

TRANSUBSTANTIATION AND EUCHARISTIC PRESENCE

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In its explanation of the presence of Christ in the eucharistic elements, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* stresses the substantial nature of the change and repeats the language of the Council of Trent: "... 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" (1376). Trent's definition in turn follows almost exactly the words of Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae*.¹

In this use of the language of substance, the *Catechism* follows a long tradition of the Western Church, which goes back at least to the Roman Council of 1079 (DS 700) and was followed by several Councils (Four Lateran [DS 802], Second Lyons [DS 860], Florence [DS 1321], and Trent [DS 1652]). Pope Paul VI in *Mysterium Fidei* also asserts that "The way Christ is made present in this Sacrament is none other than by the change of the whole substance of the bread into his Body and the whole substance of the wine into his Blood...."²

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1. *Nam tota substantia panis convertitur in totam substantiam corporis Christi, et tota substantia vini in totam substantiam sanguinis Christi. Unde haec conversio non est formalis, sed substantialis. Nec continetur inter species motus naturalis, sed proprio nomine potest dici transubstantiatio.* "ST III, 75, a4 (Ottawa edition: 1941, vol IV, 2943a). For the Latin, with an English translation, of Trent's declaration, see N. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (London: Sheed and Ward, & Washington: Georgetown Univ. Press, 1990), vol II, 695 & 697 (canons).

2. *Mysterium Fidei*, # 46 (Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1965), p. 13.

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And yet from about the middle 1960s, sacramental theologians have to a large extent shifted away from the language of substance and accident (or "species," the term used by Trent), and from the term "transubstantiation," in describing the eucharistic presence. Instead, a new approach, or rather several new approaches, made their appearance. These approaches, sometimes labelled "transignification" or "transfinalization," emphasized not so much the ontological or metaphysical change in the eucharistic elements as the change in their meaning and signification to the assembled communicants as a result of the eucharistic consecration. Joseph Martos explains this in *Doors to the Sacred*, a widely used text of sacramental theology:

With respect to the eucharist, the proponents of transignification suggest that at the last supper Christ changed the meaning of a common Jewish ritual to a memorial of his death and resurrection, and that he changed the meaning of the bread and wine from what they signified for Jews to a sacrament of his body and blood. But since meaning is an intrinsic aspect of reality as it is known to human beings, by changing the meaning of the ritual and the elements he thereby transformed their reality ... when the meaning of the elements changes, their reality changes for those who have faith in Christ ... whereas for those without faith ... they appear to remain bread and wine.³

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This theology was pioneered in Catholic circles by E. Schillebeeckx and Piet Schoonenberg,⁴ among others. 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. Where the older approach drew on Aristotelian and Scholastic categories, the newer approach draws on a variety of philosophies: phenomenology, existentialism, personalism, etc. Thus in some recent treatments of the eucharist, the term transubstantiation does not appear at all, nor is there any appreciable focus on the ontological change in the elements.⁵ Rather the center of attention is on Christ's presence within the community. As Bernard Cooke writes: "... a fundamental principle of sacramental liturgies, particularly eucharistic liturgies [is]: The most important sacramental symbol, the most significant reality, in any liturgy is the people who perform the action."⁶

There were a number of reasons for this transformation in eucharistic theology.⁷ Some of the most important were the following. (1) Vatican

3. *Doors to the Sacred* (N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981), p. 300.

4. E. Schillebeeckx, O.P., *The Eucharist* (N.Y.: Sheed and Ward, 1968), P. Schoonenberg, S.J., "De tegenwoordigheid van Christus," in *Verbum* 26 (1959), 148-157; "Eucharistie en tegenwoordigheid," in *Heraut van het Heilig Hart*, 89 (1959), pp. 106-11; "Een terugblik_Ruimtelijke, persoonlijke en eucharistische tegenwoordigheid," *Verbum* 26 (1959), 314-327; "Christus' tegenwoordigheid voor ons," in *Verbum* 31 (1964), pp. 393-415.

5. See for example, Bernard Cooke, *Sacraments and Sacramentality* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1983), pp. 95-103.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

II, in discussing the eucharist, did not use the term “transubstantiation,” but went back to biblical and patristic expressions affirming the real presence. (2) Theologians reemphasized the importance of the sacraments as signs and symbols. This line of thought was aided by the philosophy of phenomenology.⁸ (3) The ecumenical movement generated momentum away from an exclusively “Catholic” formulation of the real presence (“transubstantiation”), towards more ecumenically acceptable modes of expression. (4) The Aristotelian and Scholastic terminology of “substance — accident” or “substance — species” (Trent’s formula) did not fit well within the world-view of modern science. Cyril Vollert, in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* article on transubstantiation, states that the term “substance”: “indicates the basic reality by which the bread and wine are what they are and not something else.”⁹ But it would seem that what makes bread bread and wine wine are the chemical and molecular structures of their elements (flour, water, alcohol, etc.). But *these* are not changed in transubstantiation. “Substance” therefore must mean something else, some ghostly reality behind the chemical structures of bread and wine. But it is very hard for modern hearers to grasp what this occult “substance” might be, or how it makes the bread what it is and the wine what it is. For this reason (among others) Joseph Powers, in company with many others, concludes: “Theologians came to see that an approach to the analysis of the Eucharist from the categories of an ontology of nature was untenable [*sic*]...”¹⁰

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In this paper I will argue for a recovery, but also a re-understanding, of the term “transubstantiation” and the substance analysis of the eucharist which it represents. I propose this for several reasons. The new approach to the theology of the eucharist, while valuable and necessary, especially in its emphasis on symbol, sign, and meaning, seems also to have lost what might be called the “ontological density” of the real presence of the Lord in the eucharistic elements. In the new view, it is not so much the elements that are changed in the consecration as the community’s perception of them. Any ontological change in the elements is simply disregarded. Attention has instead shifted onto the presence of the Lord in the community. Jean-Luc Marion notes this:

7. For accounts of this decisive transformation, see the following: Schillebeeckx, *The Eucharist*, pp. 87-152; J.M. Powers, S.J., *Eucharistic Theology* (N.Y.: Herder and Herder, 1967); E. Kilmartin, “The Eucharist in Recent Literature,” in *Theological Studies* 32 (1971), 233-277; J. Martos, *The Catholic Sacraments* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1983), 109-70. For objections to transubstantiation, see Michael Lawler, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Contemporary Sacramental Theology* (N.Y.: Paulist, 1987), pp. 144-46.

8. For a recent important contribution to this literature, see Robert Sokolowski, *Eucharistic Presence: a Study in the Theology of Disclosure* (Wash. D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1993).

9. *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (hereafter *NCE*) 14: 260.

10. *Eucharistic Theology*, p. 147.

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.

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Even if the theology of transubstantiation has lost its legitimacy and, with it, real presence, the very notion of presence remains. It has simply been displaced from the eucharistic "thing" (real presence) to the community; or, more exactly, the present consciousness of the collective self is substituted for the concentration of the presence of "God" under the species of a thing.¹¹

But this, according to Marion, has resulted in an idolatry, in which the collective consciousness substitutes for the presence of Christ, and the presence of Christ as an Other standing over against the community, to which the community can relate and embrace in ecstatic union, has disappeared.¹² 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.

But with the loss of transubstantiation language, we seem to be losing any way to talk about the real presence of the risen Lord in the eucharist, at least within the Roman Catholic tradition. And with that, as Marion notes, we are losing a sense of the real presence itself, especially among young people. A 1993 Gallup poll revealed that only 30 percent of American Catholics believe that they are actually receiving the body and blood of Christ when they receive communion.¹³ Martos comments (in 1981!) that "The term *transubstantiation*, once found in every Catholic catechism, is virtually unknown to younger Catholics...."¹⁴ Many young Catholics think of the eucharist as just a symbol (in the weak sense of the word, rather than as a manifestation of a mysterious presence through which they can be transformed). Not surprisingly, many of them are not much interested in attending mass.

It is true, however, that the substance/accident analysis of the eucharist seemed to reach an impasse about the middle sixties. I will propose a way of overcoming this by employing a modified notion of transubstantiation. The resulting understanding will, I hope, bring the doctrine of transubstantiation into better harmony with other foundational Catholic doctrines, especially the doctrines of the resurrection, miracles, and the communion of saints. It will also carry significant ecumenical implications.

In developing this paper, I will first review the traditional understanding of transubstantiation, next consider its difficulties within a modern

11. *God without Being* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 166.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 167-69.

13. Cited by R. Scott Appleby, in Mary Jo Weaver and R. Scott Appleby, *Being Right* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 59. The note goes on to say "Only 21 percent of Catholics under the age of fifty believe in the real presence, while 24 percent believe that Christ becomes present in the bread and wine only if the recipient believes this to be so."

14. *Doors to the Sacred*, p. 292-93.

scientific framework, then propose a revised notion of transubstantiation, and finally explore its implications for systematic theology and for ecumenism.

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TRADITIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF TRANSUBSTANTIATION

The term *transubstantiation* appears to have been first introduced by Peter Comestor, in the twelfth century,¹⁵ and was adopted by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 to explain the transformation of the elements. The idea was that during the eucharistic consecration, the substance, or reality, of the elements changed into the body and blood of Christ, while the accidents or appearances of the bread and wine did not change. But what exactly was meant by “substance”?

This term has a long and confusing history. Aristotle uses substance (*ousia*) in at least four ways. A substance is a concrete, existing thing (primary substance), it is the essence of a thing, it is a universal (e.g. the genus and species of a thing), and finally, the substratum: “that of which everything else is predicated, while it itself is not predicated of anything else... that which underlies a thing primarily is thought to be in the truest sense its substance.”¹⁶ 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 (*substare*).”¹⁷ R.E. McCall summarizes the meaning of substance in philosophy as “something basic and independent in existence, standing under other realities, and a source of activity.”¹⁸ The notion of substance, then, in Aristotelian and medieval thought, is that which exists by itself and not in another, supports the accidents or attributes of a thing, perdures through change, and is a source of activity.

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Now it is widely accepted that Trent, in speaking of the change of the “whole substance of the bread into the whole substance of the body of

15. Beck, Hans-Georg, et al., *Handbook of Church History*, vol IV (Montreal: Palm Publishers, 1970), p. 90. The term (in Greek, *metousiosis*) is also used in Orthodoxy, from the 17th century. But Orthodox writers insist that other terms can be used to describe the real presence, and that use of ‘transubstantiation’ does not commit them to Aristotelian philosophical concepts. Typically, the term is taken to indicate that the bread is really and substantially changed into the Body of the Lord, but it does not indicate how that change occurs. See Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (N.Y.: Penguin Books, 1963), pp. 290-292.

16. *Metaphysics* 1028b-1029a; ET from *The Basic Works of Aristotle* ed by Richard McKeon (N.Y.: Random House, 1941), p. 785. See also D.J. O’Connor, “Substance and Attribute,” in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1967), vol. 8, pp. 36-40.

17. *De Potentia*, 9.1, ET from R.E. McCall, “Substance” in *NCE*: 13, p. 767.

18. *NCE*, *Ibid.*, p. 766.

It is worth noting, however, that even within an Aristotelian framework of thought, the idea of transubstantiation hardly seems plausible.

In Aquinas' understanding at least, the accidents of the bread and wine continue after the consecration, but inhere in no subject. They are not, therefore, the accidents of the glorified body and blood of Christ; they are "free floating" accidents, sustained only miraculously.

Christ" did not commit itself to any specific philosophical concept of substance. It follows instead a non-technical, theological and dogmatic tradition, going back at least to the profession of faith imposed on Berengarius (in 1079, see DS 700) in which substance seems to mean, as Cyril Vollert puts it: "the true, basic reality of a thing, that which makes it this thing and not something else."¹⁹ Some authors, notably Schillebeeckx, think that the bishops of the Council of Trent were clearly operating within an Aristotelian framework of thought.²⁰ He notes that while Trent uses the term "species" (a non-Aristotelian term) instead of "accidents," "accidents" was frequently used in the discussions, and the bishops appeared to mean the same thing by "species" as by "accidents." Nonetheless, the conciliar definition does not commit itself to any specific philosophy.

It is worth noting, however, that even within an Aristotelian framework of thought, the idea of transubstantiation hardly seems plausible. In Aristotelian thinking, natural change means that the *accidents* change while the substance remains the same (accidental change); or else the substance and the accidents change (substantial change); a change in which the accidents remain the same, while the substance changes, would seem to be impossible. (John Wyclif rejected transubstantiation precisely because of this.)

For this reason Scholastic philosophers such as Aquinas, always held (with Catholic tradition) that transubstantiation could only be a miraculous change. But miracles, like grace, build on nature, they do not destroy it.²¹ This poses a potential problem for the traditional understanding of transubstantiation. Furthermore, in Aquinas' understanding at least, the accidents of the bread and wine continue after the consecration, but *inhere in no subject*. They are not, therefore, the accidents of the glorified body and blood of Christ; they are "free floating" accidents, sustained only miraculously. As Aquinas writes: "the accidents continue in this sacrament without a subject. This can be done by Divine Power..."²² But in Aristotelian philosophy, accidents cannot exist apart from a substance, since they are precisely properties, qualities, or relations of substance.

19. Cyril Vollert, "The Eucharist: Controversy on Transubstantiation," in *Theological Studies*, 22 (1961), p. 392.

20. *The Eucharist*, pp. 56 ff.

21. See my article, "Miracles, the Supernatural, and the Problem of Extrinsicism," in *Gregorianum*, 71/1 (1990), pp. 23-41.

22. *ST III*, 77.1. See P.J. Fitzpatrick, *In Breaking of Bread: The Eucharist and Ritual* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993), pp. 12-17; Catherine Pickstock, "Thomas Aquinas and the Quest for the Eucharist," in *Modern Theology* 15 (2), April, 1999, pp. 159-80.

TRANSUBSTANTIATION AND MODERN SCIENCE

In saying then that the “substance” of the bread and wine change into the “substance” of the body and blood of Christ, Trent then seems to be saying no more than that the essence or underlying reality of the bread and wine change, while their appearances — the “species” or “accidents” — stay the same. Or, in Vollert’s phrase, substance means “the true, basic reality of a thing, that which makes it this thing and not something else.”²³ How does this understanding fit with modern chemistry and physics?²⁴

The first point to note is that in modern chemistry, bread and wine are not unitary substances, but conglomerates of other substances. This immediately introduces ambiguity into the phrases “the substance of the bread” and “the substance of the wine.” The second point is that the chemical constituents of bread and wine are molecules — carbohydrates, sugars, water, and so on. These in turn are made up of atoms (carbon, hydrogen, oxygen), which are made up of elementary particles (protons, electrons, neutrons), which are made up of quarks and gluons, which are made up of possibly more elementary units (we don’t know the bottom of the chain, if there is one.) A third point is this: in modern physics, matter and energy are interconvertible; matter can be transformed into energy (as happens in atomic explosions), and energy can be fixed as material particles. Beneath the various forms that matter/energy can take (elementary particles, electromagnetic energy including light and heat waves, etc.), there would seem to be a yet more primordial “proto-energy” which can take the form of determinate, measurable energy (light waves, heat rays, etc.) or of particles. This primordial, formless “proto-energy,” which has the potential to take many different determinate forms, may be the modern equivalent of Aristotle’s prime matter, a suggestion made by Bernard Lonergan.

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).

There are two lines of argument which address this problem. One way is to assert that “substance” is a purely metaphysical category, which

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23. See note 19 above.

24. The following English language articles summarize the literature in on this problem up to about 1967. Joseph T. Clark, S.J., “Physics, Philosophy, Transubstantiation, and Theology,” *Theological Studies* 12 (1951), pp. 24-51; Cyril Vollert, S.J., “The Eucharist: Controversy on Transubstantiation,” in *Theological Studies* 22 (1961), pp. 391-425. See also C. Vollert, “Transubstantiation,” in *NCE* 14, pp. 259-61.

Colombo argues that the substance spoken of by Trent and by previous councils in the Catholic tradition (Florence, Constance, IV Lateran) was not physical but "transphysical," an essence or inner nature, which could not be detected empirically by any present or future natural science.

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cannot be investigated by empirical science. This has been defended by Carlo Colombo in several articles.²⁵ Colombo argues that the substance spoken of by Trent and by previous councils in the Catholic tradition (Florence, Constance, IV Lateran) was not physical but "transphysical," an essence or inner nature, which could not be detected empirically by any present or future natural science. In effect, science could tell us nothing about the substance of the bread and wine, which could only be analyzed by theology. This theological concept of substance, therefore, is not tied to any particular science or philosophy. (Colombo recognizes that this notion of substance is not that of Aristotle, but he avers it is found in the Councils such as Florence, Constance, IV Lateran, and in authors such as Innocent III.) Science can tell us about the realities in the bread and wine which are *not* changed, but cannot reach the substance, which is changed in transubstantiation. This was (and insofar as substance analysis is still employed, probably still is) the most common line of thought in defending transubstantiation.

A somewhat different approach was taken by Filippo Selvaggi in two articles.²⁶ According to Selvaggi, "substance," as used by the Fathers and Scholastics, means a unified reality which can be known on different levels: ordinary, scientific, and philosophical; it is this whole substance that is converted into the body of Christ. There is no evidence that the Fathers or the Schoolmen ever endorsed a distinction between an unknowable metaphysical ground, which changes in transubstantiation, and a physical shell, the accidents, which does not change. Authors in the Catholic tradition, including the uses of the various Councils, therefore, used "substance" in the scientific sense with which they were familiar. St. Thomas in particular teaches that substantial forms cannot be known directly, but are known to us through their accidents (ST 77.1, ad 7). Thus substance, far from being an unknowable metaphysical substrate, can only be known experientially, through its accidents; it is in effect both physical and metaphysical — the ultimate reality underlying a thing. Since matter, in Aquinas' physics, is composed of substance and accidents, the object of physics is both the accidents and the substance of matter. How then does Selvaggi rescue the doctrine of transubstantiation? He argues that in transubstantiation, the *substance* of the elementary particles — protons, electrons, neu-

25. C. Colombo: "Teologia, filosofia e fisica nella dottrina della transustanziazione," *Scuola cattolica* 83 (1955), pp. 89-124; "Ancora sulla dottrina della transustanziazione e la fisica moderna," *Scuola cattolica* 84 (1956), pp. 263-66; "Bilancio provvisorio di una discussione eucaristica," *Scuola cattolica* 88 (1960), pp. 23-55; see also M. Cuervo, O.P. "La transustanciación según Santo Thomàs y las nuevas teorías físicas," *Cienca Tomista* 84 (1957), pp. 283-344; these are summarized and discussed in Vollert, "The Eucharist: Controversy on Transubstantiation."

26. "Realtà fisica e sostanza nella dottrina eucaristica," *Gregorianum* 37 (1956), 16-33; "Ancora intorno ai concetti de 'sostanza sensibile' e 'realtà fisica,'" *Gregorianum* 38 (1957), pp. 503-14. These are summarized in Vollert, 1961, pp. 401-02 and 411-13.

trons, is converted into the body and blood of Christ, but their *accidents* — extension, mass, electric charge, in short everything measured by modern physics, remain unchanged. Thus science can detect no change in the consecrated bread and wine. Cyril Vollert, in the articles cited above, takes approximately the same position as Selvaggi.

Now there seem to be problems with both of these positions. Colombo's approach removes the substance of the bread and wine from any physical reality. But in so doing, it seems impossible for him to show how this ghostly, purely metaphysical "substance" can be the essential reality of the bread, that which makes it what it is. What makes the bread bread and the wine wine would seem to be precisely their chemical structures, just as what makes ethyl alcohol (C₂H₅OH) one kind of substance, and diethyl ether (CH₃OCH₃) another, each with distinct properties (accidents), is their chemical structures. Colombo has preserved the substance of the bread and wine from the unwelcome investigations of science, but at the cost of depriving it of any form or content, and so rendering it unintelligible.

Colombo has preserved the substance of the bread and wine from the unwelcome investigations of science, but at the cost of depriving it of any form or content, and so rendering it unintelligible.

I think the same may be true of Selvaggi, except that he pushes the problem of substance down to the level of atoms, protons, neutrons, and electrons. The substance of these particles, he avers, is distinct from their proper accidents: mass, extension, electric charge, energies, etc. These accidents remain the same, but the substance is changed in transubstantiation. But this notion of substance is not that which makes a thing what it is, for that, as we have seen, is precisely the atomic and chemical structures of the elements, bread and wine, which are not changed. Perhaps Selvaggi's idea of substance could be "the true actual reality of the thing" or, in Aquinas' language, "that which exists *per se* and not in another." In this case, would it be the "proto-energy" spoken of above, energy before it has taken on any specific quantifiable form, even that of quarks, or gluons, or of yet more elemental entities, like strings? Or would it be some more evanescent reality, in which case it would be open to the criticisms leveled above at Colombo? This "proto energy" is a material or physical reality. If it is wholly converted into the body and blood of Christ, but all the appearances of the physical articles making up the bread (or wine) remain, then we would have to say, either that these appearances (accidents) remain, inhering in *another* substance, the glorified body of the Lord, or they remain, and inhere in *no* substance, but are supported miraculously (this was Aquinas' position). As a Thomist, I assume Selvaggi would take the latter position.

I think this is the best case that can be made for the traditional understanding of transubstantiation, within the framework of modern physics. I find it hard to believe, and know of no one who would defend the idea that it is the "proto-energy" which is converted into the glorified

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body of the Lord. But if it is not that, what *is* the substance that is converted? We are left with the “metaphysical substance” of Colombo. But this seems to have no real intelligible content and therefore no meaning. It is clearly *not* known through its expression in any physical accidents, which is what Aquinas says is true of substance generally. And if all this is true, then the statement of Trent, and of the Catechism, quoted at the beginning of this essay, simply does not make sense. Indeed, that is precisely why this line of defense of the real presence has been tacitly abandoned by almost all theologians; as Powers said, above, it was found to be “intenable.”

There are, moreover, other serious problems with the traditional explanation of transubstantiation which should be of concern, especially to systematic theologians. These are: it does not fit with other traditional Catholic doctrines concerning miracles, the resurrection, the communion of saints, or eschatology, and it has no analogies in nature or in the world of our experience, and the way it has been expressed contradicts the symbolic meaning of the eucharistic ritual. I will treat these problems in the above order.

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Transubstantiation has been universally held to be a miracle; indeed, it cannot be understood in any other way. But it is not at all like other miracles. For, as I have argued elsewhere, miracles, like grace, build on and perfect nature, they do not annihilate or destroy it.²⁷ This is clear in healings; people who have observed them, such as Alexis Carrel, note that what happens in a miraculous healing is an extraordinary acceleration of the body’s natural healing processes, not a displacement of those processes.²⁸ Consider, as an example, the case of Joachime Dehant.²⁹ Joachime suffered from an ulcer on her right leg which had been treated for twelve years without healing. At the time she went to Lourdes (1878), it was twelve inches long, six wide, had penetrated to the bone, and suppurated profusely, causing a nauseating stench. It was healed in a matter of minutes at Lourdes during her second bathing, leaving a perfectly formed scar. The cure was later recognized by the church as miraculous. The fact of the scar, however, indicates that the miracle followed the course of a natural healing, but was greatly accelerated. Even in as “unnatural” a miracle as the multiplication of loaves, it is bread that comes from bread, and fish from fish, not some-

27. Nichols, “Miracles, the Supernatural, and the Problem of Extrinsicism,” pp. 23-41.

28. *Man, the Unknown* (N.Y.: 1935), pp. 148-49; cited in Louis Monden, S.J., *Signs and Wonders* (N.Y.: Desclée, 1966), p. 196. In the same book, Monden himself states: “Specialists comparing the ways in which the various miraculous cures occur, agree that they follow the patterns of natural recovery. All of those who had studied the events are practically unanimous in stating that a cure always takes place as a natural process, only at an infinitely higher rate of speed” (p. 235).

29. See Dr. Boissarie, *Healing at Lourdes* (Baltimore. The John Murphy Co., 1933), pp. 2-9; also Ruth Cranston, *The Miracle of Lourdes* (N.Y.: Doubleday, Image, 1988), pp. 39-40.

thing wholly different. But this is not the case with transubstantiation, where the substance or nature of the bread and wine are wholly converted into a different nature, and hence cease to be bread and wine. It is as if a peanut were instantly converted into a whale.

Again, one might think that the transubstantiation could be understood as a foreshadowing of the resurrection and glorification of the faithful — a symbol and promise of heaven. This was in fact suggested by Colombo, who argued that the change in the consecrated bread and wine might be analogous to the change which all material reality will undergo in the general resurrection — an anticipation of eternity.³⁰ But critics pointed out that this is not the case; the consecrated bread and wine do not become glorified bread and wine; they cease to be and become another thing, quite unlike the blessed in heaven. Transubstantiation therefore is *not* a sign of resurrection, glorification, or the mode of existence of the saints in eternity; it is the opposite, a counter-sign, the natural reality is not transfigured or glorified; it ceases to be. Transubstantiation, thus understood, does not fit well with major Catholic doctrines of the resurrection and communion of saints, ones to which it would seem to be particularly related.

Finally, one would think that what happens to the bread and wine might be a sign of what should happen to the *participants* during the mass — to be transformed and incorporated into a holy community and the Mystical Body of Christ, through the action of the Spirit. But, following the above reasoning, it is not a sign of this, but a counter-sign, for in the transubstantiation the elements are not perfected and incorporated into the Body of Christ, their natures are converted and displaced by the Body of Christ. They cease to be themselves and become something else. This is the opposite of what should happen to believers; we may be said to “become” Christ (cf. the Orthodox doctrine of *theosis*), but in so doing we do not lose our human natures or our individual identities—in short, our substances. We become one with Christ, but are not absorbed into or converted into Christ.

Again, transubstantiation is not like any change in nature, whether seen from an Aristotelian or a modern perspective. It has no natural analogies. Aquinas, and following him, Herbert McCabe, argues that its closest analogy is to God’s creation of the world from nothing. But (though I am loath to disagree with Aquinas unless I have to), I do not see how this can be the case. For if the analogy is to creation from nothing, then the bread and wine are not *converted* into Christ’s Body and Blood, as Trent affirms, they simply cease to be and a new creation takes their place. And this underscores the force of the arguments above.

Transubstantiation, thus understood, does not fit well with major Catholic doctrines of the resurrection and communion of saints, ones to which it would seem to be particularly related.

Transubstantiation is not like any change in nature, whether seen from an Aristotelian or a modern perspective. It has no natural analogies.

30. “Teologia, filosofia e fisica nella dottrina della transustanzione,” 123 ff; see a discussion of this in Vollert, “The Eucharist: Controversy on Transubstantiation,” pp. 421-25.

Almost all modern commentators on the eucharist emphasize its importance as a meal, a meal of fellowship, in which Christ gives himself and makes himself present. But if the bread and wine, the elements of the meal, are not really bread and wine, how can there be a meal?

Finally, almost all modern commentators on the eucharist emphasize its importance as a meal, a meal of fellowship, in which Christ gives himself and makes himself present. I entirely concur in this understanding of the eucharist. But if the bread and wine, the elements of the meal, are not really bread and wine, how can there be a meal? Catholics have been traditionally taught that the bread looks like bread, tastes like bread, but is not bread. But if it is not bread, what are we eating? The physical body and blood of Jesus of Nazareth? That would make us cannibals. (Some statements on the eucharist, like the first *Ego Berengarius*, suggest this meaning.)³¹ The glorified body of Christ? To the extent that this is understood as a physical meal, it still sounds like cannibalism, albeit of a rarified sort. To the extent that it is understood as non-physical, it is not a meal. I submit that if the bread is not really bread, or the wine wine, we cannot really speak of a meal, and so the central symbolism and sacramental meaning of the eucharistic feast is undone.³²

Furthermore, I do not think this problem is resolved in the new view of the eucharist as “transignification.” This view maintains that in the consecration, the bread and wine acquire new meaning to the participants, and so are themselves changed. James F. White writes:

The concept of Christ’s presence in the eucharist has acquired the name “transignification.” Christ uses bread and wine ... to give himself to us. No longer is it accurate to say that the elements are merely bread and wine. They are a gift; the reality of them completely changes because they become means through which we experience anew Jesus Christ.³³

Now, it is not true that being a gift “completely changes” the reality of what is given. If I give a bottle of champagne as a gift, it does not cease to be champagne and become something else (as the doctrine of transubstantiation asserts of the bread and wine). If a dollar bill is minted, it does not cease to be paper, though it acquires new meaning and value. As Norris Clarke has written, “To be is to be substance in relation.”³⁴ In any entity, we have substance, but that substance is always found in relation with other substances. Changing the relationships of a substance will change its relations, but not its ontological essence and identity. And if ontological identity is dissolved into mere relationship (as in White’s statement above), then the relationship itself will dissolve with it.

31. See DS 690. Also, Henry Chadwick, “Ego Berengarius,” in *Journal of Theological Studies*, vol 40, part 2 (Oct., 89), pp. 414-45.

32. See P.J. Fitzpatrick, writing as G. Egner, makes this point in “More Thoughts on the Eucharistic Presence,” in *New Blackfriars* (April, 1973), pp. 171-80.

33. *Sacraments as God’s Self Giving* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), p. 59.

34. “To Be Is to Be Substance in Relation,” in *Explorations in Metaphysics*, (Notre Dame Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1994), pp. 102-22.

A NEW INTERPRETATION OF TRANSUBSTANTIATION

As is well known, Aquinas argued that there can be only one substantial form in each substance, and that this substantial form informed prime matter directly. He made no allowance for any subsidiary substantial forms in a complex entity. This led him into some curious positions. The eye, in a living person, was not a substance, but part of a substance; but in a deceased person, the eye could no longer be called an eye, even just after death, because it had no substantial form of its own. Similarly, water, once ingested and incorporated into a living body, ceased to be water, because it was part of a larger substance, and could not therefore retain its own substantial form. Thomas wrestled with this problem. In the *Summa Theologiae* he writes:

“So we must hold with Aristotle that the elemental forms remain in a compound, not actually, but virtually. For the qualities proper to the elements remain, but in a state of abeyance; the qualities, that is, that enable the elemental forms to act. And composition of this sort disposes matter to be informed by the substantiality of a compound body, such as a mineral or a living thing.”³⁵

And in *De Mixtu Elementorum* he observes:

We must find another way to state how the elements are, on the one hand, genuinely united and, on the other, are not entirely deprived of their nature but remain in the mixture after a special manner. It is the active forces emanating from the substantial forms of the elementary bodies which are conserved in the mixed bodies. Consequently, the substantial forms of the elements exist in the mixtures not with respect to their proper act (*Non quidem actu*) but with respect to their active power (*sed virtute*).³⁶

Thus Neo-Thomist philosophy would refer to the water in a living body as “virtual water” and as having a “virtual reality.”³⁷

Elsewhere I have suggested that while Thomas is correct in holding that there is only one substantial form per substance, his philosophy could be “creatively completed” by an additional category midway between substance (or substantial form) and accident; namely, the cat-

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While Thomas is correct in holding that there is only one substantial form per substance, his philosophy could be “creatively completed” by an additional category midway between substance (or substantial form) and accident; namely, the category of “subsidiary form.”

35. English translation from *Summa Theologiae*, London: Blackfriars, 1970, vol 11, p. 71. William Wallace argues that elementary particles are virtually present in atoms and molecules. See his essay “Are Elementary Particles Real?” in *From a Realist Point of View* (Wash. D.C.: Univ. Press of America, 1979), pp. 187-99. I would note, however, that even at the atomic level, parts can influence wholes. An example would be the radioactive disintegration of the uranium atom in a molecule of uranium oxide, or the point mutation of a nucleotide in the genetic DNA.

36. *De Mixtu Elementorum* (*Opuscula Phil.*, Marietti, pp. 155-56). See translation with notes by V. Larkin “On the Combining of the Elements,” *Isis*, 51 (1960), pp. 67-72. I am indebted to Norris Clarke for this reference.

37. See George Klubertanz, *The Philosophy of Human Nature* (N.Y.: Appleton Century Crofts, 1953), pp. 27-28. See also: ST I, q. 76, a.4, ad 4. See also note 32.

egory of “subsidiary form.”³⁸ Consider an organ such as the heart. The heart, in a person (or animal) has its own form, though it is regulated by the larger whole of which it is a part. The heart can be removed from a person, kept alive *in vitro*, and transplanted into another person. Clearly it does not cease being a heart in this process. The same is true of other organs and even of molecules. Water, hemoglobin, insulin, and hundreds of other molecules, retain their form inside the body; if they didn’t, they could not function. Proteins and enzymes must have very precise chemical structures and shapes — in short, forms — in order to fulfill their roles in the physiology of the body; if that structure or shape changed, the body could not function.

My proposal is that what happens in transubstantiation is analogous to the incorporation of atoms or molecules into the body.

I propose, then, that molecules such as water, insulin, hemoglobin, etc. which when isolated outside the body would be considered substances, with their own characteristic accidents, properties and operations, retain their form and properties within the body. But they become incorporated into a larger whole, a larger substance, and therefore cease to be independent substances (at least in Aristotelian and Thomistic thinking); they become what might be called subsidiary substances or perhaps better, subsidiary entities, which are part of a greater whole. This position, indeed, seems to be congruent with that of Aquinas himself, who does say that elements retain their power (*‘virtus’* in the Latin), but not their substantial forms.

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.

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. 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. Now this comparison of transubstantiation to the incorporation of minerals or protein into the body is analogous; the two situations are similar but not identical. For the Body and Blood of Christ are the glorified body and blood, not the body and blood as they existed on earth. But the analogy seems to be a strong one.

Thus it is possible, on this model, to say that the whole substance, that is, the independent substantiality of the bread and wine, is changed into the whole substance of the body and blood of Christ. But at the

38. “Aquinas’ Concept of Substantial Form and Modern Science,” in *International Philosophical Quarterly*, XXXVI, # 3 (Sept., 1996), pp. 303-18.

same time the bread does not cease being bread (or the wine wine); it ceases only to be a separate substance. Instead of existing in itself, *per se*, it exists in another (cf. Aquinas' definition of a substance, above).³⁹ This, I think, satisfies the requirements of Tridentine orthodoxy.

This conception of transubstantiation ameliorates many of the problems which attended traditional explanations, though it is not entirely different from those explanations either. (Other authors, such as Cyril Vollert, Joseph Ratzinger, and some Orthodox authors, explain transubstantiation in language which is close to that of incorporation.⁴⁰) 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. We do not need to locate the change in some obscure, unintelligible, metaphysical "substance" of the bread and wine (Colombo), or in an unreachable physical substrate (Selvaggi). Nor do we need to ponder at what level the substance of the bread and wine exist, or how accidents can be miraculously held in existence when not supported by any subject. Rather we can say that what changes is that the bread and wine are incorporated miraculously into the glorified body of the Lord, and so become the body and blood of the Lord. This change cannot, of course, be analyzed by science, and would probably be classed as metaphysical not physical (though this might depend on how one conceives the glorified body). From the scientific point of view the elements remain themselves and are unchanged.

This notion also should help to retrieve the ontological reality of the real presence in the elements, yet it does not deny the change in meaning or signification; indeed, it *strengthens* these changes in relationship, precisely because of the change in ontology. Here I agree with Paul VI in *Mysterium Fidei*:

After transubstantiation has taken place, the species of bread and wine undoubtedly take on a new meaning and a new finality, for they no longer remain ordinary bread and ordinary drink, but become the sign of something sacred, and the sign of a spiritual food. However, the reason they

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39. Would the bread and wine then be accidents of the glorified body of Christ? In Aquinas' language, they would. But I think this language is too imprecise. I would rather say that they become subsidiary entities, analogous to subsidiary forms, sustained not in themselves, but by the glorified body. In Aquinas' sense of the word substance, "that which is sustained in itself," the bread and wine are no longer substances, but have been converted into another substance, the glorified body. But in Cyril Vollert's sense of the word "substance," namely, "the true, basic reality of a thing, that which makes it this thing and not something else," I think it would have to be said that both the physical/chemical structures of the consecrated bread and wine, *and* the glorified body, which hold them in being, contribute to their "true, basic reality" and make them what they are.

40. See articles by Vollert cited above. See also J. Ratzinger, "Das Problem der Transubstantiation und die Frage nach dem Sinn der Eucharistie," in *Theologische Quartalschrift* 147 (1967), pp. 129-58. This article is discussed in E. Kilmartin, S.J.: "Sacramental Theology: The Eucharist in Recent Literature," in *Theological Studies* 32, # 2 (June, 1971), pp. 238-39.

This way of conceiving transubstantiation brings it into better alignment with other doctrines, especially those concerning miracles, the resurrection, the communion of saints, and eschatology.

take on this new significance and this new finality is simply because they contain a new "reality" which we may justly term ontological.⁴¹

At the same time, this way of conceiving transubstantiation brings it into better alignment with other doctrines, especially those concerning miracles, the resurrection, the communion of saints, and eschatology. As with other miracles, we can say here that the nature of the bread and wine is not destroyed (though they cease to be separate substances), but perfected, so that they become signs of a higher, glorified reality. In this respect they would resemble the transfiguration, in which Jesus' human nature was transfigured, but not destroyed, in becoming a sign of his divinity. Rather than being discontinuous with the doctrines of miracle and grace (which like miracles perfect nature without destroying it), in this conception transubstantiation is continuous with these doctrines, and is indeed the supreme exemplar of them.

So also for the doctrine of the resurrection and glorification. Again, if the bread remains bread and the wine wine (though not "ordinary bread and ordinary wine," as Paul VI notes), in short, if these created realities remain themselves and are not destroyed, but are incorporated into a higher order of being, then the doctrine of transubstantiation can indeed serve as a sign of the resurrection and of heaven, in which the blessed, and all created reality (see Romans 8) will remain themselves and not lose their natures, while participating in the glorification of the resurrected state. In this respect, Jesus' own resurrection was the anticipatory sign, but a sign which can be represented at each mass in the transubstantiation of the bread and wine.

The participation of the consecrated bread and wine can also signify and effect the believer's own participation in the Mystical Body of Christ, through the Holy Spirit, the actualization of which is the purpose of every eucharistic ceremony.

In this way of understanding transubstantiation, the participation of the consecrated bread and wine can also signify and effect the believer's own participation in the Mystical Body of Christ, through the Holy Spirit, the actualization of which is the purpose of every eucharistic ceremony. As *Lumen Gentium* states: "In any community existing around an altar ... there is manifested a symbol of that charity and `unity of the Mystical Body, without which there can be no salvation' ... For `the partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ does nothing other than transform us into that which we consume.'" This last statement is taken from Leo the Great, Sermon 63, and probably represents the ancient faith of the church, both West and East.⁴² It is, however, somewhat hyperbolic: we do not lose our natures and individual personalities and become Christ; our natures and personalities endure but are united with and in Christ without losing their own identities. This is true also

41. *Mysterium Fidei*, pp. 13-14.

42. Vladimir Lossky writes. "In the eucharist the Church appears as a single nature united to Christ... In the Church and through the sacraments our nature enters into union with the divine nature in the hypostasis of the Son, the Head of His mystical body." *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976), p. 181.

for the bread and wine in the interpretation I am proposing, but not in the traditional interpretations, in which the bread and wine are displaced by Christ's Body and Blood. Thus in the older theology the transformation of the eucharistic elements cannot serve as a sign of the transformation of the faithful; in this newer interpretation, it can.

This in turn validates the eucharist in its traditional role as an eschatological sign, as described in Geoffrey Wainwright's study *Eucharist and Eschatology*. It is the meal of the kingdom, the "reality-filled sign of what is to come," "the image of what will be made manifest" in the kingdom of heaven, when we will be united with one another and with God through Christ to the limit that our natures allow.⁴³

Again, in this interpretation, transubstantiation does have many analogies in nature; it is common for elements to be incorporated into greater wholes while remaining themselves. Their relationships are changed, of course, but not their ontological essence.

Finally, by preserving the reality of the bread and wine, this view supports (rather than contradicts) the symbolic reality of the eucharist as a meal.

In this interpretation, transubstantiation does have many analogies in nature; it is common for elements to be incorporated into greater wholes while remaining themselves. Their relationships are changed, of course, but not their ontological essence.

ECUMENICAL IMPLICATIONS

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."⁴⁴ 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.

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.

Again, the above interpretation should be of interest to Anglicans and Episcopalians. One of the traditional Anglican objections to transubstantiation is that if the bread and wine cease to exist, they cannot then function as a sign. Thus the Thirty-Nine Articles (1571) say that "transubstan-

43. See Geoffrey Wainwright's *Eucharist and Eschatology* (New York: Oxford Univ., Press, 1981), a study of the eucharist as eschatological sign, from which these phrases were taken (pp. 41, 49).

44. *The Book of Concord*, ed. by T. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 34.

There are at least two problems associated with the interpretation which I am advancing here.

The first is this: How can it explain the very first eucharist, at the Last Supper, when Jesus said the words of institution?

The second problem concerns the ontology of the glorified Body of Christ.

... overthroweth the nature of a sacrament."⁴⁵ But if the bread and wine remain, then the sign value of the sacrament also remains.

Another objection, (in the Forty-Two Articles [1553]), similar to the Calvinist objection, was that the body of Christ was taken up into heaven, and therefore cannot be present on the altar, since "the body of Christ cannot be present at one time in many and diverse places."⁴⁶

But this objection is rooted in a too physicalist conception of the glorified body, as if it were still occupying time and space. But in most modern conceptions of the glorified body, it exists in an altogether transcendent realm, outside of our space and time, analogous to a higher dimension. As such, it can be present to our world at any point, at many times and places simultaneously.⁴⁷

There are at least two problems associated with the interpretation which I am advancing here. The first is this: How can it explain the very first eucharist, at the Last Supper, when Jesus said the words of institution? How could the elements of the eucharist at that ceremony participate in the *glorified* Body and Blood of Christ, if it did not yet exist? This, I think, is a problem for almost all interpretations of transubstantiation. My explanation of this problem is that the Last Supper was a proleptic participation in the sacramental union of the glorified Lord with the elements of all future eucharists. In a similar way, Catholics and Orthodox hold that each mass re-presents the original sacrifice on Calvary, thus participating in it, as it were, backwards across time. The Last Supper was a participation forward in time, in the future incorporation which the bread and wine would have in the glorified Body and Blood of Christ, and which foreshadows the perfect participation of the faithful in the mystical Body in heaven.

The second problem concerns the ontology of the glorified Body of Christ. In any natural organism, say the human body, the whole depends on the constituent parts for its existence. Take away the molecules of the body, and there is no body. Yet we do not want to say this about the glorified Body of the Lord; it does not depend for its existence on any entities which are incorporated into it (as I am suggesting the eucharistic elements are). Nor can it be damaged by our eating of the eucharistic bread and wine. Here we reach the limits of the analogy I am proposing; the incorporation of the bread and wine into the glorified Body and Blood in this respect is *not* like the incorporation of food into a natural body. To explain this, we have to look to the parallel in the Incarnation. There, the human nature of Jesus is incor-

45. *Documents of the English Reformation*, ed. by Gerald Bray (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1994), p. 302.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 302.

47. See Raymond Brown, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* (N.Y.: Paulist, 1973), pp. 125-26.

porated into or fused with the Logos, yet the Logos does not depend on it for its being or existence, as a natural body depends on its constituents for its existence.

We may get some help here from Aquinas' explanation of the resurrected body.

...in the saints after the resurrection, the soul will have complete dominion over the body, and it will be altogether impossible for it to lose this dominion, because it will be immutably subject to God, which was not the case in the state of innocence.⁴⁸

The glorified body of the saints will be impassible, Aquinas argues, because its form, the soul, will be wholly subject to God, which it is not in the natural state. Similarly, perhaps we can say that the form (or forms) of the bread and wine in the transubstantiated state, rather than being independent substantial forms as they are in a state of nature, owe their being directly to the glorified body. The being of that body, in turn, depends directly on God; it is like the tunic of Jesus described in John, which was: "without seam, woven from top to bottom."

Perhaps this is the best we can do. 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. □

Perhaps this is the best we can do. As with all mysteries of faith, there is a point where words and analogies fail.

48. *Summa Theologica*, Supplement, q. 82, a. 1, ad 2; ET: (N.Y.: Benzinger Bros., 1947), vol III, p. 2906.

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