

**An Alternative Theology of Jesus'
Substantial Presence in the Eucharist**

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Irish Theological Quarterly

65 (2000) 111-131

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The classical attempt by Aquinas to explain how Christ is substantially present in the Eucharist under the appearance of bread and wine, it is argued, fails the test of intelligibility required by theology. Against the background of the Church's doctrinal clarifications over the centuries, the author proposes an alternative theological explanation. [Editor]

This article has three parts. The first summarises the teachings of Lateran IV, Florence, and Trent about Jesus' substantial presence in the Eucharist. The second argues that several statements essential to St Thomas Aquinas's theology of that presence are either incoherent or without clear meaning. The third proposes a hypothesis that might be developed into an alternative theology, but also might prove to be inconsistent with revealed truth. I hope it will be communicated prudently and to those who can evaluate it critically. Still, if Aquinas's account is unsatisfactory, an alternative is needed to remove avoidable impediments to individuals' faith and to Christian unity. So, theological inquiry and discussion of alternatives, though perilous, seems necessary.

I. Conciliar Teachings

Lateran IV's profession of faith includes the first conciliar teaching about Jesus' substantial presence in the Eucharist. One sentence deals with three issues. (1) How is Jesus in the Eucharist? He is contained under the appearances of bread and wine. (2) How does this presence come about? God's infinite power transubstantiates bread and wine into Jesus' body and blood. (3) Why does Jesus make himself present? To consummate the unity of the Church's members with himself and one another by giving them the flesh and blood he assumed in becoming human.¹

Florence's bull of union with the Armenians adds to Lateran IV's teaching on all three issues. (1) The whole Christ is contained under both species and, when their parts are separated, under every part of either species. (2) The conversion of bread and wine into Jesus' body and blood is brought about by the power of his words, uttered in his person by the priest. (3) The sacrament increases grace in those who receive it

1. See DS 802.

worthily; by that grace, recipients are incorporated into Christ and united with his members.²

The first canon in Trent's decree on the sacrament of the Eucharist further clarifies how Jesus is present in it, making two things clear. The words *whole Christ* refer to Jesus' body and blood, soul and divinity. And Jesus' presence is substantial, not merely symbolic or dynamic.³

The same decree's second canon develops previous teaching on how Jesus' substantial presence comes about. It comes about in such a way that nothing of the substances of bread or wine, but only their appearances, remain; and by a unique conversion, which the Church appropriately calls 'transubstantiation,' of the whole substances of bread and wine into Jesus' body and blood.⁴

The same decree's third chapter adds that the whole Christ is present 'immediately after the consecration.' 'By the power of the words,' Jesus' body is present under the appearance of bread, his blood under the appearance of wine. But his body is also present under the appearance of wine, his blood under the appearance of bread, and his soul under both appearances 'by virtue of the natural connection and concomitance by which the parts of Christ . . . are joined with one another.' And his divinity is present 'on account of its marvelous hypostatic union with his soul and body.'⁵ The decree's fourth chapter adds that the Council's declaration on this conversion reaffirms what the Church always had been convinced was true, and cites the New Testament's institution narratives as the source of that conviction.⁶

The same decree's second chapter explains why Jesus makes himself substantially present. He wanted the Eucharist to be several closely related things, including the spiritual food of his disciples, the pledge of their future glory, 'and thus the symbol of that one body of which he is the head.'⁷

The first chapter of Trent's teaching on the sacrifice of the Mass further clarifies why Jesus makes himself substantially present. His priesthood did not end with his death. So, though the sacrifice of the cross would be sufficient forever, at the Last Supper Jesus 'offered his body and blood to God the Father under the appearances of bread and wine. Under these same symbols he gave his body and blood to the apostles to be consumed. He then made them priests of the New Testament. And, with the words "Do this in memory of me" etc., he prescribed that they and their successors in the priesthood offer his body and blood.'⁸ In this way, he 'instituted a new Pasch, himself, to be immolated by the Church through priests under

2. See DS 1321–22.

3. See DS 1651.

4. See DS 1652.

5. DS 1640. The translations of this and subsequent quotations are mine.

6. See DS 1642; cf. chap. 1, DS 1637.

7. DS 1638.

8. DS 1740.

visible signs in memory of his passage from this world to the Father.⁹ This new Pasch makes Jesus' unique sacrifice permanently available, for it represents the sacrifice of the cross, sustains its memory, and applies its saving power for the forgiveness of sins.¹⁰

II. Problems in Aquinas's Theology of the Eucharist

If I thought one could reasonably accept Aquinas's theology of Jesus' substantial presence in the Eucharist, I would not question that theology. It avoids contradicting truths of faith and is, as it were, commingled with them in various Church documents. Calling Aquinas's theology into question is likely to disturb some of the faithful, since catechesis on the Eucharist has made such use of his views that they imbue most Catholics' Eucharistic devotion. Moreover, the magisterium has frequently commended Aquinas's theology in general.

However, since theology proposes to provide understanding, acceptable theology not only must be consistent with faith but intelligible. An account is intelligible only if it is a logically coherent set of propositions expressed in statements whose terms have definite meanings. But Aquinas's theology of Jesus' substantial presence in the Eucharist avoids incoherence only by evacuating key terms of their usual meanings. And he does not supply them with other, definite meanings. So, it seems to me that his account fails to meet the requirement of intelligibility.

To show what seems problematic, I begin by summarising Aquinas's teaching about the accidents of bread and wine.

Aquinas states that the accidents that inhered in the bread and wine remain, after the consecration, without a subject. They continue to exist without being accidents of anything. They cannot go on being accidents of the bread and wine, which no longer exist. And, Aquinas asserts, it is obviously impossible that they remain as accidents of Jesus, both because a human body cannot be affected by such accidents and because Jesus' risen body, in particular, cannot be altered so as to receive them. So, he concludes, God's infinite power causes the whole set of accidents that previously existed as determinations of the bread and wine to exist by themselves.¹¹ Among these accidents, Aquinas explains, measurable quantity is more basic than the others, and qualities belong to it. So, after the consecration the perceptible host is really just a white, crisp, wafer-shaped size.¹²

Existing by themselves, the accidents remain able, Aquinas claims, to do 'every action that they could do with the substance of bread and wine existing.'¹³ The persisting accidents decompose under conditions that

9. DS 1741.

10. See DS 1740.

11. See *Summa theologiae*, III, q. 77, a. 1.

12. See *ibid.*, a. 2.

13. *Ibid.*, a. 3.

would cause bread and wine to decompose. When that happens, what would come to be from bread and wine, comes to be from the accidents,¹⁴ though, Aquinas notes, 'it is hard to see how.'¹⁵ His explanation is that, since transubstantiation causes the quantities of the bread and wine to become, as it were, subjects of their other accidents, it also gives those quantities the ability to turn into whatever the bread and wine could turn into if they still existed.¹⁶ So, the sacramental species, previously the mere accidents of bread and wine, can nourish, inebriate, and, in general, do whatever the substance of bread and wine can.¹⁷

Reflecting critically, one wonders whether it makes sense to say that the accidents, rather than the substances in which they inhere, do anything. Even when bread and wine exist, does it make sense to say that their accidents, rather than those substances, can nourish and inebriate? Supposing it does, can it make sense to talk about a white, crisp, wafer-shaped so much of nothing that, being eaten, nourishes; or about the contents of a chalice full of the accidents of nothing that, being drunk, could inebriate?

Many ordinary Catholics might answer that the host is not so much of nothing, but so much of the Lord's body, and the chalice is not full of nothing, but full of the Lord's blood. Indeed, when dealing with the formula for consecrating the blood and with the reverence due the Eucharist, Aquinas himself says that Jesus' blood is contained in the chalice.¹⁸

But both the ordinary Catholic's answer and those statements of Aquinas imply that what previously were the quantities of bread and wine now are Jesus' quantities. And Aquinas has excluded, as obviously impossible, that any accidents that belonged to the bread and wine remain as Jesus' accidents. Accordingly, he holds that the 'body of Christ is not in this sacrament in the way in which a body is in a place, so that it fills the place with its dimensions, but in a certain special way that is proper to this sacrament.'¹⁹ So, while Aquinas affirms that Christ's body and blood are contained under the sacramental species, his view excludes saying that the host is so much of Jesus' body and the chalice is full of his blood.²⁰ Aquinas leaves no alternative to holding that the host is a white, crisp, wafer-shaped so much of nothing, which nevertheless nourishes, and that the chalice is full of the accidents of nothing, which nevertheless could inebriate.

These statements about the accidents of bread and wine that persist after the consecration lead to further problems.

14. See *ibid.*, aa. 4-5.

15. *Ibid.*, a. 5.

16. See *ibid.*

17. See *ibid.*, a. 6, c. and ad 3.

18. See *ibid.*, q. 78, a. 3, ad 1; q. 82, a. 3, ad 1.

19. *Ibid.*, q. 75, a. 1, ad 3.

20. See *ibid.*, q. 76, a. 5, ad 2.

First, Aquinas holds both that the whole Christ is present in the Eucharist and that Jesus' risen body has a definite size and is located in heaven.²¹ Given these two truths, to say that Jesus' body is not in the sacrament as a body is in a place raises questions. Are the size and location of Jesus' body present in the sacrament? If so, how?

Aquinas answers: the 'entire size of Christ's body and all his other accidents are present in this sacrament by virtue of their real concomitance' with his body and blood.²² Yet Jesus' accidents are not present in the way characteristic of accidents. Rather, they are present in the way characteristic of a substance.²³ So, while Jesus' size is present in the Eucharist, it does not spread out his bodily reality and make him too big to fit in a small host or in any part of it.²⁴ And, though Aquinas does not say so explicitly, on his view Jesus' location in heaven must be present in the Eucharist in the way characteristic of substance, and so in a way that does not affect his presence under the sacramental species.

By saying those things about how Jesus' own accidents are present in the Eucharist, Aquinas avoids inconsistency. But what does it mean, for example, to say that a body really is of a certain size, but in the way characteristic of a substance, so that the body's size does not spread out its parts and make it too big to fit in a space smaller than it? After all, spreading out a body's parts is just what size does for it. And in general, what does it mean to say that accidents exist in the way a substance does, and so without determining the substance whose accidents they are? That is what accidents seem to do *per se* – that is, necessarily, precisely insofar as they are accidents.²⁵

Second, Aquinas's view that none of the accidents of the sacramental species are accidents of Jesus himself does seem to account well for some things – for example, that breaking up hosts and sharing the cup does not mutilate and use up the glorified body and blood of Christ. Aquinas says: 'The very body of Christ is not broken, except according to the sacramental species.'²⁶ In other words, not Jesus himself, but only the sets of accidents (that in a certain special way contain his body and blood) are broken and divided. Similarly, according to Aquinas, Jesus' flesh is not chewed: being chewed 'is referred to the sacramental species, under which Christ's body truly is.'²⁷ In other words, being chewed and sipped affect,

21. See *ibid.*, a. 1 and a. 5, ad 1.

22. *Ibid.*, a. 4, c.

23. See *ibid.*, ad 1.

24. See *ibid.*, c. and ad 3.

25. I am not asking how accidents can be without a subject but how they can be the kind of entities they are without determining their subject in the specific way characteristic of each sort of accident. Therefore, I am not arguing: 'Since the very definition of an accident is to be in a subject, the accidents that remain cannot be without one.' Aquinas takes up that objection and answers it (*ibid.*, q. 77, a. 1, ad 2). But his answer, though sound, is irrelevant here.

26. *Ibid.*, q. 77, a. 7, ad 3.

27. *Ibid.*

not Jesus, but only the sacramental species that contain his body and blood.

That explanation is attractive. It excludes disgusting imagery and helps answer charges of cannibalism. Yet the appealing solution has its price: in receiving the Eucharist one does not, on Aquinas's view, eat Jesus' flesh and drink his blood. Rather, one eats and drinks – in the ordinary sense of eating and drinking – accidents that previously belonged to bread and wine, the sacramental species under which Jesus' body and blood somehow are contained. The difficulty, however, is that Jesus did not say: 'I tell you, unless you eat the accidents which inhered in bread and drink the accidents which inhered in wine that somehow contain the flesh and blood of the Son of Man, you have no life in you.'

Aquinas did not consider this difficulty. If he had, I expect he would have said that we really do eat and drink Jesus' body and blood, but not in the usual way. Rather, he might have said, in receiving Communion we eat and drink in a certain special way, so that Jesus' body and blood are eaten and drunk without being chewed and swallowed. But that response would save coherence by emptying *eating* and *drinking* of meaning.

Third, though Aquinas repeatedly says that Jesus is present *under the species* of bread and wine or *contained in* the sacrament, he never explains what these expressions mean. He does make it clear that they do not mean that Jesus is located where the species are, or is the subject of the accidents that constitute the species. Yet at times he suggests that Jesus' substance is present or contained much as the substance of bread and wine was. He says: 'In this sacrament the whole substance of Christ's body and blood is contained after the consecration, just as the substance of the bread and wine was contained there before.'²⁸

Again, in arguing that Jesus' body is not located in the sacrament, Aquinas points out that a substance is not located within or under its own dimensions. He concludes that Jesus' body is in the sacrament 'in the way characteristic of substance, that is, in the way in which a substance is contained by dimensions.'²⁹ Plainly, however, dimensions contain a substance precisely inasmuch as they are an accident that spreads out its parts and gives it its size. But Aquinas again excludes such containing with respect to the consecrated host's dimensions: 'Yet the substance of Christ's body is not the subject of those dimensions, as the substance of bread was.'³⁰

How difficult it is to determine what Aquinas could mean by *contained* becomes clear when he treats the meaning of *This is my body*. He says the words express a practical truth; they bring about, rather than describe, what the utterance refers to.³¹ Its sense is: *Let this be my body*. But does *this* refer to the bread, Jesus' body, or what? Aquinas answers: *this* does not

28. *Ibid.*, q. 76, a. 1, ad 3.

29. *Ibid.*, a. 5, c.

30. *Ibid.*

31. See *ibid.*, q. 78, a. 5, c.

refer to 'the term of the conversion so as to mean "The body of Christ is the body of Christ." Nor does it refer to what was there before the conversion: the bread. It refers to what is common to both, namely, to what is contained in general under these species.³² That final phrase means, *what substance is contained under these accidents*, as his reply to an objection makes clear: 'The pronoun *this* does not point out the very accidents but the substance contained under the accidents. That substance first was bread and afterwards is the body of Christ, which, though not informed by these accidents, still is contained under them.'³³

That answer has perplexing implications. It is intelligible only if *what is contained* has a clear and unambiguous meaning when it refers in general to the two realities that are successively contained, namely, to the bread and to Jesus' body. Thus, it is intelligible only if there is some one sense of *contained* in which one can truly say both that the bread and Jesus' body are 'contained under the species.'

When Aquinas says Christ's body is present in the Eucharist 'in a certain special way that is proper to this sacrament,'³⁴ he either does or does not intend to exclude all sameness of meaning between *what is contained* said of Jesus and of the bread. If he does intend to exclude all sameness of meaning, his answer to the question about the meaning of *this* in the formula of consecration is incoherent. But if there is some one sense in which both the unconsecrated elements and Jesus can truly be said 'to be contained' under the accidents, what can that unambiguous sense of *contained* be?

What is contained would have the same meaning if it referred in general to the subject of apparently continuous accidents in describing a change by which a perceptible object becomes a substantially different perceptible object. Suppose, for example, that *this* was used to refer both to the corpse of Lazarus and to Lazarus – *Let this be Lazarus alive and well* – to point out in general those two different substances. In that case, *what is contained* (under the two substances' seemingly common accidents) would have the same meaning in referring to both substances. But Aquinas denies that *what is contained* refers in that way in the case of the Eucharist, since he holds that Jesus is not the subject of the apparently continuous accidents.

Of course, it is a matter of faith that Jesus' body and blood really are present under the species and contained in the sacrament. That substantial presence and availability imply some real connection between Jesus and the sacramental species. But, as has been explained, Aquinas holds both that the accidents that constitute the species are accidents of nothing and that all of Jesus' own accidents are present in the way characteristic of substance. So, no accident of either set can help account for Jesus' being present in the sacrament and contained under the species.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid., ad 2.

34. Ibid., q. 75, a. 1, ad 3.

Within this theology, I do not see how one can avoid thinking of Jesus and the sacramental species as if they were two entities metaphysically and physically isolated entirely from each other. But that view precludes finding any sense whatever, even an analogous one, in which Jesus can be said to be present under the species and contained in the sacrament.³⁵

Besides the preceding problems in Aquinas's accounts of the accidents of bread and wine and those of Jesus himself, I find a problem in his account of transubstantiation.

Aquinas contrasts transubstantiation with other cases in which something comes to be. In other cases, even if one substance changes into another, the material of the former contributes to the latter. For example, when Jesus raised Lazarus, the material that made up the corpse was miraculously reconstituted into Lazarus's again-living self. That material was the underlying subject of the change.

Aquinas holds that in transubstantiation there is no underlying subject. In this respect, he thinks, it is like creation out of nothing. However, unlike creation and like substantial change, transubstantiation involves a succession of two different realities – first the bread and the wine and then Jesus' body and blood.³⁶ So, on Aquinas's view, in transubstantiation this whole (the whole substance of the bread and the wine) is converted into that whole (the whole substance of Christ's body and blood) in the sense that nothing of the former (no common material) persists. Only the accidents that belonged to the bread and wine remain.³⁷

In some other cases in which something comes from something else, there is no problem finding the sense in which one says meaningfully that the *whole* substance of the former becomes the latter. When speaking of Lazarus's dying, one cannot correctly say his whole substance changed into his corpse. His soul survived.

But in speaking of Lazarus brought back to life, it surely is meaningful, and it seems correct, to say that the corpse's whole substance became Lazarus's again-living self. All the corpse's material was reconstituted into Lazarus's living body, leaving nothing behind. And if Lazarus were still pallid and malodorous as he emerged from the tomb, one might have said that, though he was a substance entirely different from the corpse, some of its accidents remained in him.

However, since Aquinas believes that no common material persists through transubstantiation, he holds that one cannot accurately say that the bread and the wine *become* Christ's body and blood.³⁸ Aquinas holds that one can rightly say that the body of Christ comes from the bread and

35. Saying that the crucial terms are used analogously will evade, not solve, the problem unless the ground of the analogy can be clarified to supply *some* definite intelligibility. The arguments I have offered show that Aquinas did not provide that clarification and indicate that the needed clarification cannot be supplied.

36. See *ibid.*, q. 75, a. 8.

37. See *ibid.*, a. 4, c.; a. 8, ad 3.

38. See *ibid.*, a. 8, ad 1.

that the substance of the bread is converted into Christ's body.³⁹ But in saying these things, one can only mean, on his view, that the bread was the antecedent for Jesus' coming to be in the sacrament by a process in which that antecedent contributes nothing whatever to what follows from it.

Of course, even on Aquinas's view, the bread and wine are necessary antecedents both because Jesus used them when he instituted the sacrament and because they leave behind accidents that serve as the sacramental sign under which Jesus is present and in which he is contained. But those requirements could have been met by saying that the bread and the wine are annihilated and replaced by Jesus' body and blood. And this way of putting matters might seem a more accurate account of what Aquinas thinks is happening: first one reality is there and then it no longer exists, its place being taken by a second reality that has nothing whatever in common with the first.

Aquinas, however, rejects any account involving annihilation. He thinks such an account would require that Jesus replace the bread and wine by moving from heaven into the elements, with the result that he would be in as many different places as there are consecrated species – something Aquinas considers impossible.⁴⁰ So, he maintains that the consecration of the bread and the wine converts their substances into Jesus' body and blood without contributing anything whatever to the reality of his substantial presence. And he says that this conversion, though beyond the power of all created causes, is brought about by God's infinite power.⁴¹

If it is meaningful to talk about converting A into B without anything of A contributing to the reality of B, God no doubt can do it. But the very idea of converting A into B seems to me to imply that something of A contributes to the reality of B. So, it seems to me that Aquinas's account of transubstantiation is unintelligible. And since the unintelligible is impossible, not even God can do it.

Aquinas considers an objection that comes close to posing this problem with his account of transubstantiation.⁴² The objection is that a conversion is a change, and every change needs a subject (something that undergoes it) which initially can be what it will become and then, by changing, actually is that. But, according to the objection, there can be no subject underlying the substance of the bread and the body of Christ. So, the objection concludes, the whole substance of the bread cannot be converted into the body of Christ.

Aquinas begins his reply by saying that the objection deals with substantial change, which presupposes matter that is transformed from *this* into *that*, and so is irrelevant to transubstantiation, in which the whole sub-

39. See *ibid.*, a. 2, c.; a. 8, ad 1.

40. See *ibid.*, aa. 2 and 3.

41. See *ibid.*, a. 4.

42. See *ibid.*, obj. 1.

stance is converted. Given Aquinas's view, this response is effective. But he goes on: 'So, since this substantial conversion implies a certain order of the substances, one of which is converted into the other, the conversion is in both substances as in a subject, just as order and number are in both.'⁴³

That explanation confuses logic with reality. Logically, the concepts of bread and of Jesus' body can serve together as the subject of *conversion*, functioning as a two-term relational predicate (just as those concepts can serve together as the subjects of ordering and numbering predicates). But if, as Aquinas maintains, there is no real continuity between the bread and Jesus' body, the two substances share nothing that could make them be together the subject of anything real. Yet transubstantiation is a real conversion.

III. Hypothesis for an Alternative Theology

A sketch of my theology of the Eucharist as a whole would provide helpful background for understanding what follows. The following points would be developed in such a sketch.⁴⁴

(1) The sacraments of the new law are not only signs or symbols, but cooperative actions. Their being as signs and symbols is best understood in light of their reality as divine-human cooperation in establishing, maintaining, and perfecting covenantal communion of human persons both with the divine persons and with one another.

(2) The participation of ministers and recipients in the sacraments always is subordinate to grace. Human persons' cooperation and the sacraments' benefits to them depend entirely on the Holy Spirit's action, which itself presupposes God's unilateral, salvific initiative and Jesus' uniquely adequate and acceptable human response to it.

(3) At an early age, Jesus committed himself to carry out the mission his Father gave him. In fidelity to that commitment, he chose to go up to Jerusalem and celebrate the Passover with his disciples despite foreseeing suffering and death as side effects of doing so.

(4) In carrying out that fateful choice – that is, in celebrating the Last Supper – and in freely accepting the side effects of doing so, Jesus gave himself to his Father, who accepted this sacrifice and responded to it by raising Jesus from the dead and sending the Holy Spirit.

(5) Jesus' celebration of that Supper with his disciples and his perfect sacrifice in celebrating it fulfilled the Old Covenant and transformed it into one which brings about familial intimacy among divine and human persons. Fallen human beings are drawn into the New Covenant by Jesus' human friendship toward them, the gift of faith, and the Holy Spirit's action, by which they become God's children.

43. *Ibid.*, ad 1.

44. On these points, see Germain Grisez et al., *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, vol. 1, *Christian Moral Principles* (Quincy, Ill.: Franciscan, 1983), 46–58, 229–41, 459–69, 527–42, 725–35, 789–99, 813–22.

(6) In establishing the New Covenant during the Last Supper, Jesus instituted the Eucharist: cooperating with the Holy Spirit, he changed bread and wine into his body and blood, and shared these as food and drink with his disciples. He did so in order to join them to him and to enable them to cooperate in his sacrifice and in the benefits of the Father's response.

(7) Since human free choices to which one remains committed persist as self-determinations, and choices to cooperate similarly persist as interpersonal bonds, Jesus' sacrifice persists, and his disciples' solidarity with him in it also persists, if they remain faithful.

(8) In instituting the Eucharist, Jesus provided for its continual celebration so that this cooperative action would be and, in fact, is one in which his disciples can participate as an ongoing assembly until the end of time.

(9) Since his ascension, Jesus has exercised his priesthood in heaven. But to join his disciples to himself and to make his action available for their participation, Jesus must be really with them. So, he makes himself substantially present in the Eucharist.

This theology provides a framework for understanding Jesus' substantial presence in the Eucharist within the dynamic context of the New Covenant's intimate communion. I now propose a hypothesis that might be developed into such an alternative theology.

Except for the problem about transubstantiation, all the problems with Aquinas's view stem from the supposition that after the consecration the accidents that belonged to bread and wine continue to exist without a subject. So, that supposition must, I think, be denied. Denying it, however, might seem to have been definitively excluded by the Council of Constance.

Believing that the consecrated elements remain bread and wine, John Wyclif denied that the accidents remain without a subject. That denial was included in two lists of his propositions condemned by Constance.⁴⁵ But I do not think that Constance's condemnation of Wyclif's propositions absolutely excludes holding that the accidents remaining after the consecration have a subject.

Wyclif denied Catholic teaching about transubstantiation itself, which Lateran IV had already proposed definitively, and took his position about accidents in holding that both the substance and the accidents of bread and wine remain.⁴⁶ Moreover, Constance and Martin V condemned the list of Wyclif's propositions collectively with a series of alternative

45. For the first list's proposition, see DS 1152; text and translation of the conciliar document: Council of Constance, sess. 8, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols., *Nicea I to Lateran V*, ed. Norman P. Tanner (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown, 1990), 1:411. This act of Constance was confirmed by Martin V, 'Inter cunctas' (see the introduction to the list in DS). For the second list's condemned proposition, see Council of Constance, sess. 15, in Tanner, 1:422 (no. 5).

46. See DS 1151.

theological notes ranging from *heresy to offensive to pious ears*,⁴⁷ and pious ears no doubt were offended by Wyclif's charging faithful Catholics with heresy. Then too, in *Inter cunctas*, which endorsed Constance's first condemnation of Wyclif's propositions, Pope Martin supplied a set of questions to be put to Wyclifites and Hussites, and those bearing on the Eucharist do not raise the issue of the accidents remaining without a subject. Indeed, Martin V's questions speak only of a veil and of appearances rather than of accidents.⁴⁸

Similarly, in their teachings on the Eucharist, Lateran IV, Florence, and Trent speak only of appearances, and the Church's ordinary teaching generally has echoed the conciliar documents. Though a substance's appearances are among its accidents, the two are conceptually different. By using only the concept of appearances, Church teachings have focused on what is true, appearances notwithstanding – this now is Jesus' body and that now is his blood, and no bread or wine remains here. In this way, Church teaching has not invited the difficult questions Aquinas tries to answer about the subject of the appearances and the other accidents that belonged to the bread and wine. Therefore, it seems to me, no defined doctrine or any infallible teaching of the ordinary magisterium includes Aquinas's problematic view that, after the consecration, the accidents that belonged to bread and wine remain without a subject.

Of course, to faithful Catholics who think about these matters, that problematic view is likely to seem a logically inescapable, though difficult, implication of the truth of faith about the Eucharist. However, I suggest that this seeming necessity results from considering what the Church does teach *along with* various plausible presuppositions that seem to pertain to common sense or that have been drawn from Aquinas. I think some of those plausible presuppositions can be replaced.

Still, that is not the case with presuppositions that pertain to faith. Thus, I in no way propose to replace the presupposition that the bread and wine no longer exist after the consecration. Not only Trent's solemn definition but the ordinary magisterium's constant and very firm teaching, and the consensus of faithful Catholics, exclude the view that the substances of bread and wine remain after the consecration.

Among those who hold that excluded view, many have reduced Jesus' presence in the Eucharist to mere symbolism. For those who resist doing that, the view implies either that one and the same thing is both bread and Jesus' body or that the Eucharist somehow involves bread and Jesus' body as two separate realities. The former is impossible, because the same thing cannot be both non-living bread and Jesus' living body. As for the latter, any attempt to say how the two supposedly separate realities were related to each other would end in problems like those in Aquinas's account.

47. For Constance, see Tanner, 1:414, 421; for Martin V, see DS 1251.

48. See DS 1256–57.

The principal presupposition I do consider replaceable is that the appearances of bread and wine and the other accidents that formerly belonged to them cannot remain after the consecration as accidents of Jesus' body and blood, and so as his accidents. But how can Jesus be determined by a set of accidents including the appearances of bread and wine? The answer might be along the following lines.

(1) The conversion of the whole substances of the bread and the wine is their substantial change without residue. All their material is transformed into Jesus' body and blood as all the material in his corpse was transformed into his risen body.

(2) New *parts* of Jesus' body and blood are the immediate term of the transubstantiation of bread and wine.⁴⁹

(3) These new parts are integral to Jesus' glorified humanity, so that by them the whole Christ becomes present in the Eucharist.

(4) By means of these new parts, Jesus does two things. He makes it possible for his disciples to cooperate with the ongoing sacrifice which is his offering of his whole self to the Father. Jesus also gives his whole self to his disciples in holy Communion, thus making them members of his glorified body.

(5) The accidents of bread and wine that remain after the consecration become Jesus' accidents; they are accidents of the new parts of his body and blood into which the bread and wine have been changed.

(6) Jesus' other accidents are not perceptible by us, but they remain operative in him rather than being present only in the way characteristic of substance.

This hypothesis avoids the difficulties in Aquinas's theology of Jesus' substantial presence in the Eucharist. There are no accidents after the consecration that are accidents of nothing, and there is no need to suppose that anything is brought about by, or comes to be from, a set of such accidents. Jesus is contained in the Eucharist, as I shall explain, both by being where the species are and by being the subject of the accidents that previously belonged to the bread and wine. In receiving the Eucharist one eats and drinks, chews and swallows, Jesus' body and blood. The pronoun *this* refers to Jesus' body and blood in the Eucharist in the same way it refers to any other particular entity. Like any other substantial change, transubstantiation has a subject.

Is this proposal viable? Trent used formulations similar to Aquinas's in

49. The Holy Office condemned three propositions expressing Antonio Rosmini-Serbati's somewhat similar hypothesis (see DS 3229-31), and said in its decree, confirmed by Leo XIII, that those and thirty-seven other propositions *were examined* because they did not seem 'consonant with Catholic truth.' Still, the decree nowhere asserted that any of Rosmini's propositions contradicts any defined truth or Catholic doctrine (see ASS 20 [1887-88], 397-410). So, the Holy Office and Leo may well have considered the relevant propositions to be nothing worse than dangerous, and that prudential judgment could have been mistaken or might have been undermined by intervening developments in Church teaching and theology.

defining some relevant truths of faith, particularly in the first two canons, cited in part I above, of its decree on the Eucharist. Is the hypothesis consistent with those truths?

Many if not all the Council Fathers probably understood those two canons in light of Aquinas's theology. Still, Trent's formulation in the second of those canons differs in one respect from Aquinas's. He had said that the whole substance of the bread is converted into the whole substance of Jesus' body, and the whole substance of the wine is converted into the whole substance of Jesus' blood.⁵⁰ Trent says that the conversion is of 'the whole substance of the bread into his body and the whole substance of the wine into his blood'⁵¹ without qualifying *body* and *blood* by *the whole substance of*. The Council thus leaves open the possibility that the *whole* substance of Jesus' body and blood is not the conversion's *immediate* term.

Even in the respects in which there is no such significant difference in formulation, I do not think Trent's teachings on the Eucharist should be interpreted as asserting everything that various Council Fathers may personally have meant to assert or may have believed about the matters the canons address. They meant to allow for theological differences among themselves and their advisers. So, what the Council asserts by those canons should be determined by interpreting them in a way that accounts reasonably for their text considered in its historical context. Unless this standard of interpretation is used, there will be little if any room for the sort of dogmatic development that, in respect to other doctrines, has been recognised as legitimate and desirable in various magisterial documents.

I have not done the historical research to apply that standard with precision, and I lack both the time and the competence needed to undertake that project. So, though the following interpretation of Trent's teaching seems to me defensible, it might be unsound.

Both of Trent's first two canons on the Eucharist reject as false certain statements someone might make, and insist on the truth of certain statements someone might deny. The first canon excludes saying that Jesus is in the Eucharist only as in a sign or symbol or by his saving power; the second excludes saying that the substances of bread and wine remain along with Jesus' body and blood. One could adopt the proposed hypothesis without making or implying either of those statements. The problem, if any, will be in reasonably interpreting Trent's articulation of the truths on which it insists, without discovering that its teaching falsifies the proposed hypothesis.

In the first canon, Trent asserts that the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained in the sacrament of the Eucharist. What meaning consistent with the proposed hypothesis can *contained* have here, such that reading Trent's statements with that meaning will preserve the truth that the Council holds must not be denied?

50. See *Summa theologiae*, III, q. 75, a. 4, c.

51. DS 1652.

Catholic faith about the Eucharist seems to include at least the following propositions. (1) Before the consecration, one can point to the elements and say: 'This is bread and that is wine.' Afterwards, one pointing to them should say (using words with the same meanings): 'It is false that this is bread and that is wine.' (2) After the consecration, if one points to the host and to what is in the cup, one must affirm: 'This is Jesus' body and that is his blood,' using *is Jesus' body* and *is his blood* with a definite sense. What sense? The sense they would have had if the Beloved Disciple, standing beneath the cross, had said to himself: 'Just as he said, here is Jesus' body being given and here is his blood being poured out.'⁵²

In perfect consistency with those essential propositions, the meaning of *contains* is easy to specify on the proposed hypothesis. By virtue of the words of consecration the sacrament contains Jesus' body and blood in the sense that two conditions are met. First, despite appearances, the host is not bread but part of his body, and what is in the cup is not wine but part of his blood. Second, though seeming to be accidents of bread and wine, the appearances inhere in those parts of Jesus' body and blood. In other words, Jesus' body and blood are contained under the Eucharistic species in the same way other substances are contained under their own accidents. That is so, on the proposed hypothesis, because the appearances of bread and wine that remain *are* Jesus' accidents.

But on the proposed hypothesis, how can the *whole* Christ be contained in the sacrament? The answer must start from the explanation Trent adopted from Aquinas. Due to the natural concomitance of the parts of Jesus' humanity and due to the hypostatic union of his humanity with his divinity, the whole Christ is present under both species, rather than his body alone under the appearances of bread and his blood alone under the appearances of wine.⁵³ On the same basis, one can say that on the proposed hypothesis the parts of Jesus' body and blood into which he changes the bread and the wine are not separated from him, like specimens taken for laboratory studies. Rather, they are integral to his glorified humanity, and his humanity is hypostatically united with his divinity. Therefore, in the Eucharist, Jesus delivers his whole self – body, blood, soul, and divinity – to the Father in sacrifice and to his disciples in communion. So, in saying that both sacramental species contain the whole Christ, one can mean that, together with and by means of the parts of Jesus' body and blood that appear to be bread and wine, he truly

52. The predicates, *is Jesus' body* and *is his blood*, are used in the same sense if and only if one affirms that the same human individual's – that is, Jesus' – body and blood are referred to in both cases (see DS 1083, 1256). It is not necessary that those realities' molecules be the same: the predicates truly applied to Jesus' body and blood throughout his life even though few if any of the molecules in Jesus crucified were in the embryonic Jesus. Similarly, Jesus' body and blood need not be in the same condition in the Eucharist that they were in while he hung on the cross: since the same individual who suffered and died has risen, the same body and blood are now in glory.

53. See DS 1640.

delivers his whole self. He does not give only those parts of himself. The adequacy of this understanding of 'The whole Christ is contained' is supported, as I shall explain below, by the analogy between the Eucharist and marriage.

In the second canon of its decree on the Eucharist, Trent asserts the unique conversion – which it points out is fittingly called 'transubstantiation,' – of the whole substance of the bread into Jesus' body and the whole substance of the wine into his blood, only the appearances remaining. What meaning consistent with the proposed hypothesis can *conversion* have, such that reading Lateran IV's and Trent's statements with that same meaning will preserve the truth the two councils assert?

In this context, *conversion* must mean: what consecrating does to bring about the new state of affairs. After the consecration, what still appears to be bread is not bread but Jesus' body, and what still appears to be wine is not wine but Jesus' blood (in the realistic sense specified in the two paragraphs before the preceding one). On the proposed hypothesis, that unique conversion is the substantial change of the bread and the wine into parts of Jesus' body and blood.

But if that conversion is a substantial change, in what sense is it unique? Other substantial changes of bread and wine come about by natural causes and/or result in natural realities. That conversion comes about at each Mass by Jesus' human act of consecrating and the Holy Spirit's cooperation. And it results, not in a natural reality, but in preternatural bodily parts of the incarnate Word, parts that exist by his divine existence.

Again, if the conversion is a substantial change, how is it a conversion of the whole substances of the bread and the wine, rather than an exchange of the substantial forms of bread and wine for those of Jesus' flesh and blood? Substantial change never is a mere exchange of substantial forms. Forms do not substantially change; individual substances do. And when a substantial change – whether the return to life of Jesus' corpse or the transubstantiation of the bread and wine – leaves behind none of the material that belonged to the thing that changed, the whole substance of that thing truly is changed into what results from the change.

Jesus' preaching and teaching as presented in the Gospels plainly declare that he desires to unite his disciples with himself and one another in an intimate communion comparable to that of marriage. The New Testament makes it clear that the Eucharist contributes to carrying out those intentions. So, some aspects of marital communion throw light on the Eucharist.

Of course, the analogy is limited, but it clarifies two things. First, how Jesus' whole self is present in the Eucharist through the transubstantiation of bread and wine into parts of his body and blood. Second, how Jesus really incorporates his disciples and forms them into his one body, without thereby losing his human individuality or depriving them of theirs.

In marriage, a man and a woman become one flesh. *Become one flesh* refers to more than sexual activity. But the nucleus of the married couple's one-flesh unity is intercourse suited of itself for reproduction together with the natural consequences of such intercourse. Biologically, each male or female animal is from birth complete with respect to most functions: nutrition, growth, sensation, emotion, moving about. But with respect to reproductive functioning, individuals are incomplete. Each male and female is only a potential part of a mated pair, which alone is the complete organism naturally capable of reproducing. This is true also of a man and a woman. When they engage in intercourse suited for reproduction, they complete each other and become an organic unit. The couple literally become one flesh, that is, the single agent of a single organic function.

When intercourse carries out a couple's mutual consent to marry, they become one not only as animals but as rational animals. The spouses share in a covenantal communion no less real than the individual identities that differentiate them. They become, as it were, one new person with respect to their whole common life, including, when intercourse is fruitful, their life as parents. Still, the communion of husband and wife in respect to what unites them need neither negate nor diminish their individual personalities but can and should fulfill them.

Consequently, while the functioning of a married couple's complementary reproductive capacities is an essential principle of their one-flesh communion, their occasional marital intimacy does not by itself constitute their permanent one-flesh communion as a married couple. Rather, their bodies as wholes have a nuptial meaning, so that the spouses as whole persons are both united and distinguished in the mutual fulfillment of all their complementary potentialities.

These features of marriage suggest how Jesus' substantial presence in the Eucharist might be understood.

By eating and drinking, both before and after the resurrection, Jesus transformed non-living substances into his flesh and blood. Analogous to this natural process is the preternatural process of transubstantiation, in which he appropriates bread and wine, and substantially changes them by making them parts of his flesh and blood. These parts enable his disciples to receive him into themselves, and enable him to join their bodies to his own, incorporating them as members into his own glorified body.

Thus, the body and the blood made available by Jesus in the Eucharist are preternatural, bodily organs of a unique sort. Unlike genital organs, they are not specified by a single natural function that grounds the communion of participants. Rather, Jesus' Eucharistic flesh and blood bring about a real sharing in his glorified body's whole life. So, by eating his flesh and drinking his blood, his disciples become members of his body, have his life in them, and are nourished, with the result that they will never die. They will live forever, despite dying with respect to the natural life they enjoy as children of Adam and Eve.

As with the one-flesh union of marriage, the bodily unity to which the Eucharist gives rise is an essential principle of the communion of the whole persons involved in the relationship. By his Eucharistic, preternatural organs, however, Jesus makes it possible for his disciples to share, with him and one another, not just in the mutual fulfillment of complementary potentialities but in the everlasting life of the heavenly kingdom, including Jesus' life with his Father and their Spirit. Still, like the Trinity's mysterious communion and the married couple's one-flesh communion, the one-flesh communion among Jesus and his members – his communion with each of them and their communion, as his members, with one another – takes nothing from their individual personalities but rather perfects them.

This understanding of the Eucharist harmonises well with a plausible account of the sense in which an ordained minister acts *in persona Christi* when celebrating the Eucharist.

In persona Christi at least means that a celebrant, like a proxy or a person exercising a power of attorney, is an agent whose authorised actions count as actions of the person in whose place the agent acts. But since the Eucharistic sacrifice is not entirely separate and distinct from the sacrifice of the cross, Jesus himself must somehow personally be carrying out in the Eucharist the same, self-sacrificing, obedient choice that resulted in his passion and death.

Moreover, Jesus by the Eucharist establishes and nurtures bodily communion with his disciples – that is, with those who, having heard his gospel, have repented, believed in him, and been baptised. Thus, the Eucharist is related to baptism's mutual commitments of revelation and faith as marital intercourse is related to marital consent. While a couple might consent through a proxy to marriage, spouses must consummate their marriage in person. Therefore, Jesus must somehow personally bring about the bodily communion his gospel promises to those who believe.

As a human individual, Jesus can personally carry out in the Eucharist his human choices of self-sacrifice to the Father and self-giving to his disciples only if the utterances and gestures that constitute the sacrament really are his. It is not enough that those utterances and gestures, which make up the sacrament's 'form,' merely quote or mimic his, while being someone else's. So, to carry out his human choice, Jesus ordains ministers: he capacitates some men who already are members of his body to serve as living extensions of his own lips and hands in performing his utterances and gestures.

Thus, Jesus is really, truly, and dynamically present in those who act *in persona Christi* when, but only when, they do precisely what he has authorised them to do on his behalf. He is not substantially present in the ordained as he is in the Eucharist. His ministers are not transubstantiated but remain the individuals they were, acting in Jesus' person only by both intending and doing what is required to carry out *his* actions.

Unlike candidates for ordination, bread and wine are subhuman, incapable of cooperation and interpersonal communion, and unable to share in Jesus' resurrection life. So, if they remain what they are, they cannot serve as Jesus' Eucharistic, preternatural organs. The bread and the wine must be substantially changed, the bread becoming a part of Jesus' body and the wine a part of his blood. These new parts substantially exist, as do his human soul and all his other flesh and blood, by his one and only existence, which is uncreated, divine life.⁵⁴

The foregoing account of Jesus' substantial presence in the Eucharist implies that he is really located simultaneously at least wherever the consecrated species are located. Aquinas thought Jesus could be located in this world only if he left heaven, and could be located wherever the Eucharistic species are only by being in many places at once – things Aquinas thought impossible. But for Jesus to be located wherever the Eucharistic species are located can be understood in a way that seems coherent.

Jesus as man, risen and glorified, is in heaven. But where is heaven? Neither anywhere in the spatial-temporal continuum of this universe nor somewhere outside, using *in* and *outside* as they are used in referring to spatial relationships within the universe. Yet Jesus promised to be, and certainly really is, present in this world in many ways. He is in his disciples, and the least of his brothers and sisters; in the midst of every small gathering of his disciples; with his worldwide Church; in his word being preached and taught; in his ordained ministers everywhere as they act in his person – as well as in the consecrated species.

How does he do it? By being in a single place that embraces the whole expanse of the human world. Heaven is not light years away from our world. It is another dimension, a different order of reality, yet related to our world in such a way that Jesus, while remaining always in heaven, can be manifoldly present here, really yet for the most part invisibly, and, when visibly, almost always unrecognisably.

The conditions of the physical universe no longer limit Jesus' risen body. Though truly his own, it now is spiritual rather than natural. After his resurrection, Jesus entered a room whose doors were locked. So, Jesus' risen body can be in the same place as other things. A natural human body can be only so big, and is structured appropriately for human life as we now live and experience it. But that does not argue against the suggestion that Jesus' risen body, no longer limited by the dimensions of a natural human body, is structured differently, in a way appropriate for his present life.

Moreover, there is no reason to suppose that the capacity of Jesus' body to be present wherever the consecrated species are present prevents him

54. See *Summa theologiae*, III, q. 17, a. 2. The hypothesis I propose is different from the one rejected by the Holy Office on 7 July 1875 (see DS 3121–24). That proposal was that the natures of bread and wine remain, but cease to be substantial because they are united with Christ. My proposal is that the bread and wine are changed substantially, so that only accidents that belonged to them remain, now as accidents of parts of Jesus' body and blood.

from being wholly present in every part of himself. There is a sense in which even we human persons are wholly present in each part of our natural bodies, and the divine Word surely is no less present in every part of his risen, spiritual body. In a natural human body, only certain parts, spatially related to other parts in definite ways, are used in various acts of communication and social interaction. Still, one can suppose that the structure of Jesus' risen body enables him to use its spiritualised capacities and preternatural organs in doing what is appropriate according to each way in which he makes himself present in our world.⁵⁵

In sum, the hypothesis I propose is this. What seem to be bread and wine on the altar after the consecration actually are parts of Jesus' body and blood. By appropriating the bread and the wine, and incorporating their material into himself, Jesus has substantially changed them, so that they really have become his flesh and blood. Being Jesus' integral parts, each and every one of these portions of his flesh and blood makes the whole Christ present in the sacrament, though not perceptible by us. Thus, in and by these visible, preternatural organs of his glorified body, which exist by his divine being, Jesus offers his whole self in sacrifice to the Father and gives his whole self in communion to his disciples. By thus joining them to himself, Jesus also sustains them in divine life and unites them with one another in a bodily communion meant to last forever.

The appearances and other characteristics left behind when the bread and wine pass away actually are accidents of these visible organs of Jesus. As such, they really are his accidents without being accidents of the rest of him, just as the blackness of a woman's hair is an accident of hers even if she is fair-skinned. Even while Jesus makes himself present and available to us in the Eucharist, he remains in heaven, which is another dimension, an order of reality that includes our whole world and yet is distinct from it. So, except for the appearances and other characteristics left behind by the bread and wine, Jesus' accidents are beyond our experience. Yet they continue to exist in him as accidents and make him, insofar as he is man, be as he now is: risen and glorious.

Even as a small child, I wondered about Jesus' presence in the Eucharist. When being prepared for First Communion, I asked: 'How can Jesus fit in the wafer?' The question upset the teacher, but I was permitted to receive with the class after I assured our parish priest that I believed Jesus manages it somehow.

55. Jesus' several ways of being really present to his disciples have been mentioned in recent magisterial documents and discussed by some theologians. For a summary and an argument showing the matter's importance for Eucharistic theology, see Michael G. Witzak, 'The Manifold Presence of Christ in the Liturgy,' *Theological Studies*, 59 (1998), 680–702. Even if Aquinas's theology accounted for Jesus' substantial presence in the Eucharist, it plainly does not account for (and implicitly excludes a realistic account of) Jesus' other ways of being present in this world. So, that theology disposes those who accept it to reduce these other ways to metaphor and symbol, mixed with confusion between those presences and the Word's omnipresence.

Now I think I see how. Still, I am ready to be shown or taught authoritatively that my thinking is unsound. And I hope, by God's grace, to continue believing what the Catholic Church believes about the Eucharist, even if it becomes clear that some statements of which I cannot make sense are necessary to express that mystery of faith.⁵⁶

56. I thank those who commented on earlier versions. Some associated with me in other projects disagree with my criticism of St. Thomas, the hypothesis I propose, or both.