted, however, that the Catholic Church would still have more to say on this sacrament in later centuries as more questions and concerns would arise.

V. Conclusion

This brief overview of the historical development of the Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist illustrates the rich and intricate history surrounding the Eucharist and other central beliefs. Out of the several important themes that I intended to illustrate, the relationship between faith and reason underlies the entire history of the Christian faith, particularly with the Eucharist: "Christian thinkers, from the beginning, were confronted with the question: How are we to reconcile reason with revelation, science with faith, philosophy with theology?" (*New Advent: The Catholic Online Encyclopedia*, 2009 ed., s.v. "Scholasticism"). As I move into the philosophical and theological defense of this doctrine, I encourage my readers to view my defense as I have the historical development of the Eucharist: *faith seeking understanding*. Christians believe that the human existence is uniquely characterized by the controversial balance between faith and reason. The doctrine of transubstantiation, in particular, is an element of the Catholic faith which finds itself deeply amidst the muddled debate. Thus, as I move forward, it is imperative to see how Catholics are able to offer a rational justification for this mystical belief.

CHAPTER II

PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS AND DEFENSE OF TRANSUBSTANTIATION

“As with all mysteries of faith, there is a point where words and analogies fail. Reason can carry us to the portals of the mystery, but it cannot enter it; the rest is silence, worship, and contemplation. And yet it is better to attempt some explanation, however halting, than to simply declare as doctrine an unintelligible surd, which must be simply accepted in faith.”

Terence Nichols: Transubstantiation and the Eucharistic Presence (page 75)

I. Introduction

The doctrines of transubstantiation and real presence are two distinct issues. As I noted in the historical section, the belief in real presence is the indubitable and miraculous article of faith that Christ is truly present in the Eucharist. Transubstantiation, on the other hand, is the metaphysical explanation that has been cycled through and developed by the Church to explain how it is intelligible for Jesus Christ to be truly and wholly present in the bread and wine. Since the fourteenth century, the Catholic Church has acknowledged the teaching of transubstantiation as the central component in understanding the doctrine of real presence. Thus, while these doctrines are certainly distinct, it is my intent to support the belief that they are inseparable. That is to say, that by believing in the real presence, it necessarily and most appropriately follows, that Catholics must accept the doctrine of transubstantiation. What I hope becomes a noticeable and developed theme within this chapter, is the relationship between the doctrinal aspects of the Catholic faith and the philosophy that the Church uses to understand and express them. The philosophical language and concepts, used by the Church, are believed to be just as universal as the faith claims that they seek to explain.

The Catholic Church's Endorsement and Acceptance of the Thomist Model

As we saw, what is now considered the doctrinal conception of transubstantiation was predominantly authored by Saint Thomas Aquinas; where the language and philosophical concepts are intimately marked by the use of Thomist metaphysics. To a certain extent, this metaphysical explanation has become as dogmatic as the belief in the real presence itself: just as Catholics have accepted the realness of the Eucharist as a matter of authority, so too have they accepted the explanation of transubstantiation. Though this doctrine has shone as one of the Church's brightest accomplishments, it has never escaped intellectual opposition and scrutiny.

It is quite obvious that much has changed in the way of scientific and metaphysical knowledge from the closing of the Church's teaching at the Council of Trent (1563 CE). Man's intellectual drive and capacities have equipped our society with levels of verifiable and scientific information that is incredibly precise and beyond anything seen in centuries before. In particular, the knowledge and understanding that humanity has about the nature and composition of matter is exceedingly more accurate and better supported than what was the case during sixteenth century. As a result of this unparalleled increase and evolution in human knowledge, many believe that the doctrine of transubstantiation, and in turn the belief in the real presence, have become severely damaged. Not only has the belief in Christ's presence in the Eucharist been disregarded, but more universally, many have challenged the basic philosophical principles which have allowed Catholics to talk about the real presence. What was once the accepted and understood teaching on *substance, being* and *accidents* has now become a battleground for intellectual debate. Church theologians, as well, have sought to develop alternative modes of explanation; believing that the Thomist understanding of transubstantiation does not carry the same weight as before.

What Are the Philosophical Issues Surrounding the Eucharist?

As the result of the influence and objections from the doctrine's skeptics, the Catholic community has been left with the responsibility of better understanding this belief, and answering to the questions it now faces: have Catholics lost all ability to talk and think intelligibly about the Eucharist? Is transubstantiation an incoherent notion; something that should be given up? And, is there any place for rationality in trying to make sense of the eucharistic mystery? This skepticism and doubt have created the beginnings of a schism that has scarred the once unanimous eucharistic faith of the Catholic Church. The paired doctrines of

transubstantiation and real presence are now seen as incompatible to many. Moreover, the ability of the Christian faith to rationally understand itself has been called into question: the relationship between what Catholics believe and what the human being knows appears to be more separated than what was once the case.

Overview of Chapter

In this chapter, I intend to do the following: (1) First, I will offer an analysis of the traditional Thomist understanding of transubstantiation: whereby I explain how the Church's model makes use of the fundamental concepts of Aquinas' metaphysics. I hope not only to make clear the Thomist understanding, but more specifically, I will illustrate how this metaphysical stance applies to the belief in the real presence. (2) Secondly, I will address a series of objections and critiques of this model. This section will explicitly attend to the apparent shortcomings and misconceptions of the Thomist model of transubstantiation. These objections will critique the metaphysical, epistemological and scientific aspects of the doctrine. (3) Next, I will highlight several competing models which seek to offer other rational explanations for the belief in real presence. While I intend to accurately emphasize the strengths of these other theories, I will ultimately revert back to the traditional Thomist model, as I believe it is the most intelligent and applicable theory of explanation. Thus, my purpose is to defend the Catholic Church's traditional metaphysical approach against the philosophical skepticism that it has recently encountered. Above all else, however, I hope to restore a certain measure of logical coherency to this mystical article of the Christian faith. I contend that it is of central dogmatic importance for Catholics to be *realists* when it comes to their belief in Christ's presence. How they choose to explain and understand this real presence is of lesser importance; though I hope to make it clear that the traditional model of transubstantiation provides Catholics the ability of making rational and

substantial claims about the Eucharist. (4) Lastly, I will emphasize these doctrines—belief in the real presence and the explanation of transubstantiation—as they relate to the faith and reason debate. This section is intended to take a step back from the logistics of these doctrines, and allow my readers to see how transubstantiation is a matter of faith seeking understanding. In this way, I am trying to show that it is reasonable for Catholics to believe in the real presence of the Eucharist. I will ultimately show that no demonstrative proof can be offered in support of this area of the Catholic faith; or to put it another way, transubstantiation cannot be shown as a logical or scientific proof. Nevertheless, the purpose of this section, and my thesis on the whole, is to demonstrate that transubstantiation is not an irrational belief nor is it metaphysically unintelligible. That is to say, while mystical, there is something that can be said and understood about the Catholic belief in the Eucharist.

II. Transubstantiation: A Rational Model of Explanation

Thomist Metaphysics

Aquinas' metaphysical world view is as complex and involved as any. Famous for the synthesis between Aristotelian philosophy and Christian theology, Aquinas borrows much in the way of the traditional Greek method and approach. The Thomist model of transubstantiation employs the use of several of these metaphysical concepts, including: *substance, accident, form, change* and *being*. In order to understand and critique how Aquinas employs these principles in eucharistic transubstantiation, it is important to gain a basic impression of Thomist metaphysics. Western metaphysics has been commonly known as the branch of philosophy which studies *being qua being*. That is to say, the traditional method of metaphysics has been regarded as the

most basic and fundamental philosophical investigation of nature; or as Peter Kreeft defines it: “that division of philosophy which studies being as such, and the universal truths, laws, or principles of all beings; ‘the science of being qua being’” (Kreeft 1990, 27). Aquinas’ metaphysics operates in the same way, as he attempts to offer a very detailed and exhaustive view of how different types of things exist in the world, and how the human person comes to experience and know them. Though a very broad description, Aquinas’ approach to transubstantiation fits the same method as his overall metaphysical vision: transubstantiation helps the human person to know and understand how the Christ’s body exists in the Eucharist.

Thomist metaphysics is very thorough and laden with a variety of philosophical concepts and terminology. His metaphysical vision and approach are deeply connected with the way in which he understands this doctrine. For the purposes of this exposition and defense, however, I will provide and reflect upon how Aquinas uses the main metaphysical concepts in eucharistic transubstantiation (I will first offer a brief description and analysis of these ideas, and then in the next section, discuss how these concepts operate for Aquinas in the Eucharist).

(1) Substance and Substantial Form. The Scholastic-Aristotelian notion of substance has become a dominant idea within Christian doctrine. For Aquinas, both substance and substantial form are pivotal concepts that help us to understand what a thing is and how it is determined to be such a thing. Though these two ideas are intrinsically linked, they have two very different functions or roles within Aquinas’ metaphysics.

Substance can be best understood, in the Thomist view, as something that exists in itself (Kreeft 1990, 23). It is what a thing is by itself; a being in its most basic and underlying identity, Terrence Nichols suggests:

Aquinas, in line with Aristotle, defines substance as follows: “There are two things proper to substance as a subject. The first is that it does not need an extrinsic foundation in which it is sustained, but is sustained in itself; and thus it is said to subsist, as existing per se and not in another. The second is that it is itself a foundation sustaining accidents; and as such it is said to stand under” (Nichols 2002, 61).

It is important to understand what is meant by substance as ‘underlying’. This often confuses people—making substance sound like some hidden, fictitious or abstract idea. Though this is certainly not the case. While substance is not something that is empirically observable and noticeable (as a trait or feature may be), it is however something that we recognize in our daily life; something that we immediately assume and understand when we identify things. When I look at a cat, for instance, I know that it is a certain substance, not because I can see the substance (as something that stands apart from the cat) but because I notice how the cat is composed and organized in such a way that it is of a particular type of being. Substance is a unique and unchangeable identity; it is how I can say that a cat is a cat and not a dog. This has then taken us to the idea of substantial form.

Trying to explain and comprehend what the notion of substance, it is necessary to discuss this idea of substantial form (commonly understood as essence). Simply put, the substantial form is the ordering principle which organizes and dictates how a certain being exists; the form of something is that which makes it what it is. Like substance, it is not observable as a tangible, concrete object, but it is manifested in the way that things are composed and the way in which beings live and act in a particular way, or as Frederick Copleston says:

This form must not of course be confused with the outward shape or figure of the tree: it is an immanent constitutive principle of activity which makes the oak tree an oak tree, stamping it, as it were, as this particular kind of organism and determining it to act as a totality in certain specified

ways. But what is it that the substantial form of the oak tree ‘informs’ or determines? We might be inclined to answer that it is the matter of the tree, meaning by this the visible material which can be chemically analyzed (Copleston 1976, 89-90).

Thus, I know that this being that I am observing is a cat because it is composed and organized in such a way that it can be nothing else (substantial form). When I look at this object in front of me, I say that is a cat because it is unique from other beings and it is of its own substance. I know that this thing is a cat, John Haldane declares, because, of its nature, identity, and organization: “When we identify what something is, then either explicitly or implicitly we advert to its nature, the principle determinant of which is its substantial form...Substantial forms are the fundamental principles of specific identity and organization” (Haldane 2002, 94). It is also important to note, that according to Thomist metaphysics substances exist in themselves and are not dependent on other modes of being—thus, as I will come to show in my analysis of accidents, substance supports the accidents and exists through change; it is the source of activity (Nichols 2002, 61). While the idea of substance is a key component in Aquinas’ metaphysics, it is not always an easily understood notion. It is best apprehended in its relationship with a subject’s *accidental properties*.

(3) *Accidents*. Often discussed in relation to substance, accidents are considered those qualities and properties of a thing that are nonessential; “that mode of being which can exist only in another being, as a modification or attribute of a substance (thing); e.g. the redness of a rose” (Kreeft 1990, 23). According to Aquinas, and the traditional notion of nonessential properties, accidents are specific to certain subjects; they are different from substances, however, in that they are not inherent to the nature of the thing.

To best understand the role and relationship between these two concepts, consider for instance, a young person—let us call him James. According to a Thomist, to be a person, as James is, he must be of a certain kind of substance. This substance, as Aquinas surely admits, is invisible to eye and other senses. Instead, it is a something that is perceived through the mind: “But substance, as such, is not visible to the bodily eye, nor does it come under any one of the senses, nor under the imagination, but solely under the intellect, whose object is ‘what a thing is’” (Summa Theologica 3.76.7).

Some might contend that I identify James as a person because of his physical features, and perhaps this is true. Certainly I notice that he has skin and that he has the overall shape, look and a constitution of a human person. His physical features and properties, however, are not what qualify him as a person. Suppose James as a young boy had reddish hair, but as an adult he naturally developed dark brown hair. Has James, as an individual substance intrinsically changed? Has his substance in any way lessened or increased? Of course not, the color of his hair, like many other of James’ features, is merely an accidental property.

Accidental, or nonessential properties, are considered secondary because they are not determinative of the substance of the individual. So while we can imagine James has two arms and two legs and is fair skinned, it is entirely possible that he could be without any one of those features and still be of the same substance. This is not to say, however, that accidents are in no way connected to the substance of a thing; certainly the physical features of a human person are not entirely arbitrary, Copleston declares: “In knowing [James’] accidents or modifications we know [his] substance in so far as it reveals itself in and through these modifications...What I perceive is neither an unattached accident nor an unmodified substance: I perceive a modified thing” (Copleston 1976, 86). Thus, when I see James or a cat, I am perceiving a substance, but it

is a modified substance as it is a particular being. In this manner, Aquinas treats the connection between substance and accidents as a matter of ontological priority. Which is to say, that in his assessment of being, Aquinas places emphasis and importance on the substance of a thing, rather than its nonessential qualities:

In Thomist metaphysics the principle point of the substance-accident distinction is to mark a difference between things and attributes of things, and to indicate an order of ontological priority between them. It is not of the nature of attributes to inhere in substances, but substances do not inhere in attributes or anything else” (Haldane 2002, 91).

The relationship between substance and accidents, as we will come to see, becomes a very involved and problematic issue in the Thomist model of transubstantiation. Nevertheless, this relationship is of utmost importance as it is the central philosophical component in understanding the Thomist model.

(4) *Change*. The notion of change is a significant idea in this relationship of substance and accidents. For Aquinas, there are two types of change, *accidental change* and *substantial change*: “in the first substance persists through the modifications of its attributes; and in the second it is destroyed and replaced by another substance or aggregate of these, as when an organism dies and decomposes into a heap of chemical compounds” (Haldane 2002, 96). An accidental change, for Aquinas, occurs when the substance remains yet the accidental properties are altered. Thus, when James matures from a young boy to an adult, many of his physical features have developed and changed, but he remains of the same substance. In this way, an accidental change is said to be a modification of sorts, whereby the nonessential features are changed, but the underlying substance or identity remains the same. On the other hand, a substantial change is when the substance is entirely changed. A good example of substantial

change is what occurs during the digestion of food or drink. Suppose that James eats an apple. Before he consumes, the food is of a particular kind of substance. After he consumes the apple, however, the processes that occur in digestion completely alter and substantially change the apple. Such a process would be labeled a substantial change: “the subject of accidental change, by contrast, is substance, which is to say a quantity of designated matter organized to some substantial form” (Haldane 2002, 96).

(5-6) *Matter and Form*. There are two other terms which are worth distinguishing in Aquinas’ metaphysics. In his vision of nature, Aquinas (borrowing from Aristotle) describes being (the things that exist) as determined by matter and form.

Matter (often referred to as *prime matter* by Aquinas) is that principle material which exists in potentiality only; it is that which has the possibility to become something. This realization, then, is achieved when matter meets form. Form, for Aquinas, is that which a thing is; a cat is of a particular form while a dog is of another; as Brian Davies suggests, “[matter] is potentiality, not actualization...Matter, for Aquinas, is opposed to form. Form is that which something actually is (e.g. a cow), while matter is that by which what it is might not be” (Davies 2009, 47-48). Simply put, form is the “the essential nature of a thing, that which specifies it to be this rather than that” (Kreeft 1990, 26). Matter, then, is that material or things which form gives shape to. Thus, if we were to consider an artist’s statue, for example, the matter would be the clay (or whatever material the artist used) and the form would be the organized structure or figure that the sculptor imposed upon the clay. The matter in this example (the clay or materials used in creating) is understood as “sheer potentiality”; that is it has the ability to become something (i.e. the sculpture). Therefore, the form (is that which a thing is) and the matter is that which takes on the identity or ordering of the form—it is what the thing is composed of.

My intent here is not to merely list and analyze the basic themes of Thomist metaphysics; nevertheless, it is quite necessary to have a basic understanding of the overall tone and general ideas of Aquinas—especially seeing as how these terms provide a fundamental view of the nature and composition of being. Most importantly, the relationship between substance and accidents is the central theme that comes to light in Aquinas’ model of eucharistic transubstantiation—it is a critical observation, and really the point of controversy amongst theologians. Before moving into the doctrine of transubstantiation, it should become understandably clear, that Aquinas’ view of being, particularly within the Eucharist, makes substance to be the primary mode of existence, and thus pushing accidents into a secondary, nonessential category, “while accidents exist, theirs is a secondary and dependent mode of existence while the being of substances is primary in the order of nature” (Haldane 2002, 91).

What Then Is Transubstantiation?

By the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called Transubstantiation (Catechism 2007, 1376).

The position taken by the Catholic Church was uniquely informed by Thomist metaphysics; thus, my exposition and defense of traditional transubstantiation will obviously be within the Thomist metaphysical framework which the Catholic Church is so indebted to. For Aquinas, the belief in the real presence can be explained in no other way than through the change of substance; whereby the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ. Therefore, before the consecration, the sacramental gifts that rest upon the altar are merely bread and wine. The matter is the wheat and grapes (and other ingredients) which are structured and organized

according to the form of bread and wine to create the objects that we can sense (taste, see, smell, touch). Before the consecration they are of two individual substances: bread is of one substance while the wine is of a uniquely different type.

Now of course, as Aquinas admits, this change of substance is entirely a result of divine power. Nevertheless, the whole premise of transubstantiation is that this change is not impossible; rather, there are some intelligible elements that the human mind can understand. After the priest performs the blessing, and the bread and wine have been consecrated, Catholics will not see or sense anything different. The bread and wine, which now have become the body and blood of Christ, will still taste, feel, smell, and look like the bread and wine that was on the altar before. So how do Catholics explain that Christ's body and blood are actually present when no change can be sensually perceived? Recall, Aquinas suggests that there are two types of change: *accidental* and *substantial*; the first being one of modification of the accidents, and the second being an entirely altered change of the substantial and accidental features of the thing. Thus in the case of the Eucharist, it is quite puzzling as the change that Catholics believe in does not seem to be accounted for or accommodated in Thomist metaphysics.

Upon a closer look, we should be able to easily conclude that the conversion that takes place in the Eucharist is not an accidental change. For in a accidental change the substance remains and while the accidental properties are changed; this appears to be the opposite of what occurs in the Eucharist: "The change involved in the Eucharist is not, Aquinas agrees, a natural change, for in natural change you have a change of form, while in the Eucharist you have bread and wine changed wholly into something else (Davies 2009, 365). Therefore, we are left only with a substantial change. Aquinas' position is, in fact, that the change that takes place in the Eucharist is one of substance; his reason for this is that a substantial change is predicated on the

notion that the conversion will bring about a whole new mode of being (the fact that the accidents remain is of lesser importance). According to his metaphysics, however, a substantial change occurs when both the accidents and substance change—thus, there seems to be a discrepancy between the Thomist metaphysical change and the one that takes place in the Eucharist. How can there be a substantial change when the accidental properties remain? Aquinas responds by declaring it a substantial change solely on the basis of a complete change of substance. The fact that the accidents of the bread and wine remain in the sacrament in no way detracts or diminishes the notion that the substance of the bread and wine have totally and entirely been replaced by that of Christ’s body and blood. This of course is not a change that occurs in nature, for Aquinas, but a substantial change of divine power:

For the whole substance of the bread is changed into the whole substance of Christ's body, and the whole substance of the wine into the whole substance of Christ's blood. Hence this is not a formal, but a substantial conversion; nor is it a kind of natural movement: but, with a name of its own, it can be called "transubstantiation" (*ST III* Question 75, Article 4).

Aquinas’ belief in a supernatural change, so to speak, seems to be in keeping with the beliefs of the early Fathers of the Church. Ambrose, himself declared, “be convinced that this is not what nature has formed, but by the blessing nature itself has changed” (Haldane 2002, 92). The belief that this change is supernatural is the main point here. Aquinas, while explaining transubstantiation through grounded metaphysical terms is ultimately suggesting that the change that takes place is stepping outside the bounds of the natural metaphysical order. By the act of divine power, a substance is changed into a whole other substance without any subsequent alterations in its form or accidental properties: “Yet this change is not like natural changes, but is

entirely supernatural, and effected by God's power alone...And this is done by Divine power in this sacrament" (ST III Question 75, Article 4).

How Does this Explain the Real Presence?

Therefore, upon the words of consecration, Catholics believe that a substantial change occurs within the Eucharist by the miraculous power of God. There takes place a substantial change, whereby the accidental properties of the bread and wine remain and the substance is replaced by the substance of Jesus Christ's body and blood. When it comes to the Eucharist, the belief in the real presence is the essential article of faith for Catholics. The Church, while endorsing the model proposed by Thomism, asserts that it is of primary importance for believers to be *realists*. This is to say, that the Church's primary concern is that the belief that Christ is actually present in the Eucharist is of central and dogmatic importance. The teaching of transubstantiation, the metaphysical position that has been held by the Church, is simply a philosophical belief that accounts for this change.

What I have described above is a basic understanding of Thomist metaphysics and a simple analysis of the doctrine of transubstantiation according to Aquinas. This teaching, however, becomes particularly more complex when further investigation is paid towards the relationship between Christ's body and the accidents of the bread and wine which remain. Specifically, does this belief undermine or contradict the Scholastic-Aristotelian philosophical principles upon which it was founded? Consequently, even with a basic reflection on this teaching, there is a variety of questions and issues that need to be addressed.

The Pivotal Issues of this Doctrine

How does the body and blood of Christ exist without its dimensions and quantity?

One facet of this doctrine that remains unclear is how the body of Christ can be substantially contained in the Eucharist. Thomist metaphysics teaches that a body, which is not specifically a human designation, is anything that has dimensions and occupies space. Thus, the belief that Christ's body is actually present in the bread presents an apparent impossibility: how can something of greater size and mass be fully contained in a smaller dimension? The solution to this is found in the notion of what it means for Christ to be substantially present:

Christ's body is not in this sacrament as in a place, but after the manner of substance, that is to say, in that way in which substance is contained by dimensions; because the substance of Christ's body succeeds the substance of bread in this sacrament: hence as the substance of bread was not locally under its dimensions, but after the manner of substance, so neither is the substance of Christ's body (*ST III* Question 76, Article 5).

Christ's body is present in the Eucharist in a different way than a person is contained in a room, for instance. James is contained in a room by the walls and dimensions that confine him; this is drastically different than Christ's presence. After the consecration, the substance of Christ's body and blood and the accidents of the bread and wine are what are present upon the altar. What one must realize is that dimensions, for Aquinas, are not of the same importance as that of substance. It is entirely possible, Aquinas argues, for this substantial change to occur without an alteration in its dimensions or quantity: "On [Aquinas'] account one can distinguish between the substance of a thing and its dimensions" (Davies 2009, 370).

Nevertheless, the question still remains how can Christ's body—which according to Thomist metaphysics is that which occupies space and dimensions—can be present in the Eucharist? Or even more fundamentally, what is the manner in which Christ's body is present, and how is it metaphysically intelligible?

As already mentioned, Christ is present in the Eucharist by way of substance. Aquinas believes that upon this substantial change, Christ's body is in no way lessened or deprived of its accidents or dimensions. This belief would imply that the body that is in the Eucharist is the same body of the actual, historical person who suffered and died upon the cross. How is that conceivable? First and foremost, to say that Christ is substantially contained means that he does not become present by local change. It is not as if Christ was at one moment in Heaven and then all of the sudden was beamed or sent down. You cannot think of transubstantiation in this way; in fact, you cannot think of Christ's body moving in the way that a physical object does. Nonetheless, it is still his actual body. Aquinas suggests that the dimensions of his body (that which occupied space) are there but by the manner of substance:

Since, then, the substance of Christ's body is present on the altar by the power of this sacrament, while its dimensive quantity is there concomitantly and as it were accidentally, therefore the dimensive quantity of Christ's body is in this sacrament, not according to its proper manner (namely, that the whole is in the whole, and the individual parts in individual parts), but after the manner of substance, whose nature is for the whole to be in the whole, and the whole in every part (ST III Question 76, Article 4).

Thus, to say that his body is present, it does not simply mean that Catholics acknowledge some 'spiritly' acceptance of Christ's body. Nor does the Eucharist contain just a small portion of the real body (say, perhaps the heart or flesh only); rather, it contains all one hundred percent of Christ, not a smaller or lesser portion. This, at first, might seem puzzling to believe that his dimensions and quantitative body are present; if that is the case where is it? Why can't I sense it? The distinction must be drawn between a body being present definitively (or dimensively) and a body that is present substantially; Christ's presence, is obviously the latter:

Christ's body is in this sacrament not after the proper manner of dimensive quantity, but rather after the manner of substance. But every body occupying a place is in the place according to the manner of dimensive quantity, namely, inasmuch as it is commensurate with the place according to its dimensive quantity. Hence it remains that Christ's body is not in this sacrament as in a place, but after the manner of substance, that is to say, in that way in which substance is contained by dimensions; because the substance of Christ's body succeeds the substance of bread in this sacrament: hence as the substance of bread was not locally under its dimensions, but after the manner of substance, so neither is the substance of Christ's body. Nevertheless the substance of Christ's body is not the subject of those dimensions, as was the substance of the bread: and therefore the substance of the bread was there locally by reason of its dimensions, because it was compared with that place through the medium of its own dimensions; but the substance of Christ's body is compared with that place through the medium of foreign dimensions, so that, on the contrary, the proper dimensions of Christ's body are compared with that place through the medium of substance; which is contrary to the notion of a located body (ST III Question 76, Article 5).

In the above passage from question seventy-six of the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas clarifies what is meant when Catholics acknowledge Christ's full bodily presence in the Eucharist. He suggests that Christ's body is truly and fully there in the Eucharist, though his manner of presence differs from how a body is located or present in a particular location. Christ's substance is not in anyway lessened or deprived by its dimensions, nor is it totally dependent on them. That is to say, that simply because the dimensions of Christ's body are not what lay upon the altar, it does not necessarily follow that Catholics cannot receive the entirety of his body. Aquinas is saying that Catholics are receiving the entire body of Christ, dimensions included, by way of substance. Certainly, this is a hard and mystical belief to understand, but it should be noted that it is not metaphysically unintelligible; the fact that Christ's dimensions do not become observable after

the consecration should not seem as a problem. Christ's manner of presence—by way of substance—brings to Catholics the fullest possible acceptance of Christ's body. Simply, because Christ is present substantially does not in any way diminish the belief that Catholics are receiving his whole body.

So, when Catholics receive the Eucharist, they believe they are receiving the whole Christ—including the same body and blood, down to the very accidental and specific features. Thus, by receiving the whole Christ, Catholics believe they are receiving his whole person: soul, body, and divinity included. As I mentioned, a substantial change can occur without a change in dimension. Thus, the substantial change that occurs maintains the dimensions on both sides of the conversion: neither the accidents nor dimensions are lost in the bread or the body of Christ:

The substance of Christ's body is not really deprived of its dimensive quantity and its other accidents, hence it comes that by reason of real concomitance the whole dimensive quantity of Christ's body and all its other accidents are in this sacrament (ST III Question 76, Article 4).

How is the substance of Christ's body and blood related to the accidents of the bread and wine?

A second, and probably the most mysterious, aspect of the Eucharist is this notion of how the substance of Christ and the accidents of the bread and wine relate. The predicament, Peter Leithart explains, is that if accidents are to inhere in their subjects, as both Aristotelian and Thomist metaphysics clearly indicate, then how is it that the accidental properties of the bread and wine continue to exist: “The remaining accidents of bread and wine are subject to corruption and even provide physical sustenance, despite the fact that they are ‘substanceless.’ The obvious difficulty with this formulation is to explain how accidents can remain unchanged when the substance on which the accidents depend has undergone a complete conversion” (Leithart 1991, 296). Catholics do not say that Christ's body and blood take on a new set of nonessential

properties; Jesus' body is not made of wheat, nor is his blood alcoholic. Rather, the accidental qualities of the bread and wine remain in existence, with the body of Christ, in order to serve as symbols. Though, this still begs the question how is it possible for the bread and wine to be present if they do not inhere in the subject (as Christ is now the subject/substance of the Eucharist)? This facet of the doctrine creates a quite a bit of confusion and contradiction for a lot of people. Aquinas holds the position that the accidents of the bread and wine continue in the Eucharist without a subject. Instead, they exist in a floating manner, whereby they attach to the 'dimensions' acts as something of a substitute substance in which the other accidents inhere" (Leithart 1991, 296). Though, what exactly does this mean? How do they just exist without inhering in anything? The metaphysical explanation that the Thomist model offers for the continuation of accidents of the bread and wine is that they continue in the dimensive quantity left behind. Aquinas, is adamant in suggesting that the accidents of the bread and wine do not inhere in Christ (He is not their subject. His body is not bread-like nor is his blood alcoholic): "Furthermore it is manifest that these accidents are not subjected in the substance of Christ's body and blood, because the substance of the human body cannot in any way be affected by such accidents; nor is it possible for Christ's glorious and impassible body to be altered so as to receive these qualities" (ST III Question 77, Article 1). Inevitably, the way in which the accidents remain—subsequently reattaching to the dimensive quantity—is beyond the natural metaphysical order and a work of divine power: "It is necessary to say that the other accidents which remain in this sacrament are subjected in the dimensive quantity of the bread and wine that remains" (ST III Question 77, Article 2).

After the consecration and the change in substance, it is believed that the accidents remain not in a proper subject but in the dimensive quantity that exists: "It is necessary to say

that the other accidents which remain in this sacrament are subjected in the dimensive quantity of the bread and wine that remains...when the subject is withdrawn, the accidents remain according to the being which they had before, it follows that all accidents remain founded upon dimensive quantity.” (ST III Question 77, Article 2). For the accidents to remain in the Eucharist, however, without reattachment to any subject (for we do not say that Christ’s body is bread), there must be some guiding or fueling source. Thus, Aquinas suggests that it is possible for accidents to remain, because God serves as the originating cause or effect:

Therefore it follows that the accidents continue in this sacrament without a subject. This can be done by Divine power: for since an effect depends more upon the first cause than on the second, God Who is the first cause both of substance and accident, can by His unlimited power preserve an accident in existence when the substance is withdrawn whereby it was preserved in existence as by its proper cause (ST III Question 77, Article 1).

Aquinas, also, makes special note of the reality that the accidents of the bread and wine remain. God could have changed the bread and wine into the physical bloodied flesh of Christ—that is well within His power. Aquinas, however, believes that it was befitting as a symbol and as a part of our nature for the accidents to remain: “It is evident to sense that all the accidents of the bread and wine remain after the consecration. And this is reasonably done by Divine providence. First of all, because it is not customary, but horrible, for men to eat human flesh, and to drink blood. And therefore Christ's flesh and blood are set before us to be partaken of under the species of those things which are the more commonly used by men, namely, bread and wine” (ST III Question 75, Article 5).

Criticism

Aquinas' explanation for this apparent dilemma is driven by the notion, that in God's unlimited power, He was able to create such a miraculous transformation. This belief is very unsettling for many metaphysicians and theologians, as it seems to not only be a very unintelligible and unnatural idea, but the appeal to God's unlimited power seems to make his model of transubstantiation seem arbitrary and frail. Many are unsatisfied with Aquinas' belief that the type of change that occurs, allows special privilege and exception to metaphysics:

To the objection that the accidents cannot remain independent of their substance, he replied that "there is no reason why the common law of nature should not arrange things in one way, yet for a contrary arrangement to be quite in order because of some special privilege of grace." Thus, "although the common order of nature prescribes that an accident should inhere in a subject, we have here, for a special reason and in the order of grace, accidents without a subject" (Leithart 1991, 305).

Critics of transubstantiation argue, and I think it can seem somewhat valid, that the metaphysical model of transubstantiation can seem somewhat arbitrary, as it gains its strength from God's providential action. I will ultimately conclude, however, that this is a nearsighted view. People often become frustrated or disinterested when they here: 'by Divine power' or 'it's possible because God can do anything'. I encourage my readers to see that this is not entirely the position I am claiming. It is certainly the case that the change that occurs in the Eucharist is miraculous and authored by Divine power, but this change is not totally beyond what we know and sense about the world. While it is beyond natural, Catholics claim that it occurs in nature and thus there are certain elements which we can perceive.

III. Objections and Other Models of Explanation

In this section, I would like to focus on a series of objections directed towards the philosophical basis of transubstantiation. I intend to raise three objections, which in one way or another, will expose a certain dimension of the Thomist model. My three objections will focus upon the metaphysical, epistemological and scientific objections that have been raised since the closing of Trent in the sixteenth century. Following these three objections, I will move into an analysis of three other models of explanation. While all three operate off of different critiques of transubstantiation, I will demonstrate how all these models are influenced by the substance-accident relationship. Towards the end of this section, I will revert back the Thomist position and offer a more thorough and metaphysically grounded solution as to how this phenomenon can take place, and how the human mind can understand it. Inevitably, I believe that these objections and models will strengthen the traditional position of transubstantiation.

Objections

a. Metaphysical

As a metaphysical model, transubstantiation provokes quite a bit of criticism and scrutiny from many a philosopher and theologian alike. Perhaps the most targeted aspect of Thomist metaphysics is the notion of substance, though for the purposes of this section, I believe that there is considerable scrutiny surrounding the relationship between the substance of Christ and the accidents of the bread and wine.

As Haldane suggests, most objections to this aspect of Thomist eucharistic transubstantiation come in one of two forms: (1) Either an objection is raised as to whether it is inconceivable and unphilosophical to suggest that an accident can remain apart from its proper subject and still be

considered an accidental property; and/or secondly (2) a general objection, questions how can we talk about something as an accident when it inheres in no subject?

There are two issues here depending on whether one holds that the appearances of the bread and wine are annexed to the substances of Christ's body and blood; or that they exist wholly and entirely detached, "floating in the air," as it were. First, does it make sense to suppose that an accident can exist apart from the sort of substance of which it is a natural feature? Second is it compatible with the very idea of accidents that they should occur apart from any substance at all (Haldane 2002, 92)?

I think it is best that we first tackle the second of these objections. Remember what Aquinas says about accidents: they are the nonessential properties of a thing. For instance, the fact that James has red hair is merely an accidental feature. The objection, however, wants to know how it is that an accident can exist (as an accident) when it is not supported by its subject. Haldane rightly shows how we can discuss accidental features without any knowledge or reference to their proper subject; we can discuss it, learn about, investigate it, etc How often do we focus on colors, textures, or sounds? In this way, it is not inconceivable to talk or think about an accidental feature without paying any acknowledgement to its substance. The second aspect of this objection, in fact further drives home this point.

Next, how does Thomas acknowledge the accidental features of bread and wine to be mere nonessential properties, when their respective subjects are no longer in existence? Building off of what was just discussed, when the substance of the bread and wine are changed, one might assume, according to Thomist metaphysics, that the accidents in themselves would become proper substances. Though of course, this cannot be the case for Catholics. Nevertheless, Aquinas cannot deny that the accidental features are still around: everyone can still observe the feel, smell, taste and appearance of the bread and wine. This then begs the question, what

remains, and how is it possible? Aquinas will say that the accidents of the bread and wine remain as a matter of divine power, but is this even comprehensible? Or is it a contradiction to suggest that an accident can remain without subsequent reattachment (Haldane 2002, 93)?

Aquinas' answer is that while this might not be empirically noticeable (in the way that other substances and accidents relate in nature), it is not fair to conclude that it is unintelligible. In fact, it should not be surprising that we speak and understand substance-less accidents all the time:

Consider statements such as "it's bright," "it's hot," and "it's noisy," said in relation to the environment generally. Being bright, being hot, and being noisy are accidents, but what do they qualify? Often there will be identifiable substance-sources of features in question, such as light, a fire, or a siren, and one may then rephrase the statements so as to make reference to these. But that is not guaranteed. So far as the nature of light, heat, or noise is concerned they could just be "in the air" but it would be straining things to insist that they are then accidents of air as substance (Haldane 2002, 93).

It is not irrational or nonsensical to talk about accidents with out any reference or connection to its proper substance. In the passage provided by Haldane above, it seems common to talk about accidental features (smell, color, taste, texture) without acknowledging or even knowing a thing's proper substance or subject. So while it is certainly not the case that the change that occurs in the Eucharist is in the proper metaphysical order, it would not be fair to conclude that accidents of bread and wine remaining apart from the body and blood of Christ is an impossible conception: "While the disassociation of from the one substance and association with the other may be wholly unnatural and metaphysically exceptional, they are not, so far as I can see, unintelligible" (Haldane 2002, 93). When, then, does this appeal to intelligibility mean? Just because the change that occurs in eucharistic transubstantiation supersedes or goes beyond the

natural metaphysical order does not mean then that it cannot be acknowledged as possible, nor is this type of change a logical impossibility that transcends the mind. It is not unintelligible to think that an accident can be perceived without its subject (as it was just shown with Haldane) nor should this seem impossible when put into the context of Divine power.

b. Epistemological

One objection that I find particularly strong is actually an attitude or view that was indirectly imposed by Martin Luther—the key figure of the Protestant Reformation and an avid critic of Aquinas and transubstantiation. Basically, Luther embarks on a line of questioning that raises a red flag with regard to the relationship between the mystery of the Eucharist and the human mind's capacity to know it. *How can we know with any degree of certainty that there occurs a substantial change within the Eucharist? Why, when we can apply no verifiable evidence or adequate reason, should we make such substantial claims, as Aquinas so freely does?*

Luther insisted also that the mystery of the sacrament not be explained away. Believers should be "willing to remain in ignorance of what takes place here and content that the real body of Christ is present by virtue of the words". He admitted that he could not understand how the bread is Christ's body, "yet I will take my reason captive to the obedience of Christ, and clinging simply to his words, firmly believe not only that the body of Christ is in the bread, but that the bread is the body of Christ" (Leithart 1991, 310)

While, this objection rests upon the theme of faith and reason (which I have dedicated a reflection to at the end of this chapter), I believe that it does raise concerns over man's intellectual capacities and whether or not we can really know anything real about the eucharistic mystery.

First and foremost, the real presence in the Eucharist is a mysterious article of faith; I think there is no denying this from within or outside the Catholic Church. It should also be

understood that transubstantiation implies a gesture of faith in its metaphysical implications as well. Nevertheless, the Thomist model is not entirely unintelligible to the human mind; in fact, Aquinas' effort to apply Aristotelian principles to the miraculous change is an effort of the human mind to understand the nature of this divine interaction. I believe that Aquinas sees transubstantiation as an explanation that is amid what is logically possible and what is so mysterious as to defy understanding.

Suppose I were to describe the Eucharist as both bread and flesh; this is an obvious contradiction and an impossibility, as an object can only have one substantial form. Similarly, if I were to say that Christ is now bread, there is yet another contradiction. These, however, are not the type of statements that stand in the way of the mind and the mystery, as they are merely logical contradictions. What perplexes the human intellect is how the divine can be contained, in one small host. Catholics must realize that the belief in the real presence must be accepted by faith; transubstantiation, nor any other model, could ever prove this belief. This act of faith becomes the building block, around which we construct our understanding. As Michael Dummett suggests, it is the task of the theologian to declare the religious truths, while the philosopher interprets and determines whether or not this belief is coherent: "What the theologian delivers the philosopher must attempt to interpret, in precisely the same spirit as that in the physicist or psychologist. It is not for him to judge, among theological statements, which are true and which are false, save for those which he concludes that they cannot be true, because they are conceptually incoherent" (Dummett 1987, 232). One can follow each point of the doctrine, Dave Armstrong explains, so long as the human mind understands the presence of the divine: "But in the Eucharist—a supernatural transformation—substantial change occurs without accidental alteration. Thus, the properties of bread and wine continue after consecration, but their essence

and substance cease to exist, replaced by the substance of the true and actual Body and Blood of Christ. It is this disjunction from the natural laws of physics which causes many to stumble” (Armstrong 2003, 80-81).

Thus, when Luther suggests that it is inconceivable and beyond the approaches of the human intellect to talk and logically discern that which occurs in the Eucharist, I do not believe he has a proper understanding of the Eucharist. As much as it is a sacrament, Christians believe the Eucharist also is a point of connection and communion between God and humanity. On the one hand, Catholics undeniably confess that God is performing something entirely miraculous, whereby Christ becomes present upon the altar. On the other hand, however, the human intellect—with its principles of reason and understanding of nature—has the capacity to synthesize this divine interaction with what the human mind knows as metaphysically possible and impossible. Luther is critical of the claims that man makes about *a substantial change*, *remaining accidents*, and so forth. Catholics are not stepping outside of their faith, as Luther supposes (Luther believed in the real presence, just not transubstantiation); rather, the real presence is what Catholics accept through faith and transubstantiation is how they understand it with what we know about nature. Transubstantiation provides the human mind with the capacity to talk about and discern what it is that they believe in.

Thus, the objection that the human mind cannot know or even talk about what occurs in the Eucharist, is in my opinion, entirely unwarranted. Of course human capacities could never fully understand, or even approach, the mystery that is claimed to take place upon the altar. Nevertheless, the belief in the real presence is difficult enough. Putting reason, into the service of faith as transubstantiation does, is merely the attempt of the human mind to clear away that which impedes the vivacity of faith:

Well indeed it cannot really be understood how it is possible. But if it is claimed it is impossible, then a definite contradiction must be pointed to, and if you believe in it, you will believe that each claim to disprove it as contradictory can be answered (Anscombe 2008, 86).

c. Scientific

The idea of a unitary substance or identity has all but lost its meaning in the modern intellectual world. Scientists claim that the basic chemical and biological processes and compounds uniquely form the identity that our human faculties perceive. That is to say, when we think or talk about a substantial being, we are merely (according to scientific skepticism) assigning an identifying label to a mass of intricately connected chemical and biological composition. The modern metaphysician might maintain that there is nothing more substantial in a human being than in the proteins, acids, and other rudimentary elements that we are composed of. Thus, in this modern day, it appears as though the scientific world view of nature and composition of matter, has all but undermined the traditional metaphysical concepts that uphold transubstantiation:

Where, in this chain, do we locate substance? If we say that the substance of the bread—its essential reality, which exists in itself, sustains accidents, and makes it what it is—is its physical and chemical makeup, we are being consistent with modern physics and chemistry. But clearly *this* does not change in transubstantiation. The molecular structure, atoms, elementary particles, quarks, etc., presumably remain unchanged in transubstantiation (so far as I know, no one disputes this) (Nichols 2002, 63).

The scientific objection, then, suggests that the substance or essence that we assign to the subject fails to distinguish itself as wholly other or independent of its accidental properties. Simply put, in Thomist metaphysics, there is a significant difference in ontological priority between substantial form and the accidental properties of a thing. The scientific claim, however, is that

the ‘accidental features’ cannot be in anyway distinguished from the identity of the thing. Thus, substance appears to be an oddly conceived or imagined title that we assign to particular beings. And as we know, without substance transubstantiation is a nonsensical idea.

Does this objection hold water? I think that the rise in modern scientific knowledge has raised serious issues with respect to the Thomist understanding of substance. For instance, how can we separate the human being as a necessity and his features an accidental? Traditional metaphysicians might cite the child’s eye color in support of their claim: ‘certainly we can imagine the young boy (James) could have different color hair or eyes (and surely these features might actually change in his lifetime). The Thomist will argue that these properties can be altered without changing the identity of the boy. The modern intellectual mind, however, is unsettled about this distinction. The idea of a unitary substance—apart and independent of its accidents—is disturbing and unsupported in the modern scientific mind. It is an imagined, free floating idea: not bound by any content or physical features. How can the claim be made that James’ hair is not a part of his identity, when it was biologically and genetically determined like the rest of his person; there seems to be nothing accidental about it? That is to say, we recognize James for who and what he is, not because he is of a particular substantial form, but we recognize him because of the biological and chemical processes that make him what he is. Thus, the biologist and modern metaphysician would equally contend that there is no reasonable way of talking about a person’s identity or being (that which characterizes and individuates himself from others) as independent from these other factors.

This general shift away from Thomist metaphysical worldview carries with it drastic effects on the Church’s view of substance and accidents. I believe, however, that much of the criticism and scrutiny directed at transubstantiation is the result, or rather misconception, of the

way in which Aquinas envisions the relationship between substance and accidents. I think it is unfair to place this criticism upon Aquinas, as I believe that his metaphysics makes room for such scientific knowledge. Even more, I believe that this ‘scientific objection’ is fueled by the idea that metaphysics and scientific knowledge or in competition, or are in some way undermining each other. As Frederick Copleston (a great commentator of Aquinas) suggests, this could not be any more wrong: “Metaphysics does not stand in the way of the development of the sciences; it leaves room for their development and indeed demands their development, that concrete content may be given to the bare bones of categorical generality” (Copleston 1976, 36).

Not to take this criticism to scientific grounds, but simply because James is composed of a unique strand of molecules, atoms and D.N.A., I do not think that that confounds Thomist metaphysics. Metaphysics, particularly this idea of substance, might seem abstract or fictitious to some. Though what I think many do not realize is that metaphysics is simply a grounded or logical view of the natural world. Simply because all human beings are unique, and drastically ornate, biological compositions, does not mean that we can see or talk about James as a human being. For Aquinas, what makes James a human being is not just his biology but the fact that his body is organized and ‘informed’ (substantial form) in a certain way, he is form-matter composite with his human soul as the substantial form of his body. Scientific knowledge, as much as it is verifiable and authentic, cannot contradict or undermine anything about substance: “substance is a purely metaphysical category, which cannot be investigated by empirical science” (Nichols 2002, 63-64). Though that does not mean that science and metaphysics cannot support one another. Scientific inquiry is based in the most rudimentary metaphysical concepts: change, relation, composition, etc. A substance, like a person, is organized according to some ordering and unifying principle (this is what is understood as substantial form). Thus, a thing is

determined to act and conform to a certain way of being according to its proper substance; a cat acts as a cat because of what it is. It is because things are organized metaphysically that they are available to scientific investigation. Thus, in the case of the substance-accidents relationship, simply because scientific knowledge of composition can account for all facets of a being's existence, it does not necessarily follow that we cannot assign ontological priority to substance and accidents. To assume that scientific knowledge has crippled and replaced the understanding of substance leaves the believer without anyway of properly talking about and comprehending the world. This was a critical point in Cardinal Ratzinger's (now Pope Benedict XVI) recent work *God is Near Us*:

Has the Church not with her concept of substance—for she speaks of “transubstantiation”—fettered herself to far too great an extent, to a science that is basically primitive and obsolete? Do we not know precisely how material is constituted: made up of atoms, and these of elementary particles? That bread is not a “substance”, and, in consequence, none of the rest can be true? The word “substance” was used by the Church precisely to avoid the naïveté associated with what can be touched or measured (Ratzinger 2003, 84).

Presumably the scientist and metaphysician who are skeptical of transubstantiation would likely declare that the identity of the bread and wine do not change: as there has been no alteration in their chemical composition and structure. In response, however, Aquinas would contend that because man can talk about substance, there need not be any empirical change as it is a conversion conducted by divine power.

Other Models

Having addressed several strong camps of criticism, I would like to turn next to a series of alternate models of explanation. These theories, in one way or another, have found insurmountable discrepancies with the Thomist transubstantiation; many of these discrepancies have

been raised in the above objections. In examining these alternative theories, I am interested in seeing whether they hold onto the notion of real presence and that they account for a change in the sacramental gifts.

a. Consubstantiation

Considered the arch-rival model to transubstantiation, consubstantiation was produced during the Reformation, and was made famous through the endorsement of Martin Luther. As has already been discussed, Luther was concerned over the Church's use of reason in its understanding of the Eucharist. Though he attacked Aquinas' use of metaphysical principles, Luther, too, was considered a high authority on Aristotelian-Christian theology. The source of his problems were found in the Thomist notion of how substance and accidents interact in the Eucharist. It was Luther's opinion that to make such a bold and knowledgeable claim, without the necessary rational capacity or verifiable evidence, is a bit unsettling. Simply put, to completely undermine the natural scheme of metaphysics in trying to explain an unexplainable mystery is foolish.

Some have cited Luther, and his consubstantiation model (it should be noted that consubstantiation was not actually developed by Luther, but his approval made the model known), as hypocritical in this regard as he employs the use of Aristotelian metaphysics as well. Though these objections are off base. Luther's theory is much simpler and in keeping with the traditional method of Aristotle's metaphysics. In consubstantiation: "the substance of Christ's Body exists together with the substance of bread, and in like manner the substance of His Blood together with the substance of wine. Hence the word *Consubstantiation*" (*New Advent: The Catholic Online Encyclopedia*, 2009 ed., s.v. "Consubstantiation"). It is said that Luther's theory is more empirically supported and logically sound; which I believe is fair claim to make. His

main incentive for proposing a new mode of understanding for the real presence was because transubstantiation went beyond the limits of reason and revelation (Leithart 1991, 309). Thus, he proposed in consubstantiation man is merely recognizing what he believes with what he sees; Luther acknowledges no reason why both substances cannot exist simultaneously in the Eucharist: “‘It is of no great consequence whether the bread remains or not.’ Still, he preferred to say that there are two substances, which in reality and name are one substance” (Leithart 1991, 313). This view allowed Luther to avoid the troublesome problem of the substance-accident relationship that Aquinas found himself forced to confront. Also, consubstantiation makes itself available to explanation from a layman’s perspective; upon the altar Christ becomes present, such that the Eucharist now contains both Christ and the bread. ‘I see the bread and wine, yet I believe that they are the body and blood of Christ’—consubstantiation holds onto both of these.

Where Luther finds resistance on this view is in the notion of unitary substance, and whether or not there undergoes a real change. Thomists readily point out, that even though Luther himself criticized Aquinas for his ‘manipulation of metaphysics’, the same could be said of Luther; particularly in the idea that the Eucharist contains two substances. This idea falls into direct contradiction with Aristotelian metaphysics, which suggests that a subject is of only one specific substance; though of course, as is typical with eucharistic theology, Luther here wants to make the exception. While his dual-substances is the vulnerable point of attack from Thomists, it is not in the respect that it violates the traditional metaphysical theme that the Church finds Luther’s consubstantiation unsettling. The consequences of Luther’s model seem suggest that a different sort of change takes place; traditional Church theologians interpret this as a change of a lesser kind:

What always mattered to the Church is that a real transformation takes place here. Something genuinely happens in the Eucharist. There is something new there that was not before. Knowing about a transformation is part of the most basic eucharistic faith. Therefore it cannot be the case that the Body of Christ comes to add itself to the bread, as if Body and bread were two similar things that could exist as two “substances” in the same way, side by side. Whenever the Body of Christ, that is the risen bodily Christ, he is greater than the bread, other, not of the same order... Whenever Christ has been present, afterward it cannot be just as if nothing had happened” (Ratzinger 2003, 85-86).

Consubstantiation presents serious problem for the notion of change within the Eucharist; a theme which dates back, as we saw, to the early period of the Church. How can it be the case that a divine substance enter into the bread and wine and be co-equal and co-existent with an earthly substance? The Church, in its acceptance of the Thomist model, assigns ontological priority to the substance of Christ. ‘This is my body...’ implies that it is nothing else. In fact, even though he wrote centuries before Luther, Aquinas himself anticipated and dismissed the basic notion of consubstantiation:

Some have held that the substance of the bread and wine remains in this sacrament after the consecration. But this opinion cannot stand: first of all, because by such an opinion the truth of this sacrament is destroyed, to which it belongs that Christ's true body exists in this sacrament; which indeed was not there before the consecration... "This is My body," which would not be true if the substance of the bread were to remain there; for the substance of bread never is the body of Christ. Rather should one say in that case: "Here is My body."(ST III Question 75, Article 2).

The bread and wine are not the body and blood of Christ. For not only is it wrong to think that both substances—Christ and the bread---can exist mutually together, but as Aquinas points out, the Church has always interpreted that it is now Christ present in the Eucharist. Not Christ and

the bread and wine. If Christ can only become present by way of substance, then it must be the case according to Thomist metaphysical notion of substantial change, that the preexisting substance must change; no two substances can remain: “Christ's body cannot begin to be anew in this sacrament except by change of the substance of bread into itself. But what is changed into another thing, no longer remains after such change. Hence the conclusion is that, saving the truth of this sacrament, the substance of the bread cannot remain after the consecration” (ST III Question 75, Article 2).

At the end of the day, I believe that transubstantiation is more in keeping with the central articles of eucharistic faith and the spirit of the real presence. While both of these models have their metaphysical vulnerabilities, I believe that the leap that Aquinas makes in his philosophical position possesses far less egregious and damaging consequences as Luther's.

b. Transignification (Transfinalization)

A new and powerful eucharistic theology is currently on the rise in the modern Church. Pioneered by Edward Schillebeeckx, and other theologians, this new reflection seeks to understand the notion of Christ's presence in a totally new and revolutionary way. In this new model, transignification, the focus is directed away from what occurs in the Eucharist itself, and instead is focused on the way in which Christ becomes present in the community: “Where the older focus was on the real presence in the Eucharistic elements, the newer focus is on the presence of Christ within the community through the symbolic ritual of the whole mass” (Nichols 2002, 58).

The strength behind this theory is that it appears to be understood on a more universal and comprehensible level. The biggest distinction is that transignification operates off of the

notion of change of use, while of course transubstantiation emphasizes a change of substance. A strong example of this is provided by Cardinal Ratzinger. Before it is constructed, a nation's flag is merely a piece of cloth. When it becomes crafted and dedicated, however, it no longer is considered a piece of cloth; in this way, it is incurring a new use, meaning and function. The flag becomes a symbol and reminder of a nation's values, hopes and beliefs. Many theologians have turned away from the arduous task of accepting the Thomist metaphysical change and instead have accepted this new model, as they believe it is more in keeping with scripture. These revolutionary thinkers have focused not on Christ's presence in the Eucharist, but more profoundly, the model calls for emphasis upon Christ's presence in the community, "it is not so much the elements that are changed in the consecration as the community's perception of them" (Nichols 2002, 59).

While the Catholic Church acknowledges that this view raises important messages and effects that the Eucharist has upon its community, the Church inevitably must look unfavorably upon this new theory. The Church's claim against this position is that it allows Catholics to not be *realists*, which of course is a fundamental aspect of the Catholic eucharistic faith. Though another important criticism of this view is that it places the efficacy of the Eucharist within the believer, as opposed to within God: "I would hold that the presence of the Lord in the community is founded on the presence of the Lord in the Eucharist, and not the other way around (as Cooke seems to imply), and that with a loss of a sense of the real presence, the presence of the Lord in the community will be vitiated as well" (Nichols 2002, 60).

Transignification emphasizes symbolic expression; whereby the Eucharist symbolizes both the sacrifice that Christ offered on our behalf, as well as the unity that now unites us together in his Church. The Church, which has always accepted and highlighted the symbolic

dimension of the Eucharist as a sacrament, must always hold onto the realness of the sacrament as well. Pope Paul VI, in his encyclical *Mysterium Fidei*, addresses rising philosophies and theological visions that seek to replace or undermine the model of transubstantiation. In this letter, the pope deals explicitly with this idea of transignification. In Paul VI's argument against this new model, he raises two important claims. First, the pope emphasizes that the teaching on the Eucharist is based off of divine revelation first and then supported by human understanding: "And so we must approach this mystery in particular with humility and reverence, not relying on human reasoning, which ought to hold its peace, but rather adhering firmly to divine Revelation" (Pope Paul VI 1965, 16). In this way, he is suggesting that this new model of transignification undermines the literal and realist interpretation that is given at the sacrament's institution at the Last Supper. And secondly, the pope argues that transignification, while highlighting the important symbolism of the Eucharist, entirely undermines that which makes this sacrament so special and intimate to Christ's message: "While Eucharistic symbolism is well suited to helping us understand the effect that is proper to this Sacrament—the unity of the Mystical Body—still it does not indicate or explain what it is that makes this Sacrament different from all the others" (Pope Paul VI 1965, 44). The realness of Christ's presence should in no way be confused with symbolic representation. Such an error would undermine the salvific function of the sacrament. Certainly there is a symbolic aspect of unity and memorial of the Eucharist, however, the sacrament of the Eucharist contains much more than that.

c. Nichols: Subsidiary Substances

This last theory that I would like to address is an interpretation and rebuilding effort of the traditional Thomist model. Terence Nichols' notion of subsidiary substances is an attempt to

hold onto the belief in substantial conversion in the Eucharist, while overcoming the contemporary concerns raised by scientific knowledge.

As I noted in the scientific critique, a strong criticism that has recently surfaced suggests that substantial form is an empty and contentless idea, as the true identity of a thing is really determined by its chemical composition and constitution. Thus, the objection that transubstantiation must overcome is: how can it be the case that the bread and wine ceases to be bread and wine when nothing occurs within its composition. Of course the traditionalists argue that substantial change alters the identity of the bread and wine. Though Nichols' point, and I do believe its worth highlighting, is that the bread and wine have really remained the same; nothing has changed within their elements: "the bread and wine do *not cease* being what they are — their chemical structure and form remain the same" (Nichols 2002, 70). For Nichols, who believes in both a change and the real presence, what happens in the Eucharist is that the bread and wine are changed in so far as how they relate to the substance of the Eucharist. Or to put this another way, once the gifts have been consecrated, and the real presence of Christ is acknowledged, the bread and wine then become *subsidiary substances*; which for Nichols means, they are not independently existing essences, but instead or contingent upon the presence of Christ:

What changes is that they are no longer independent substances existing *per se*, in themselves, rather, they exist in another. Similarly, the bread and wine do *not cease* being what they are — their chemical structure and form remain the same, else they could not function as food — but they cease to be independently existing substances and become incorporated into another substance, the Body and Blood of the Lord, as subsidiary entities (Nichols 2002, 70).

Nichols supports this model with an example of how we view the elements within the human body. When the human person ingests food (which like the apple from my previous example would have been considered a substance in itself), or a certain kind of vitamin, these

molecules become integrated into the human body, in such a way that they are considered to be working parts of the whole: “My proposal is that what happens in transubstantiation is *analogous* to the incorporation of atoms or molecules into the body. If I ingest a mineral (say calcium) or amino acids (in the form of protein), these molecules are built into my cells and become part of a larger substantial whole, my body. But they do not cease to be calcium or amino acids: if they did, they could not nourish the body” (Nichols 2002, 70).

What Nichols considers to be the strength behind his model, might actually be considered a pitfall by his critics. Nichols believes that his notion of *subsidiary substances* satisfies both sides of the scientific debate. While on the one hand, his notion appeases the Thomist because it confirms that real substantial change that take place; ultimately concluding Christ is present fully and substantially. Nichols supports the scientific claim as well, as his model does not reject the idea that the bread and wine retain their identity: “We do not need to deny that the bread is bread or the wine wine after the consecration, only that they cease to be independent substances, and instead are incorporated into the substance of the glorified body and blood of Christ” (Nichols 2002, 71).

The best objection to this model is actually best expressed in a comparison. Is it not the case that Nichols is offering a more contemporary, elaborate and scientifically-based theory of Luther’s consubstantiation? While I believe that Nichols’ idea is quite profound, the essential question is whether or not he stands on different grounds than Luther. It is undeniably the case, that Nichols is walking a fine line between traditional transubstantiation and the Reformer’s consubstantiation, but does his notion of subsidiary substances fall into the same error of Luther’s dual substances? At the end of the day, Nichols’ position is that both Christ and the bread and wine are present; this is a conclusion which casts him into the category of

consubstantiation. To this, I believe that he would reply that his model does not undermine any belief proposed in Aquinas' transubstantiation; rather, he would argue that it gives a more accurate and truer meaning to our understanding of the bread and wine. While I am not sure exactly how Aquinas would feel about this theory, I believe that the Church should give it consideration. My position here is to analyze and defend the traditional dogmatic teaching, as proposed by Aquinas. I personally think that Nichols' idea avoids this issue of consubstantiation and pushes transubstantiation a bit further. That is, in no way does it change transubstantiation. It makes it a more comprehensible and content based model.

In fact, it is worth noting that Nichols devotes a small section towards the end of his essay on the 'Ecumenical Implications' of his theory. He suggests that his interpretation, or new model, might appeal to a variety of different Christian Churches. Providing support for why his reinterpretation might gain interest from other groups of Christians, I found his draw to the Lutherans to be the most compelling:

This conception of transubstantiation should have significant ecumenical implications. Luther, and Lutherans following him insisted on the real presence, but could not admit that the bread and wine ceased to be present after the consecration. The Augsburg Confession (German version) affirms: "It is taught among us that the true body and blood of Christ are really present in the Supper of our Lord under the form of bread and wine and are there distributed and received." Therefore the bread and wine and the Body and Blood of Christ, are *both* present in the Eucharist. Catholics however pointed out that this would mean two substances inhabiting the same space, an impossibility. The formulation of transubstantiation presented here may be more acceptable to Lutherans than the traditional doctrine, since it admits that the bread and the wine are not destroyed, but remain, though they cease to be separate substances, existing in themselves, and instead exist as subsidiary elements in another (Nichols 2002, 73).

Is Nichols suggesting that he has synthesized and found common ground between the Lutheran and Catholic Churches with regard to transubstantiation? Possibly so. Though it might be worth considering what his reinterpretation means as to the differences between consubstantiation and transubstantiation, and whether or not his ideas have helped to clear away the clutter and better understand the core discrepancies that exist.

The Church's Position: Proficiency of the Thomist Model

In the above sections, I tried to answer the question, *why does the Church accept this model?* To put it simply, transubstantiation allows Catholics to understand how it is intelligible for Christ to become present in the Eucharist. The Thomist model allows believers to not only comprehend how this is possible, but it provides them with a meaningful way of talking about this mystery. *Will the Church's position ever waiver or evolve?* I do not believe that transubstantiation will ever be replaced, as substance is a philosophical concept that was explicitly chosen: "Substance was used by the Church precisely to avoid the naïveté associated with what can be touched or measured" (Ratzinger 2003, 84).

Having said that, I do not know if the doctrine of transubstantiation is closed to further improvement. As the human mind continues to develop and better understand nature, I believe that it is entirely possible for us to have a better understanding of the philosophical concepts that serve as the basis of this idea. What is certain, however, the Church will not accept any theory which contradicts any point of transubstantiation.

IV. Faith and Reason

Aristotle vs. Aquinas

The debate between faith and reason is a theme which underlies the whole discussion and theology of transubstantiation and the eucharistic mystery. If any believer is confused as to whether transubstantiation is a matter of faith or a logical proof offered through the human faculties, one ought to investigate the theology and method of Aquinas himself. As much as he is credited with introducing Aristotelianism into the Catholic tradition, let there be no mistake about it, Saint Thomas Aquinas was also theologian—not only a philosopher:

Aquinas does not rely on rational or philosophical argument as a means of establishing that Christ is present in the Eucharist. He uses philosophical arguments in trying to give an account of the celebration of the Eucharist. But belief in the literal or non-symbolic eucharistic presence of Christ is not, for him, something grounded on what we might recognize as proof or demonstration. As he sees it, it is something implied by Christian faith. ‘We could never know by our senses that the real body of Christ and his blood are in the sacrament, but only by our faith which is based in the authority in God’ (Davies 2009, 365-366).

His tone and method resembled, quite intimately, the metaphysical approach introduced by Aristotle. Nevertheless, and this is a point that every Thomist will agree upon, Aristotle would not have endorsed or agreed with the idea of transubstantiation. For Aristotle, a change entails either that accidents are altered (accidental change) or both the substance and the accidents are changed (substantial change). To declare the type of change that Aquinas argues for in transubstantiation would be impossible for Aristotle (Nichols 2002, 62). Discrepancies like these are the result of the faith that exists in Aquinas’ theology; particularly in the doctrine of transubstantiation.

Aquinas most surely would have agreed, ‘Aristotle could have made no sense of the notion of transubstantiation. It is

not a notion that can be accommodated within the concepts of Aristotelian philosophy, it represents the breakdown of these concepts in face of mystery.' That is why Aquinas speaks of transubstantiation as a unique change without parallel and effected by God as a miracle (Davies 2009, 374).

The Faith in Transubstantiation and the Place of Reason

Any analysis and defense of transubstantiation, even those more intelligent and sophisticated than mine, will leave its reader's with further perplexing questions and uncertainties; and this is rightly so. Many of the questions that I believe my audience will raise will revolve around this mystery as it relates to faith and reason.

Does the presence of faith take away some of the luster or beauty behind transubstantiation? Are Aquinas' efforts, and the other thinkers I have covered, worth anything if there has been no demonstrative proof offered? Does reason really provide us with any insight into the mystery of the real change? Did Thomas Aquinas have it right when he tailored the doctrine of transubstantiation? Does the doctrine of transubstantiation close the mystery of real presence? Or are there other acceptable modes of explanation? Or none at all?

Of course, these are not questions I can answer (at least not to the satisfaction of critics), as they must be left to my audience. Though I will say any exposition and close study of the eucharistic belief will inevitably reveal how important both the presence of reason and mystery in any act of faith. The reality of believing is as real and as important as the place of rationality in the human existence. Many people are opposed to living a life mystery, and thus, are completely content in living a life in which they accept only that which can be proved. I do not believe, however, that this leads them to anything worthwhile. I think it is more than fair to claim that the natural condition of humanity is one intimately related to both mystery and belief.

When one examines transubstantiation from the outside, it comes across as an illogical and absurd idea. If someone were to accept the preexisting faith-claims that explanation presupposes, then this doctrine might not seem so absurd. This is precisely the intention of Aquinas. Transubstantiation is not casted towards nonbelievers; it instead seeks to clear any confusion that might seem to impede the human faith from accepting the Eucharist. He is putting reason into the service of faith; as Elizabeth Anscombe argues:

It is a mystery of faith which is the same for the simple and the learned. For they believe the same, and what is grasped by the simple is not better understood by the learned: their service is to clear away the rubbish which the human reason so often throws in the way to create obstacles (Anscombe 2008, 91).

As I close this philosophical exposition, it might still remain unclear what, if anything, has been accomplished by transubstantiation? The Eucharist is a very rich belief, yet it remains difficult for the Catholic Church to defend, as it presents opportunities for skepticism from a variety angles. Lots of people remain unsatisfied and perplexed by what the Church formally teaches in transubstantiation. I would anticipate that this is a result of improper expectations; no proof or analysis will ever cast a light on this teaching in such a way that no doubt can be seen: “It would be wrong to think, however, that the thing can be understood, sorted out, expounded as a possibility with nothing mysterious about it. That is, that it can be understood in such a way as is perhaps demanded by those who attack it on the ground of its obvious difficulties” (Davies 2009, 373).

If I can leave my readers with one last thought: I think it is best to understand transubstantiation as an attempt to show the conditions in which the real presence could be possible and intelligible. God intervenes for the sake of human salvation, or so the Christian tradition goes. And this interaction occurs in our human existence—a corporeal and finite

condition. Could we label this mystery that Catholics believe occurs in the Eucharist as anything other than miraculous? Absolutely not. The human being, nevertheless, must admit that while this mystery is entirely beyond what naturally occurs in the proper order of things, it is not a belief that completely transcends the human mind. It is not philosophically indefensible, nor is it metaphysically unintelligible. What makes the Eucharist so great and so dynamic is that it is an act of the divine entering into the human condition. In the event that God became Incarnate, His mystery opened itself to the human person. Therefore in the eucharistic teaching, Catholics are not assigning arbitrary or senseless explanations (metaphysical models), nor are they stepping outside the realm of their rational capacities. It is actually quite the opposite—God has made Himself known on a human level. Transubstantiation reflects the human efforts to understand how a divine miracle has occurred in the flesh. Though more profoundly, I think Aquinas (and other apologetics) wants to say that the eucharistic mystery does not stand against reason, but instead captures and represents multiple aspects of the human existence.

CHAPTER III

THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS AND DEFENSE OF THE EUCHARIST IN THE CATHOLIC SYSTEM OF BELIEF

“The Eucharist means God has answered: the Eucharist is God as an answer, as an answering presence. Now the initiative no longer lies with us, in the God—man relationship, but with Him, and now it becomes really serious”

Cardinal Ratzinger: God Is Near Us (page 90)

I. Introduction

Thus far I have investigated two critical aspects of the Catholic eucharistic doctrine: a historical trace of the Church's teaching and consistency, as well as a philosophical examination and defense of the transubstantiation model. Yet there is still another dimension in which the Catholic belief in the Eucharist is defensible. In this last chapter, I intend to investigate how the doctrine of transubstantiation and the belief in the real presence coheres with and appropriately follows the other beliefs that Catholics hold. That is, beginning with certain presuppositions, there is a certain basis and strong progression to the Catholic understanding of real presence and the necessity of the sacrament of the Eucharist. In my analysis of this highly questioned dogma I will show how it is that the Church's position on the Eucharist is keeping with the framework and spirit of the Catholic Christian message. There is an interconnection and consistency of the articles of the Catholic faith, whereby, accepting one it becomes necessary to accept the others.

This theological defense will contain an analysis of what place the Eucharist has in the Christian message of salvation, whereby I unpack the Catholic beliefs on the saving work of the incarnate Christ. What will become a dominant theme in this portion of my work is the reciprocating relationship between what Catholics believe about the Eucharist and the Incarnation. The Incarnation, in its classical, Catholic understanding, is the foundation for the efficacy of sacramental worship; that which makes it real and necessary for Catholics. The Incarnation—the act of God becoming human in the person of Jesus Christ—inspires and fuels the salvific need of the Church and its sacramental worship; practices and beliefs which Catholics claim have been brought to human beings

by Christ. The reality of the Eucharist is effective only insofar as the graces of the Incarnation allowed for such a sacrifice to be possible. On the other hand, the Eucharist both confirms and reaffirms everything that Catholics hold onto in faith. This element of the Church is regarded as the central and culminating point of Catholic Christian worship as it enriches and supports the lives of those who participate in the eucharistic Body. In embarking upon this theme, I will also discuss the nature of the relationship of the Eucharist and the Church. How these two separate, though intimately connected doctrines, both support and reveal one another. What will be different about this portion my defense, is that the strength and support of this position is upheld by the other central articles of the Church. Thus, I will be speaking in a Catholic tone: *Why is the Eucharist important to the Catholic faith? How should I understand the Church's teaching on the Eucharist?* "If we are to understand the Eucharist," Marie-Joseph Nicolas explains "we must set it in its context. It can only be understood in light of the economy of the Incarnation. The mystery of the eucharistic presence will remain incomprehensible to those who do not begin by believing that the body of Jesus is that of God made man, that of the Incarnate Word" (Marie-Joseph 1962, 37).

In this way, I am investigating the 'source and summit' of my Catholic faith and I am seeking to understand both how and why this is possible. Who we are as Catholics, and what we believe about the nature of God and humanity, is expressed in what we believe about the Eucharist. My work will hopefully suggest that any misunderstanding of the doctrine of transubstantiation and the real presence merely reflects discrepancies and misconceptions in the other, more basic elements of the Catholic faith. In this way I am saying, that by accepting certain precepts of Catholicism, it logically follows that the

real presence is a necessary and fitting belief. For Catholics, as Dave Armstrong points out, the belief that the transformation has taken place is inspired by what they believe about the Incarnate reality of Christ and the salvific necessity of God's Intercedent presence:

If one accepts that God became Man, then it cannot consistently be deemed impossible (as many casually assume) for him to be truly and really present under the appearances of bread and wine. Jesus, after his Resurrection, could apparently walk through walls while remaining in his physical (glorified) body. How, then, can the Real Presence reasonably be regarded as intrinsically implausible by supernaturalist Christians? (Armstrong 2003, 82).

In the following chapter, I will begin with laying the foundation of what the Incarnation is and how Catholics see and understand the person of Jesus Christ: what can be said of the mystery of Christ as both fully divine and fully human. Next, I will discuss and reflect upon the nature and function of the Eucharist in the Catholic Church. In this portion of my analysis, I will draw connections between the Eucharist and other dimensions of the Catholic faith, including the Incarnation, the doctrinal conception on the nature of Christ, the general nature of sacraments, and the Church itself. To help draw this out, I will raise an objection voiced from the modern Protestant theologian Paul Tillich. I offer this critique in hopes of highlighting what tensions reside around the Eucharist within not only the Christian community but from a perspective that a variety of people hold about the Eucharist. Through this critique, I intend to show how the Eucharist is a reflection of God's infinite love and capacity to help us; how it is a reflection of our condition and our need and want for something greater; and how it is the Eucharist, in line with the Incarnation and whole mission of Christ Himself, that makes

our relationship with God so dynamic. Ultimately, the intent of this defense, just as it was in my philosophical section, is to show how another dimension of this Catholic position is characterized by internal rational consistency.

II. The Incarnation and the Nature of Christ: The Basis for the Eucharistic Faith

As I have already mentioned, in analyzing the Eucharist, there must be a proper foundation and understanding of several other articles of the Catholic faith, namely: the Incarnation and the nature of Jesus Christ. Thus, in this section, I attempt to adequately show what Catholics traditionally understand as the Incarnation, and how we attempt to speak about the mystery of Jesus Christ as both human and divine. Such an analysis requires a brief historical overview of the context and Councils in which these doctrines were formally defined, as well as a theological investigation as to how Catholics properly understand and apply these doctrines to the Eucharist.

As we saw in the historical development of the Eucharist, the Church encountered inconsistencies and opposing views as time went on. The same was the case with both the Incarnation and the nature of Christ. In the beginning century, and on through the patristic era, it was nearly unanimous amongst the Christian community that the Incarnation of Christ was the actual event of God becoming human. In fact, this is still the same traditional and basic belief that we hold today. The doctrine, however became more confounded when further consideration is given towards the person of Christ? *What does it mean for God to become human? How is this possible? Was Jesus truly both divine and human? How could he fully be both of these?*

The Ecumenical Development of the Doctrine of Christ

Recall, ecumenical councils are those formally convened meetings of Church authority to discuss and gain a better basis of Church doctrine in opposition to circulating heretical beliefs. Beginning in the early fourth century on through the mid fifth century, the Church convened its first three assemblies (all of which are different) in order to address the proper belief of the nature of Christ. The first general council, the Council of Nicaea I, was assembled in 325 CE in response to the heretical view called Arianism which professed that Christ was a creature of God and not fully divine in the way that the Father was; Arius taught that Christ was a sub-creator of God. Thus, the Council of Nicaea, focusing their efforts on defining how Christ was fully divine, produced what is called the Nicene Creed. In this expression of faith (creed simply means believe—*credo: I believe*), the Council laid down the proper language and way of understanding Christ as fully divine. This assembly taught that in no way was Christ inferior or created by the Father. He was coeternal and of the same being of God the father: “Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, and born of the Father before all ages. (God of God) light of light, true God of true God. Begotten not made, consubstantial to the Father, by whom all things were made (*New Advent: The Catholic Online Encyclopedia*, 2009 ed., s.v. “The Nicene Creed”). Therefore what is important to gather from this Council, with respect to our present goal, is that the Church taught that Christ was fully divine, in so far as he was *homousious*—‘of the same being’—with the Father.

In 381 CE the Council of Constantinople I was called in response to an unorthodox view that was on the rise under Apollinarius of Laodicea. This heretical view known as Apollinarianism was a view that came out of the Council of Nicaea. In an

explicit effort to emphasize the divinity of Christ, Apollinarius taught that Christ was not fully human in the way that we think of the human condition. In the act of God becoming man, Christ did not take on a full human and rational soul; his divinity, Apollinarius suggested, superseded this facet of the human constitution. The result of which, this Council would determine, makes Christ not fully man. “He had been so intent on defending the Nicene faith in Christ’s divinity that he held that in the incarnation, the Logos or Word of God assumed a body but took the place in Christ of the higher (spiritual and rational soul) soul. Hence Apollonarius did not acknowledge a complete humanity in Christ; he was truly divine but not fully human” (O’Collins and Farrugia 2003, 32). The Church authorities found this view to be in direct opposition of what the Christian community has always held and taught about Christ. That is to say, the Incarnation has always been predicated upon the belief that God became Jesus as person of both full humanity and divinity. Thus, Gregory of Nazianzus and the presiding bishops at the council reaffirmed the faith at Nicaea and taught that Christ had two natures—fully human and divine:

In his rejection of Apollinarianism, Gregory of Nazianzus gave classical expression to a theme that goes back at least to Origen, when he argued that to have saved us, Jesus must also be fully human ... To have healed human nature in its entirety (including our rational soul), the Logos must have assumed complete nature when taking on the human condition” (O’Collins and Farrugia 2003, 32).

After the first two assemblies, the doctrine on the nature of Christ was still a bit ambiguous. The first two ecumenical councils each spoke to the human and divine natures of Christ; emphasizing each one in face of their respective heretical view. But even after the Council of Constantinople the belief still was not solidified; there were still

puzzling questions to be addressed. *Was Christ two persons? Did one nature rule the other?* Before these questions could be put to rest, however, more problems were still on the horizon. In 431 CE, the aforementioned Nestorius came into the spotlight at the Church's third ecumenical assembly, the Council of Ephesus. Educated at the school at Antioch, Nestorius remained loyal and diligent to the previous teachings set forth at both Nicaea and Constantinople. What would become his downfall, however, is that Nestorius did not acknowledge any significant unity in the two distinct natures. This became evident in his discussion with Cyril of Alexandria over the title of 'Theotokos v. Christokos'. Nestorius did not want to give the Virgin Mary (formally understood by the Church to be the Mother of Jesus Christ) the distinction of Theotokos—which means 'bearer of God'. He instead pleaded that Mary be referred to as Christokos—which translates to Christ's mother (Jedin 1960, 30). A seemingly small distinction, Nestorius remained adamant in belief as he felt that the idea of God being born of a human birth was entirely inappropriate. In this way, Nestorius was claiming that the Virgin Mary bore a human being, and that person would eventually become inhibited by divinity: "God cannot have a mother, he argues, and no creature could have engendered the Godhead; Mary bore a man, the vehicle of divinity but not God. The Godhead cannot have been carried for nine months in a woman's womb, or have been wrapped in baby clothes, or have suffered, died and been buried" (Kelly 1978, 311). While his theology focused primarily on the relationship of Mary, Nestorius' teaching had far reaching implications on the nature of Christ, in so far as he went onto say that Christ's two natures—divine and mortal—were not fully united in one person: "Nestorius laid himself open to the accusation of turning the distinction between Christ's two natures into a separation and

proposing a merely moral unity between the eternal Son of God and Jesus as adopted Son” (O’Collins and Farrugia 2003, 33).

The Council of Ephesus, in its repudiation of the Nestorian heresy taught that Mary was the God-bearer. The Incarnation was the act of God becoming human in the person of Jesus Christ. In this way, there were no dual persons as Nestorius indicated. Christ, when conceived was both perfectly human and divine in nature; these natures were not separated but unified in one person:

We confess therefore our Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God , perfect God and perfect man composed of rational soul and body, begotten before all ages from the Father as to His divinity, and the same in latter days born of the Virgin Mary as to His humanity for us and for our salvation. The same is one in being with the Father as to divinity, and one in being with us as to the humanity, for a union of two natures has taken place. Hence we confess one Christ, one Son, one Lord. In accordance with this union without confusion, we confess the holy Virgin to be the Mother of God (*theotokos*), for God the Word became flesh and was made man and from the moment of conception united to Himself the temple he had taken from her (Neuner and Dupuis 1975, 144).

The Council of Ephesus concluded twenty years before the beginning of the Council of Chalcedon. Often overlooked for its contributions to the doctrine of Christ, Ephesus helped to really lay the foundation for what would ultimately be considered as the pinnacle achievement on the doctrine of Christ formulated at Chalcedon. Even though its conclusions were unprecedented and insightful, still more questions remained unanswered, “The Council of Ephesus indicated clearly that the divinity and humanity of Christ are not separated. If so, are they really to be distinguished? And, if not, how are they to be united? These questions remained to set the agenda for the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE” (O’Collins and Farrugia 2003, 33).

The Council of Chalcedon and the Hypostatic Union

Regarded as the Church initiative which helped to fully solidify the doctrinal Christological teaching (Christological means ‘on the nature of Christ’), the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE put to rest any remaining heresies and ambiguities that had resulted from the previous three council’s reflection on who Christ was. The purpose of this Council was to further develop and explain the teaching that was introduced at Ephesus, as well as repudiate the unorthodox views that were present at the time, specifically the error of Eutyches. What is important to note from Chalcedon is that it offered a ‘formulated’ view of the nature of Christ. Reaffirming similar language used at previous councils, the Church authorities (specifically Cyril of Alexandria) established the notion of the *Hypostatic Union*. This term refers to the belief that Christ has two perfect natures unified together in one person (*hypostasis*, as commonly translated through Latin into English, simply means *person*). Thus, the council declared that upon conception, Christ contained both fully divine and fully human natures. In Christ then, this doctrine teaches, is contained both fully human faculties and capacities, as well as those fully divine properties, “In him are preserved all the properties of the divinity and all the properties of humanity together in a real, perfect, indivisible, and inseparable union” (O’Collins and Farrugia 2003, 157). No less than a great mystery of the Christian faith, this union between divine and human is viewed as both indivisible and perfect:

The Council of Chalcedon provided a ‘logical’ conclusion to the first three ecumenical councils. Against Arianism, Nicaea I used the term *homoousios* to reaffirm that ‘Christ is (truly) divine’. Against Apollonarianism, Constantinople I insisted that ‘Christ is (fully) human’. Against what were understood to be the errors of Nestorius, [the Council of] Ephesus professed that Christ’s humanity and divinity are not separated. Against Eutyches, Chalcedon taught that,

while belonging to the one (divine) person, the two natures of Christ are not merged or confused. Thus the first four councils became acknowledged as representing the essential and orthodox norm for understanding and interpreting the New Testament's witness to Christ (O'Collins and Farrugia 2003, 45).

In this way it not only supported the Nicene faith but also brought further development and conclusion to the Christological doctrine: "Chalcedon is often described as the triumph of [Western Christology]" (Kelly 1978, 341).

The Incarnation

Having now gained a better understanding of what the Church has declares as the unified nature of Christ, it may now seem more comprehensible what Catholics believe as the Incarnation. There is strong progression and consistency amongst what Catholics believe in the Incarnation, the Church and the Eucharist. While I intend to discuss this theological significance and impact upon the Christian faith, I would like to first highlight the basic article of faith.

Athanasius, renowned for his profound thoughts and reflections on the belief in the Incarnation, has much to say in the way of Christ's dual nature, and what effects this understanding had upon the Incarnation. In his work, *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*, Athanasius thoroughly discusses the need Christ's becoming man (a theme I address shortly) as well as how his dual nature is necessary to the purpose of the Incarnation on the whole. In this way, Athanasius (writing before these four councils) actually pushes the doctrines a bit further than their respective councils:

The Word perceived that corruption could not be got rid of otherwise than through death; yet He Himself, as the Word, being immortal and the Father's Son, was such as could not die. For this reason, therefore, He assumed a body capable of death, in order that it, through belonging to the Word

Who is above all, might become in dying a sufficient exchange for all, and, itself remaining incorruptible through His indwelling, might thereafter put an end to corruption for all others as well, by the grace of the resurrection... Naturally also, through this union of the immortal Son of God with our human nature, all men were clothed with incorruption in the promise of the resurrection. For the solidarity of mankind is such that, by virtue of the Word's indwelling in a single human body, the corruption which goes with death has lost its power over all (Athanasius 1977, 35).

Thus, the Incarnation—in its classical teaching—is the belief that God became man in the person of Christ. This is a belief that was in no way conditioned or artificially developed at Chalcedon; in fact Athanasius, who lived before, during and after the Council of Nicaea verifies this very consistency. The doctrine that comes out of Chalcedon declares that Christ possesses two natures: full divinity and fully humanity. This belief is guided as a matter of salvation. Christ needed to be both fully human and divine, as Athanasius points out; Christ became present to us through his human nature, but it was through his own divinity that he defeated sin and death. What is important for the purposes of this section, is that my readers understand that the doctrine of the Hypostatic Union is not an arbitrary, or historically conditioned belief. What should be acknowledged is the belief that Christ has two full and perfect natures stems from a preexisting, essential belief in the Christian faith.

What I would like to address next is how Catholics philosophically and theologically situate themselves with respect to the Incarnation and the Eucharist. It must be explicitly noted that the Eucharist, to an extent, reflects that is expressed in the Incarnation: the act of God coming down into the finite and material word (in the Eucharist this occurs in the bread and wine, and in the Incarnation it occurs through the

human condition). What is worth distinguishing is how each article of belief (Incarnation and the Eucharist) offers a different philosophical-theological method of explanation; that is to say, the way in which Christ came to be present via the Incarnation is quite different than how he becomes present through transubstantiation. In this way, it is important to note why these explanations are different, as well as, how is it that Catholics are able to withstand arguments/support for other models—such as consubstantiation and impanation—which remain consistent with the mode of change that is believed in incarnational theology. Simply put, Christ became present as man in a different way that he becomes in the Eucharist. Why is this? And why is transubstantiation better than those models which are more similar the Incarnation?

Transubstantiation, Consubstantiation, and Impanation

The doctrine of transubstantiation suggests that Christ is present in the Eucharist by way of substance. Which of course as we have seen, implies that the substance of the bread and wine have become that of Christ's body and blood; leaving the accidents of the bread and wine as all that remain. It should be quite apparent that this is drastically different from what Catholics acknowledge in the Hypostatic Union. The Incarnation is predicated upon a consubstantial model. Recall this basic language and understanding from the philosophical section; the assertion is that in the person of Christ contains both divine and human natures. This discrepancy has drawn much objection and concern: *Was Luther entirely off-base with consubstantiation? Isn't there a strong argument and basis for opposing transubstantiation?*

We have already discussed the traditional conception of eucharistic consubstantiation as seen in the Reformer's view. It should be quite noticeable how

consistent Luther's eucharistic model was to the orthodox view of the incarnational theology. Just as Christ was both human and divine, so too for Luther, the Eucharist was substantially both bread and wine. The only disparity between these two teachings is that Luther did not believe that the Hypostatic Union took place in the Eucharist; instead, he suggested that the Body of Christ did not formally unite with the bread and wine—its connection was termed as a sacramental union: “Luther asserted that the Body of Christ penetrated the unchanged substance of the bread but denied a hypostatic union. Orthodox Lutheranism expressed this so-called sacramental union between the Body of Christ and the substance of bread in the well-known formula: The Body of Christ is ‘in, with and under the bread’” (*New Advent: The Catholic Online Encyclopedia*, 2009 ed., s.v. “Impanation”). While it is certainly the case that consubstantiation presents a more consistent theological model, the notion of impanation seems to be more consistent with what the Church teaches in the Incarnation.

The origins of this theory extend as far back to Berengar of Tours during the eleventh century, but it was carried on and developed much more concretely through the history of the Church. In fact, it is considered to have been predominantly authored by John of Paris in the late thirteenth century (*New Advent: The Catholic Online Encyclopedia*, 2009 ed., s.v. “Impanation”). Impanation and the Protestant view of consubstantiation have similar approaches. Most notably, both of these models deny the doctrine of transubstantiation and both models claim belief in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Impanation differs from consubstantiation, however, in the way that consubstantiation separates itself from the traditional incarnational theology. The Eucharist, in this model, takes on a unified duality in the same way that Christ took on a

dual nature. Thus, impanation suggests, according to a variety of its advocates, that the Eucharist is a unity of both bread and Christ's body. The *New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia*, describes impanation as such:

A heretical doctrine according to which Christ is in the Eucharist through His human body substantially united with the substances of bread and wine, and thus is really present as God, made bread: *Deus panis factus*. As, in consequence of the Incarnation, the properties of the Divine Word can be ascribed to the man Christ, and the properties of the man Christ can be predicated of the Word (*communicatio idiomatum*), in the very same way, in consequence of the impanation — a word coined in imitation of incarnation — an interchange of predicates takes place between the Son of God and the substance of bread, though only through the mediation of the body of Christ. The doctrine of impanation agrees with the doctrine of consubstantiation, as it was taught by Luther, in these two essential points: it denies on the one hand the Transubstantiation of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, and on the other professes nevertheless the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

A more technical and thorough theory than Luther's consubstantiation, the model of impanation I think actually presents more of a substantial challenge to the Catholic position. The strength behind this idea stems from its relation and consistency in the Hypostatic Union in the Incarnation. Thus, it frames the question: *Why transubstantiation and not impanation?*

It is quite apparent that there seems to exist a better continuity between impanation and the Incarnation rather than what is presented in the Thomist theory of transubstantiation. The Church, regardless of this support for impanation, still professes transubstantiation as the proper teaching. In this way, the Church declares impanation as a heretical teaching in two ways: 1) the most obvious reason being that it undermines the doctrine of transubstantiation. 2) perhaps more profoundly, the Church declares the

theory of impanation false on the grounds that it is incomprehensible and in direct denial of what the Church has always believed about change: “The doctrine of impanation as far as it denies the Transubstantiation of bread and wine is certainly a heresy; besides, it is also against reason, since a hypostatic union between the Word of God Incarnate, or the God-man Christ, and the dead substances of bread and wine is inconceivable. Much less conceivable is such a union if we presuppose Transubstantiation, for since the substance of bread no longer exists it cannot enter into a hypostatic union with Christ” (*New Advent: The Catholic Online Encyclopedia*, 2009 ed., s.v. “Impanation”). The Church repudiates impanation, and rightfully so, because by Christ entering in the Eucharist it is not conceivable for any other substance to coexist; which is why Catholics subscribe to a total change in substance. Aquinas, too, anticipates and objects to this line of thinking. His thoughts and objections surrounding the remaining presence of the substance and the bread and wine seek to show how such an opinion is unintelligible and unbefitting of Christ’s presence (*ST III* Question 75, Article 2; *ST III* Question 75, Article 6). The reason why this is different than what takes place in the Incarnation, is because the human condition required a divine and human presence

III. Nature and Function of the Eucharist in the Catholic Faith

Having briefly discussed what the Incarnation means to Catholics and how we understand the person of Jesus Christ, I turn now to the way in which the Eucharist connects itself to the other aspects of the Christian faith. In this way, I am highlighting the strong basis for why Catholics believe what they do. Ultimately, I hope to show how the Eucharist is the ongoing presence and gracious assistance of Christ in the Church.

Thus, the foundation that we have just laid down—concerning who Christ was and how the Incarnation is traditionally understood—will help to better solidify and support why Catholics believe in the real presence. It should also be kept in constant reminder, as I attempt to demonstrate this connection amongst the Catholic beliefs, that the doctrine of transubstantiation is not in anyway independent or isolated from the Eucharist's connection to the other articles of faith. In fact, it is because of what Catholics believe about the condition of humanity and the nature of Christ that we are given the grounds to talk about the Eucharist as a change in substance.

The Central Presence of the Eucharist in the Catholic Church

It is undeniable that the sacrament of the Eucharist is the hallmark and summit of Catholic worship: “The Eucharist is the source and the summit of Christian life. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ Himself” (Catechism 2007, 1324). Not only is the Eucharist the central component of the Catholic mass—the way in which the Catholic community worships—but the Eucharist is also considered the most real and intimate of any of the sacraments. Trying to understand just why it is that this sacrament occupies such a central role in the Catholic faith it can be very complicated, as the Eucharist is a mystical belief which draws much of its importance in what is believed about the human person and how God's plan for salvation is made available to us. Therefore, I must point to and highlight the Eucharist as it relates and functions in a variety of ways, namely: *How it is that the Incarnation and the Eucharist relate? In what way does the Eucharist function as a sacrament? And, lastly, how is it that the Church and the Eucharist support and fulfill one another?* There is a harmonious and deeply embedded relationship between the Incarnation, the Church, and

the sacrament of the Eucharist. What I intend to draw out from this relationship (the Incarnation, Church and Eucharist) is that there exists an overall cohesiveness and consistency to Catholic teaching. This cohesiveness, and the way in which these articles relate, stem from a more rudimentary view of what the human being is, what the human needs, and how God's plan for salvation affects human existence.

The Incarnation

The term *economy*, in the Christian sense, refers to the ordering of salvation in human history; or in other words, how God has revealed and made Himself known to man. Within this economy of salvation, Christians acknowledge the Incarnation as the pinnacle and monumental act of revelation between God and man: "Christ, as a historical and physical individual, was undoubtedly the pinnacle and final expression in God's revelation" (Davies 2009, 357). Without going into a deep analysis of this Christian belief, simply put the Incarnation is understood as God becoming a human being in the person of Jesus Christ; thus the term *Incarnation*, which means *to become flesh*.

Although the doctrine of the Incarnation occupies, in itself, a very complex and rich subject in Catholic theology (specifically, how the Church understands Christ's existence as both fully human and fully divine), the need for the Incarnation is a central facet to the eucharistic doctrine and the Christian message on the whole. That is to say, the reason why God became man in the human person of Jesus is intrinsically tied to the Catholic understanding of the Eucharist and the mission of their Church all together.

A thorough explanation of why the Incarnation and the presence of the Church are needed is a very extensive aim which reflects on the whole salvific function of the Christian faith. What is required, however, is a basic understanding of what Catholics

believe about the creation of man and his fall from grace. We believe that humankind was created in God's own image and likeness, so that we may share and live in God's greatness and love. Though as we read about in scripture, mankind fell away from God's presence as a result of sin. Whether or not one has a literal interpretation of the Garden and Eden and the First sin of Adam and Eve, Catholics believe that the human condition is characterized by death, ignorance and corruption: "Instead of remaining in the state in which God had created them, they were in process of becoming corrupted entirely, and death had them completely under its dominion" (Athanasius 1977, 29). As a result of this sin and our turn away from God, man had directed himself towards lesser things and thus was destined for corruption. Although this is a Catholic article of faith, I think it is fair to acknowledge that the human condition is not one of pure harmony and peace; surely all would admit that there exists great pain and suffering in the world. The Christian theodicy is based upon this idea that God became man in order to prevent this death of mankind. Thus, it is in this way that the Incarnation was a matter of human salvation:

God knew the limitation of mankind, you see; and though the grace of being made in His Image was sufficient to give them knowledge of the Word and through Him of the Father, as a safe guard against their neglect of this grace, He provided the works of creation also as means by which the maker might be known (Athanasius 1977, 12).

Catholic Christians hold that Incarnation, the pivotal event within the economy of salvation, was the initial event which led to Christ's life, death, and subsequent founding of his Church. *How exactly did the coming of Christ provide salvation for mankind?* A subject as intimate and explorative as any in the Christian faith, the way in which Christ's coming achieved salvation for humankind can be explained in several ways. The most basic way of understanding it, however, is that the Incarnation provided us contact with

the divine. Our original sin, and turning away from God put us not only in a state of despair, but it put us at a distance from God; our condition was such the case that our natural faculties—reason, senses—were not enough to know God on our own. This is an important consequence of sin for Athanasius: it distances us from God, and in turn our knowledge and experience of Him is weakened. Therefore, by Christ's coming he brought us contact with the God. While the path to salvation achieved by Christ is far more rich and gracious than just that, it should be understood, most basically, that the Incarnation was the pivotal step in salvation history whereby the Ultimate entered into the finite condition of humanity. Christ's coming, as I will develop further, was a foreshadowing of what is expressed in the Eucharist. He provides us with not only grace in Himself, but he is a mediator to God: "What we mean is that God took a body only so that he might be present among men in order to offer this body to them as the proper and necessary intermediary between our fleshy being and his Divinity" (Marie-Joseph 1962, 37).

The Incarnation then, for the purposes of its relation to the Eucharist, should be seen for its salvific restoration. By this I mean that it was the merciful act of God by which He sought to save us from our own sin and death and restore us to our original, intended state: "Humanity is the image that understands itself in God's own light and can find its fulfillment in God" (O'Collins and Farrugia 2003:171). What should also be noted with regard to the nature of the Incarnation is that it was an act of the Infinite (which is God) entering into the finite (the created reality in which we live). While I intend to highlight this a bit more, this should seem somewhat familiar to what Catholics acknowledge in the eucharistic transubstantiation.

Sacraments

The Incarnation was the act of God becoming man in the person of Christ as a matter of salvation. *What becomes the issue then is how do Catholics achieve salvation today?* We hold that though both human and divine, Christ was born, lived, died, and resurrected centuries ago; as a historical person he lived during a certain time and place. If he was the intermediary and divine presence, come down for our salvation, how do people continue to be saved after his life?

During his time, Christ explicitly taught that salvation was attained by believing in Him. Achieving salvation today has not changed: it must still be done through Christ. Though, because Christ lived and taught centuries ago, his presence today is brought to us in a different way. What Christ spoke and did during his life the Church has carried on through the centuries. In particular, there are seven sacraments which the Catholic community acknowledges that Christ founded during his life: Baptism, Communion (Eucharist), Reconciliation, Confirmation, Holy Matrimony, Holy Orders, and Last Rites (Anointing of the Sick). The sacraments which Christ left us and the Catholic Church are intrinsically tied. In fact they exist to uphold one another and to lead us towards God: “In this age of the Church Christ now lives and acts in and with his Church, in a new way appropriate to this new age. He acts through the sacraments in what the common Tradition of the East and the West calls ‘the sacramental economy’” (Catechism 2007, 1076).

Sacraments are signs and symbols which remind us of the grace which Christ brought to us through his life, death and resurrection. Unlike ordinary signs or symbols, which merely point to something beyond themselves, sacraments both point to and

contain the reality to which they direct us, “Celebrated worthily in faith, the sacraments confer the grace that they signify. They are *efficacious* because in them Christ himself is at work: it is he who baptizes, he who acts in his sacraments in order to communicate the grace that each sacrament signifies” (Catechism 2007, 1127). Should sacraments be human initiatives to reach the divine, then surely one might say they are merely pure symbols, as humanity can not reach divine grace by itself. What is so significant about the Catholic understanding of sacraments is that we believe that are efforts of God to reach humanity through material means; quite similar to what we acknowledge in the Incarnation. In this way we ought to view the sacramental worship of the Church as not only a means of communication, but a means of obtaining grace.

The gap that exists between man and the divine—the ontological gap—is so great that we can never know or bring ourselves to the level of truth and grace that is necessary for our salvation. Therefore, God acts through materials conditions, signs and realities to bring His goodness to us. It is a human condition that we need something to sense and grasp. This was expressed in the Incarnation and it is carried on in the work of sacramental worship. Religious worship and belief, for Catholics, is not something purely inner and spiritual. Our fall away from God has created not only this ontological gap, but this need for something concrete; our own capacities are limited and are unable to overcome this huge deficit. Sacraments fulfill the same obligation as the Incarnation in so far as they extend our faith to both spiritual and material means. This is not to say that Catholics worship idols or material things because that is not at all the case. We believe that because our inner, spiritual capacities are not enough, God made Himself known through finite, material things so that we could better know, understand and grasp them.

This is not an arbitrary aspect of our faith, rather, we recognize this necessity by what was accomplished and intended through the Incarnation of Christ. The religious experience—how we come to know and understand God—is through the entirety of our person. Because God is so great and beyond our capacities, we must direct our entire person towards Him; in this way, it is not enough for just a spiritual relationship: “The sacraments of the Church have for their purpose to serve a human beings need in the spiritual life. Now the spiritual life runs parallel to that of the body, since bodily things are shadows of spiritual realities” (Van Nieuwenhove and Wawrykow 2005, 311). Thus, God made Himself available to us in both a material and spiritual way. This providential reality is not something that occurs because simple because we need it; rather, the Incarnation and the sacraments that stem from it are a result of His humility and love for us.

What then ought we to know about the general nature of sacraments? And what connection should be drawn between them and the Incarnation? The purpose and nature of the Incarnation—a historical event—is still at work today in the Catholic sacramental worship: “For Catholics, the Incarnate Word remains present and active until the end of the world, through signs, through realities the senses can grasp. The Incarnation is continued in the sacramental order” (Marie-Joseph 1962, 38). The seven sacraments of the Church are in one sense seen to be practices and rites within the life of the Church. On the other hand, and from a more theological position, sacraments are seen as those symbols and symbols which Christ directly instituted as a matter of continuing his work of salvation--“The Incarnation plays a determining role in the nature of sacraments since only because of Christ are we able to say what is to count as a sacrament” (Davies 2009,

355). These signs, which point to and remind us of the life of Christ and the revelation he brought to us, afford for us the same grace that the Incarnation itself promised.

The Church as a Sacrament

I have briefly addressed the doctrine of the Incarnation and the relationship it has with the Catholic sacraments. I also touched upon the basic nature and function of sacraments, and what role they carry on in the Church. Therefore, the next step is to understand where in this puzzle the Church fits in; this should seem to be a quintessential step as the Church is the facilitator of the sacraments.

Just as Christ left this system of sacramental worship, so too did he establish his Church in this overall mission of bringing salvation to God's people. Again, the relationship of the Church and its sacraments is yet a whole other complex branch to Catholic theology, but what is essential to understand is that Church itself is a sacrament. In one way it points to Christ's Incarnation and redemptive plan for humanity, while at the same time the Church reflects the common unity of humanity. We are all in bondage to sin, and we are all in need of grace in order to reach salvation. The Church, then, is a symbol in its reminder of our condition and the providential plan of Christ. Yet it is also real in the sense that Christ is truly present in the Church. This occurs in the sacramental and unitive character of our worship, though in particular, this resides in our eucharistic faith.

The Eucharist as a Sacrament of the Catholic Church

As a matter of concluding this section, what significance and connections can be made about the Eucharist? Or more importantly, in what way does the Catholic

understanding of the Incarnation, sacraments, and the Church strengthen and defend its doctrinal teaching of the Eucharist?

Catholics acknowledge that sacraments are a continuation of the same salvation that was brought to us through the Incarnation. While, each of the seven sacraments has its unique identity and purpose within the life of the faithful, the Church undoubtedly acknowledges the Eucharist as the central and culminating point within Catholic worship. In the three areas that I have already discussed—the Incarnation, sacraments, and the Church—the Eucharist has a special connection with three; and it is within the Eucharist we find the unity and fulfillment of all three of these Catholic articles of faith.

The Incarnation was a foreshadowing of the Eucharist. As the miraculous and unparalleled event within the *economy*, the Incarnation needed a way of continuing its salvific work. This is accomplished through the use of sacraments and the Church, though it is most profoundly achieved and actualized in the Eucharist: “So the eucharistic communion is the redeeming incarnation made actual for each one of us” (Marie-Joseph 1962, 122). Catholics acknowledge the Incarnation, the act of God becoming man, as perhaps the most inherent and basic features of our faith. In this way, by accepting such a feat of divine intervention, we allow the room and possibility for the divine to enter into corporeal—the infinite to be contained in the finite. Perhaps this language seems familiar? We, as Catholics, place a similar acknowledgement in what occurs in transubstantiation: we allow there to be an exception in the metaphysical order of nature in the Eucharist. Why then, should these two miraculous beliefs seem inconsistent? Why is that some Christians are willing to accept the metaphysical exception of the Incarnation, while at the same time denying the possibility of substantial change in the Eucharist?

Perhaps, they see it as a matter of salvific necessity; whereby the Incarnation was necessary for us, and the Eucharist as a efficacious sacrament is not. Though I must contend, and hold to the Church's teaching, that these opinions have an improper and inconsistent view of what a sacrament is and what the human being needs

“The Eucharist concretizes the soteriological principle that God became human so that humanity might become divine” (Billy 2010, 135). Sacraments, by their nature, are given to us for salvation: they not only remind and teach of us about God, but they actually serve as an intermediary between God and man—the same way that the Incarnation set out to do. While all sacraments confer a certain amount of grace, the Eucharist itself is given particular distinction, as only in the Eucharist is Christ fully and unequivocally present. Christ left for us this system of teachings and sacraments; each of which have unique reflections and graces needed in the life of the believer. It is in the Eucharist, however, that the fullness of Christ's graces is given to humanity. Just as God realized that man needed the Incarnation, so too did He realize that humanity needed a sacrament that would bring them into direct communion with the divine: “The Eucharist is the sacrament par excellence in which takes the perfect meeting of man with his Savior. Nothing could be more in keeping with the spirit of the Incarnation” (Marie-Joseph 1962, 121).

Lastly, what relationship does the Eucharist have with the Church? The relationship between the Eucharist and the Church is reciprocal, “Just as the Church ‘makes the Eucharist’ so ‘the Eucharist builds up’ the Church (Pope John Paul II 1980, 16). Catholics acknowledge our communal faith in light of the Incarnation—the coming down of Christ for our salvation; this is a basic tenet of Christian identity. We also

recognize our Catholic faith in light of the continuing work of Christ: what he did and what he said he remained after his death and resurrection—in a sense he remained with us. Though, just as Christ's Incarnation made him more than just spiritual and transcendent, so too does his continuing work affect both our bodily and spiritual lives. Why, if the Incarnation was intended to bring God to our full person (not just the inner or spiritual), would Christ subsist to be present in the finite means? Thus, the relationship between the Church and the Eucharist actualizes and reminds us of this necessity. The Church, God's faithful, was established by Christ for us; it represents both our path towards redemption and our bondage to sin. Within the Church, the Incarnate Christ makes himself available through the Eucharist—fully and actually, as both Nieuwenhove and Wawrykow suggest:

The Eucharist gives a bonding with Christ himself, in the full reality of his being, where as the other sacraments give a transient, functional contact with Christ. The Christ received in the Eucharist is Christ in the fullness of his priesthood and the fullness of his glory" (Van Nieuwenhove and Wawrykow 2005, 360).

The most basic premise of Christian belief is accepting that God became a human being, and that person (who was fully God and man) was Jesus Christ. This providential action was done on behalf of our condition; we could not be saved on our spiritual, inner being alone. Christ came into the present and material condition. Though a historical event, the Incarnation and its salvific purpose, did not end with Christ's death and resurrection. To believe that would be to ignore the whole purpose of the Incarnation and Christ's life and teaching all together. His presence is held and continued in the sacrament of the Eucharist which is received in the Church:

I am not just accepting and act which was done at some distant date and about which I have been told, nor even an act which is taking place now, but transcendently, beyond time. Salvation through Christ is offered to me here and now, in this place and at this moment of time, there where I live, where I exist” (Marie-Joseph 1962, 121).

The Eucharist is both real and symbolic. It is symbolic in the sense that it represents that unity of humanity under the bondage of sin and the need for God’s providence. It is real of course in the sense that Christ has come as the answer. Thus, when we receive this sacrament we are both living our faith and reaffirm everything that we believe all at once; “In brief, the Eucharist is the sum and summary of our faith: ‘Our way of thinking is attuned to the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn confirms our way of thinking’”(Catechism 2007, 1327).

IV. Tillich’s Objection: The Protestant Principle

Perhaps the most formidable theological objection against the eucharistic faith of the Catholic Church is raised from the Protestant community. Paul Tillich, a modern Protestant theologian, raises a series of objections surrounding the Eucharist and the sacramental nature of the Church. In this section, I intend to highlight these objections as they pertain to both the Eucharist and the inherent purposes of both sacraments and the Church. What I hope to make a noticeable feature in this analysis is that Tillich’s, and in turn the Protestant Christian community, critique of the Eucharist brings to focus a different position on the nature of sacraments, the Church, and the relationship between God and humanity in general.

The Tillich Objection

In his work, *The Dynamics of Faith*, Tillich explores the relationship and dynamics of the religious experience between man and his Creator through what Tillich believes are the philosophical capacities and ontological differences between the finite (man) and the Infinite (God). In this section, however, I am highlighting only a particular objection from this Protestant theologian, as I believe that it speaks to a wide variety of people (both Catholic and non-Catholic) and the thoughts and beliefs that they have about the Eucharist and sacramental nature of the Church.

The overall argument of Tillich in his Protestant Principle is one of transcendence. Tillich approaches symbols, religious language, and sacraments with much skepticism and weariness. While he acknowledges that these serve an important role in our spiritual life, Tillich envisions a proper role and function of these things that is predicated off the idea that symbols, language, and sacraments point to something beyond themselves; they in essence serve as reminders of things about Christ and God. Symbols, for Tillich, are signs or expressions which point to something beyond themselves. Symbols are such that they participate in the reality to which they point, in so far as they make accessible to us levels of reality which otherwise we would have no experience of. Tillich asserts that we must not forget the nature of symbols and religious language: their purpose is to point to that which is beyond themselves and allow us to participate in some greater reality. Participation, then, is achieved in elevating our own capacities, not in bringing the Infinite to the finite. In this way, he singles out the religious practices because he is worried about idolatry: that is man focusing on the created and not the Creator.

It prevents us from raising the symbolic content of theology and hence the symbolic content of faith to the level of the ultimate because doing so ‘deprives God of his ultimacy and, religiously speaking, of his majesty. It draws him down to the level of that which is not ultimate, the finite and conditional,’ and so it fails to give God ‘the honor which is due to him’ (Macdonald: *Knowledge and the Transcendent* 2009, 54-55).

I believe that this is a view that is not unique to just Tillich. People in general—whether it be atheists, agnostics, Jews, Christians, or even Catholics themselves—have a problem with believing that something so infinitely great can be present to us in something so small. Personally, I have faced questions such as: *What are you thinking when you receive the Eucharist? Do you believe God is really in the bread and wine?* The Protestant principle and his beliefs surrounding the nature of symbols and religious expression pave the way for his criticism against sacramental worship. As already mentioned, Tillich is critical of this type of religious practice in so far as, sacraments (in their traditional sense) lose sight of their own finitude and symbolic nature and purpose. It is exactly in this way that Tillich frames his objections towards the Catholic eucharistic faith:

The act of faith is no longer directed toward the ultimate self, but towards that which represents the ultimate—the tree, the book, the building, the person. The transparency of faith is lost. It is the Protestant conviction that the Catholic doctrine of Transubstantiation of bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper into the body and blood of the Christ means just such a loss of the transparency of the divine and its identification with a segment of the encountered world. Faith experiences the presence of the holy, as embodied in the picture of the Christ, in the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper. Yet it is a doctrinal distortion of faith if the bread and wine of the sacraments are considered as sacred objects effective in themselves and able to be preserved in shrine. Nothing is sacred except in the correlation of faith. (Tillich 2001, 68).

The whole sacramental structure of the Catholic Church, particularly the Eucharist, is a point of serious contention within not only Tillich's writing, but the Christian community as a whole. Through his Protestant Principle and other criticisms, Tillich raises serious concerns that Catholics must face: *What are we really focusing on in the Eucharist? Is God in anyway diminished or lessened by His substantial presence? Is our faith in anyway misdirected or unnatural through sacramental worship—have we taken our attention off of God? Is the Church claiming too much in its practice of the Eucharist? What does the Eucharist imply or suggest about how we understand the nature of God and His ultimacy?*

Even more, these objections and criticisms have been raised by members within the Catholic hierarchy itself. Recall what was said about this new model of transignification? Can we not see how Tillich's theology in a way speaks to that which many Catholic leaders are trying to establish as the new doctrine in place of transubstantiation? Remember, transignification teaches that Christ is no really present in the Eucharist by way of substance, rather, this teaching focuses on Christ's presence as it relates to the community. This should seem somewhat consistent to what Tillich talks about in religious symbols and sacraments. God, because of His ultimacy and majesty, transcends the finite and rational minds of humanity. Religious symbols and language can only point us in the direction of God; they remind us of Him, so to speak. Thus, Christ becomes present to us, not trough the finite medium of bread and wine Tillich would say, but it is through our faith and reflection on the symbolic meaning of the bread and wine that he becomes present in us.

I Answer That...

There are two central criticisms that I would like to raise against Tillich's objections; one criticism takes root in a central philosophical observation of Tillich's theology, and the other stems from what I believe is an improper view of transubstantiation and the Eucharist. First, to say that the Infinite not only transcends but cannot be contained within the finite, which Tillich so adamantly asserts, is in essence putting a limit or upon the Infinite. Whether he realizes it or not, Tillich seems to be a very lofty theological claim. In his isolation and non-interactive relationship between the finite and the Infinite, Tillich is in a way supposing to know and comprehend the capacities of God. To put this rather hastily, who is he to say what God can and cannot do? Given the finite and imperfect condition of man, his ineptitude and need for the tangible, I believe that serious reflection ought to be paid toward what sacraments and other like practices are truly seeking to accomplish, and from what source are they being derived. Secondly, in his direct objection of transubstantiation, Tillich seems to be concerned over the idea that Catholics believe Christ is *contained* in the Eucharist. Tillich objects that this belief takes away from God's majesty and transcendence, and in turns focuses on the Eucharist as a symbol elevated beyond its inherent purpose. Though I object that Tillich has lost sight of what this means—*to be contained*—as he seems to think that there it implies a confining connotation; that by somehow being in the Eucharist, God's ultimacy has somehow been diminished. Though, couldn't the same be said of the Incarnation? Had God been diminished by the Incarnation—the pivotal and central facet of Christianity? To answer Tillich more directly, the Resurrected body of Christ meant that he was able to defy physical and material limits; thus making

transubstantiation all the more fitting. Or as Cardinal Ratzinger says, “Resurrection means quite simply that the body ceases to be a limit and that its capacity for communion remains” (Ratzinger 2003, 81). Also, if my work has been worth anything, its that the Eucharist is a mystery! Transubstantiation in no way exhausts or takes away the mysticism from this article of faith.

Therefore, I think my two central criticisms towards Tillich can be synthesized into one main point or idea—and in turn—I believe it helps to offer support for Catholics against similar skepticism. The sacramental nature of the Church—manifested most notably in the Eucharist—fall within a certain context of faith as well as a certain theological view of what man is, what man needs, and what God promises to provide. My problem with Tillich’s objections is that they seem to have ignored this idea, in so far as, they do not take certain faith claims into account. Is there not a noticeable continuity and consistency between the Incarnation, the Church and its practice of the Eucharist? In this way, Tillich’s objections frame a certain disconnect between the corporeal and the Divine. If God is truly Infinite and transcendent, what prevents Him from revealing Himself on multiple levels and through multiple mediums? Wasn’t this a critical feature of the Incarnation? It is an obvious trait of humanity that we have closer connection, understanding and intimate connection with things that we can grasp and hold onto. Wasn’t this the superb and miraculous reality of Christ—that he was both divine and human? We desire objective, tangible truths—things that we can touch, see and grasp. But do these needs and wants detract us from God? Tillich, and the Protestant community in general, wants to say that God cannot conform to these limitations because He is too grand and too majestic: “The use of finite materials in their ordinary sense for the

knowledge of revelation destroys the meaning of revelation and deprives God of his divinity” (Tillich 1951, 131). In thinking logically, I would say that Tillich is correct, the Infinite is such that It cannot be contained into this realm of finitude. Given my belief in an all powerful, all loving God, however, I believe that these human conditions present no challenge or obstacle for Him. Given our human desire and intimate connection with the tangible, it seems possible that God appeals to us on this level. And in fact, it is the continuity and consistency that the Church has taught with regard to the saving work of the Incarnate Christ that leads me to believe that this is an entirely possible feat for God.

What Tillich fails to acknowledge with sacraments is that Catholics consider them sacred reality. Certainly they are symbols of sorts, in so far as they point to something beyond themselves, yet at the same time, they also participate and contain the reality to which they point. Perhaps one of the Church’s most commonly cited definitions for sacraments is best expressed by Saint Augustine: Sacraments are outward signs of inward grace, instituted by Christ for our sanctification” (*New Advent: The Catholic Online Encyclopedia*, 2009 ed., s.v. “Sacraments”). The fact that Catholics recognize that the these sacraments rest upon the structure of our faith in an incarnate Deity makes itself defensible against Tillich’s criticism that man is elevating the finite to the realm of the Infinite: sacraments reflect the capacity of the Ultimate, not of humanity. Where is the contact between the Infinite and the finite? Catholics are unique, and against what Tillich believes, in that they believe in sacred realities.

To cite sacraments as mere symbols that have been taken beyond their inherent function is to deny their sacred presence in the world. Even more fundamentally, such a suggestion undermines the sacredness of the Ultimate’s presence in the world. It again is

traced back to my philosophical objection against Tillich: to say that the Infinite cannot be contained in the finite, is, in essence, placing a limit upon the Limitless. The nature of the Church, which manifests itself particularly in the sacraments, is derived through our beliefs about Christ; that is, our same need for the tangible and divine presence of God is exemplified on our reliance upon the Church and its practices: “Sacraments are needed because Christ is needed. They were needed both before and after his coming. They had to be different after his coming because they signified him as already present rather than as one yet to come. ‘Sacraments are various signs protesting the faith by which humans are justified’” (Van Nieuwenhove and Wawrykow 2005, 343).

Tillich seems to ignore, or at least qualify in a way, the unfolding of God’s plan of salvation. His philosophical pursuit seems to begin with the present, natural condition of man, without any respect or consideration given to the economy and God’s interactive transcendence. What he must realize is that we do not seek to experience and know God through our own sustained efforts. Rather, any such attempt to experience or arrive at truth of God is nothing short of His infinite humility and gracious salvation, manifested to us wholly in the Incarnation of Christ. We know and receive God through His acts, events and gifts which unfold and present themselves to us through history. To think that we have attained these capacities through our own finite existence is, as Tillich suggests idolatrous. Though, as Henri Bouillard says, this is profoundly backwards. Signs and tangible realities are those things through which God manifests Himself:

Because God is infinite and we are infinitely beneath him, we cannot apprehend him in himself; we can only know him through his works. The natural knowledge that we can have of him consists of what we can discern of his manifestation of himself in the world and in the human soul. Knowledge of God by faith consists in recognizing him in

the historical signs of his actual revelation. Whoever says revelation says manifestation by signs. By signs we mean not alone miracles of the physical or moral order but that totality of divine action that constitutes the history of salvation, the totality of creatures that God has selected and sanctified so that they may be the signs of his presence and the instruments of his action, in the history of mankind. The sign of signs is the human reality of Jesus Christ” (Bouillard 1967, 16-17).

Lastly, Tillich’s direct attack on the Eucharist is particularly unfounded. The Eucharist, as much as it is a reality of Divine presence, so too is it a symbol of communication. Can we not recognize sharing of body and soul in human expression and communication? When we greet others, it is a common ritual to hug or extend some sort of greeting (many variations) as to unite the two persons (Ratzinger 2003, 80). The Eucharist, which is conducted through human means, cannot be at all possible without the Ultimate’s humble and gracious providence. Communion then is symbolic in so far as it reflects the efforts of the Divine greeting the finite, but it is real in so far as the Infinite is actually bestowing his graces upon humanity. God is extending Himself to us through this medium. In this way, the Eucharist, and ultimately the divinely instituted and guided Church, stand against Tillich’s theology as both a theological and ecclesiological necessity. The Christian message of salvation might not be something we could have predicted or guessed, but now that it is in existence, we can understand the illustrious message of the Incarnation and the presence of Divine revelation and interaction in this unfolding plan of salvation.

In response to the growing skepticism and disbelief outlined in the idea of transignification, it must be noted that Christians must be realists when it comes to the economy and God’s plan for salvation. By ignoring the realness of sacraments, in

particular the Eucharist, one is ignoring the realness of the Incarnation. The authorities who have proposed this theory are certainly correct in their emphasis of God's transcendent presence in the community and in the individual. But, as Catholics, they must accept the realness of the Eucharist as a central component of their faith. It is not an arbitrarily formed belief. It is the whole reason for the Church and the priesthood, both established by Christ. As much as we think we are unworthy and incapable of understanding God—which we absolutely are—we must always remain cognizant that faith is a relationship; that is to say that it works both ways. We must not be afraid of thinking of God as close and remote to us. While of course we are undeserving of that humility and grace, it is our central belief as Christians that God acted in such a way to bring us salvation: “Christians cannot think of God as distant or remote. For them he must always be present. And his revelation of himself in Christ is something to be received, acted on, and lived out by Christians in physical, bodily, everyday behavior” (Davies 2009, 358).

V. Conclusion

Practical Claims

Has this theological synthesis of the central articles of Catholicism in any way lessened the skepticism that the Eucharist typically receives? Catholics are expected to genuflect in front of the altar (which hosts the consecrated Eucharist) as they believe they are kneeling before Christ. It is also common that we hold eucharistic adoration, where we may sit in front of the Eucharist and pray in front of it; believing truly and wholeheartedly that we are praying with Christ? In light of what I have covered concerning the

historical consistency, philosophical intelligibility and theological continuity, do these practices seem so absurd? Is there not a basis, context, or system of belief in which the Catholic eucharistic faith might actually seem (dare I say) rational? Are these practices so irrational? Do the historical, metaphysical, and theological defenses in any way provide stability to the way Catholics act, talk and think about the Eucharist?

The Christian Message of Salvation: Incarnation, Church, and Eucharist

The eucharistic worship of the Catholic Church sheds light on the cohesive system of faith that was set into place by the pivotal act of the Incarnation. Or to put it another way, by accepting the realness and necessity of the Incarnation (as was taught from the fourth century onwards by Athanasius), Catholics subscribe to a certain structure of belief. This system of thought makes serious faith claims about the realness of God's salvific plan and the natural condition of the human person. The Incarnation, sacramental structure and need for the Church, and the eucharistic doctrine, while all individual and unique expressions of the Catholic faith, all possess and share a unique continuity; whereby, accepting one of these beliefs an acceptance of the whole system should consistently follow—similarly, by rejecting one aspect of this theology, the understanding of each component is considerably weakened.

As Christians, we are united in the miraculous and saving event of the Incarnation, whereby God became man in order to bring us closer to Him. Of course, because God entered into the corporeal as a human person, this life could not be enduring and eternal in the way we needed it to. Nevertheless, Christ's work and teaching allowed for the Incarnation to continue its saving effects through the ages. This, Davies declares, Christ

accomplishes through the work of the Church, sacraments, and in particular, the

Eucharist:

The Incarnation is the means by which God definitively draws people to himself by virtue of what is created. This drawing of people to God is over and done with after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. It continues in what the Church does by means of ritual. By means of sacraments people directly share in what was going on in the Incarnation (Davies 2009, 350).

Does this mystery of salvation of the Incarnate Christ in any alleviate the problems and ambiguities surrounding the real presence and transubstantiation model of the Eucharist? Maybe not. The Eucharist, even in light of its relationship to the Christian system of belief, will remain a miraculous aspect of Catholic thought; how Christ comes to be present under the species of bread and wine may not ever be fully understood. Nevertheless, why this reality—God’s continuing presence—is needed is explained and beautifully expressed in the Christian message. God’s love and plan for salvation took root in human history and in human affairs. His humility and care allowed for our condition and needs to be satisfied through both spiritual and materials realities. The realness of Christ’s life, death, resurrection, and continuing presence, Marie-Joseph says, must be held onto by Christians with total profundity:

‘How’ this mystery can be brought about is more difficult that ever it was for us to discover. We have to be content to see it as an exception to ordinary laws as well beyond the reach of our senses. We can however more easily grasp ‘why’ it takes place, its deep underlying reason. At least we can see its place in the general economy of God’s plan, we can show that in the Eucharist there is a wonderful gathering of all the elements of the Christian system...It is the triumph of Christian logic, of that Divine Wisdom which revealed itself in the Incarnation, in the Cross, in the mystery of the Church, in the economy of man’s salvation (Marie-Joseph 1962, 118).

Closing Remarks

In this thesis, I have attempted to offer an original and unique reflection on the Catholic doctrine of eucharistic transubstantiation. In light of the sources I have read, and the thoughts and words of the brilliant thinkers I have encountered, I must reluctantly concede that my work will inevitably fall short those who have inspired me; but to quote Brian Davies, “that is to be expected” (Davies 2009, xi). What I hope I leave my audience with is an insight and basis for what it means to be a Catholic, and how this identity and faith carries with it certain implications and views. It is this approach that has guided my defense.

I am defending the Roman Catholic position on the Eucharist, in particular the traditional doctrine of transubstantiation which seeks to explain how this mystery is possible. But what does this mean—how is it that I am ‘defending’ this aspect of my Catholic faith? In my defense, I do not claim to have offered any real logical demonstration. My defense and exposition of the Eucharist will probably not guide or inspire a nonbeliever. I cannot logically trace or prove the Church’s position on the Eucharist in the way that I could demonstrate that the angles of a triangle add up to one hundred eighty degrees. There is no logical syllogism that can express this. I cannot reciprocate or apply this type of logic in understanding just how it is that Christ becomes present by way of substance. *So what is it that I have defended? What I have I shown?*

The whole Christian message and intrinsic function of the Church is predicated on a belief that is mystical and seemingly irrational—or perhaps supernatural. Therefore, any description or analysis that I have offered in support of this Catholic doctrine is confessional. That is to say, that I am defending the Church’s eucharistic belief as it falls

under the umbrella created by the origin of the Christian message: God becoming human, in the person of Jesus Christ, for the sake of our salvation. My defense and arguments in support of the Eucharist must center around and explicitly deal with the metaphysical model of transubstantiation. As this doctrine highlights the conditions in which this mystery is possible and intelligible in light of what Catholics hold by faith. In this way, I am trying to rationally understand and express what I believe with what I know.

That being said, it must also be noted that Catholics see something universal and true behind the philosophy and world view that they use to explain that which they believe. In my historical, philosophical and theological exposition, I hope I have shown to my audience that there is nothing arbitrary in how the Catholics explain and hold their doctrine. Thus, and I will end with this, the eucharistic teaching, in particular, the philosophy which seeks to explain it, is in now way secret or unique to just Catholics—the expression of the eucharistic doctrine is not historically or culturally conditioned. We believe that the Eucharist, and the Christian message in general, employs philosophical concepts and universal truths that are available to all of humanity of all ages:

In the same way, it cannot be tolerated that any individual should on his own authority take something away from the formulas which were used by the Council of Trent to propose the Eucharistic Mystery for our belief. These formulas—like the others that the Church used to propose the dogmas of faith—express concepts that are not tied to a certain specific form of human culture, or to a certain level of scientific progress, or to one or another theological school. Instead they set forth what the human mind grasps of reality through necessary and universal experience and what it expresses in apt and exact words, whether it be in ordinary or more refined language. For this reason, these formulas are adapted to all men of all times and all places (Pope Paul VI 1965, 24).

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