

THE EUCHARIST

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Abstract: The real presence of Christ in the Eucharist is a mystery although the gospel of John¹ provides a pathway towards an explanation. The change that takes place in the Eucharist appears to do so from outside the composition of bread and wine. The analysis of Aristotle's principles of change cannot be used to explain the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The divine presence is other than a substantial change in the composition of bread and wine. The change is an event rather than a process from potency to act. Certain consequences follow from this view. First, the distinction between the natural order of space and time as process and the supernatural order of eternity time as event avoids the errors of pantheism and panentheism. Second, Thomas Aquinas' analysis of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist supports the belief in a creation *ex nihilo* rather than from eternal matter. This view is supported by biblical theology. Saint Augustine's Tractate on the Gospel of John explains the connection between the visible bread and wine and the invisible and supernatural presence of Christ in the Eucharist as an event. The aim of this paper is to examine that claim.

The celebration of the Eucharist has a long history beginning in the Upper Room and Holy Thursday Supper. The Eucharist is the heart of every mass as a sacredness instituted by Christ in pledging to give his life for us. During this history, the secondary elements have undergone

¹ Biblical references are from The New American Bible. Wichita, Kans.: Catholic Bible Publishers, 1985-1986.

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certain changes, “*but there has been no change in the essence of the ‘Mysterium’ instituted by the Redeemer of the world at the Last Supper.*”² The Holy Eucharist is the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the celebratory bread and wine.

We read in Matthew (14:22-25) During the meal he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. “Take this, he said, this is my body.” He likewise took a cup, gave thanks, and passed it to them, and they all drank from it. He said to them “This is my blood, the blood of the covenant, to be poured out on behalf of many.”

We do not understand the real presence of the divinity of Christ in the Eucharist. However, this is a matter of profound faith for the Christian faithful. The distinction between understanding and explaining a phenomenon is critical to the success of this article. We can attempt to understand the human presence of Christ in the Eucharist through the principles uncovered in Aristotle’s analysis of change, but the presence of Christ as divine in the Eucharist is a mystery because the solution to the problem lies beyond the range of human understanding.³ However, the etymology of explanation as a process of discovering explanations within the folds of an antecedent and necessary set of conditions promises some degree of insight into this mysterious presence. We cannot know the essence of the divinity of Christ and therefore we have no understanding of the nature of the divine presence in the Eucharist, but the biblical texts of John’s gospel on the transubstantiation⁴ provide the texts required to shed light on that mystery. Let me be as clear on the distinction between understanding and explaining a phenomenon because it seems possible to explain something without being able to

² Vatican Council 11. Austin Flannery, General Editor. Northport, (New York: Costello Publishing Company), volume 11, 1982, 73.

³ I am reminded of the book of Job and how his attempt to understand why God permits the suffering of innocent victims (such as himself) angers God. This is a reminder that God is God and we are not (Job 38: 12-21; 40:3-5).

⁴ The term transubstantiation is used by Thomas Aquinas to indicate that the process of change that takes place in the bread and wine moves across the boundaries of accidental and substantial change.

understand it. The attempt to understand God's essence fails because the issue moves us beyond the range of the human intellect. For instance, we cannot understand why God died on the cross for our sin, or why Christ's temporal existence does not claim equality with the Father. The action of Christ appears to be wholly irrational from a human point of view. He puts himself at-risk by not claiming this equality and leaves himself open to the possibility of suffering a horrible death at the hands of his accusers. The crowd that surrounds Jesus does not know that his death is redemptive and that his resurrection from the dead opens the door to eternal life. Three interrelated themes are at work in the gospel of John and are examined here to provide an explanation of the Eucharist. We read in John (6:1-71); (1) the multiplication of the loaves at Passover; (2) the discourse on the bread of life, and (3) the effect of the discourse. But Jesus is misunderstood and "many of his disciples broke away and would not remain in his company any longer" John (6:66-67). The people lacked insight into the double meaning of 'bread' as daily food and as the food of eternal life. The translation of bread from the Aramaic language which Jesus spoke '*hawvlan lachma d'sunqanan yaomana*' includes 'insight' and food.⁵ We turn to the gospel of John for a closer look at what Jesus says about 'the bread of life' and the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

Jesus begins by feeding a large crowd of people to make the point that 'another type of bread' (the Eucharist) is everlasting food. We read in John (6:11-12) that Jesus took the 5 barley loaves and 2 fish to feed a crowd of 5000 people. He took the food, gave thanks; "... and passed them around to those reclining there; he did the same with the dried fish, as much as they wanted." It became clear that this was not an ordinary meal because after everyone ate, "they gathered twelve baskets full of pieces left over by those who had been fed with the five barley loaves." The people were in awe of Jesus and sought to follow him as the terrestrial 'prophet who had come into the world.' Jesus

⁵ My translation is from Douglass-Klotz, Neil. *Prayers of the Cosmos*. (San Francisco: Harper & Rowe Publisher), 1990, 26-27.

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knew that the people wanted to make him king and he fled back to the mountain alone.

The crowd went to Capernaum where they found Jesus as he explained that he is not giving them ordinary bread. We read in John (6: 35); “I myself am the bread of life. No one who comes to me will ever be hungry, no one who believes in me will ever thirst.” But the crowd did not understand Jesus as he spoke about ‘coming down from heaven’, ‘being sent by the Father’ and that those who believe in him “shall have eternal life” and ‘they will be raised from the dead.’ The crowd said; ‘is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph’? But Jesus told them to stop their murmuring; “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.” John (6:44). At this the Jews continued to quarrel amongst themselves, saying “How can he give us his flesh to eat?”

The teachings of Jesus in John (6:53-56) are shocking to his followers; “Let me solemnly assure you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. He who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has life eternal, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood real drink. The man who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.” Jesus said this in a synagogue instruction at Capernaum. Their Jewish history told them that Moses gave them manna from heaven to eat in the desert as they fled from the Egyptians. But Jesus is telling them that it was his Father that fed them and led them out of the desert, not Moses. They are hearing something new, something radical with suspicions of cannibalism at the thought of eating Jesus’s flesh and drinking his blood. Their culture, attitudes, values, and beliefs are rooted in the temporal world while Jesus is talking about an entirely different world and how the Father as bread of eternal life is the gateway to that world. The Jews do not understand how Jesus’s earthly father and his seemingly other Father are related. Some Christians today continue to struggle with this issue and look upon ‘heaven’ as more or less of an extension of the ancient Greek view of the world as being eternal. They are told that this new world is without suffering and death. Most accept that the Eucharist is the real presence of Christ as a

matter of faith, but we do not understand what this means because we do not think the way God thinks.

The play between the temporal world and the eternal world is continued in John (6: 57-58) with the Eucharistic promise that the “man who feeds on this bread shall live forever.” What could it possibly mean for the people of Capernaum to live forever, if not understood in the light of eternal time? I am not personally convinced that Jesus is talking about eternal time in the Aristotelian sense of the term. Aristotle is pagan, and the culture of his day believed in a plurality of gods. However, this is not why I find that his view of the eternal does not fit the Christian view of eternal life, but more on this later.

The transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ bridges the gap between the temporal world and the eternal world. The resurrection of Christ which Christians celebrate at Easter is the most significant event of the Church year as it plays a critical role in the transition from one world to the next. The resurrection of Christ is a historical fact. No biblical scholar doubts the evidence of the risen Christ because we have first-hand testimony about the empty tomb by those apostles who were at the present to see the death and resurrection of Christ.⁶ What are we missing?

The risen Christ is seen to bridge the divide between the temporal and the eternal world because Christ exhibits characteristics from both worlds; he is simultaneously recognized and unrecognizable, appears

⁶ See Gary Habermas. Veritas Forum. The Historical Evidence for the resurrection of Christ. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ay_Db4RwZ_M accessed 8 October 2018. The historical evidence to support the resurrection of Christ is from Paul's 15-day visit with the apostles Peter and James in Jerusalem 4 or 5 years after the resurrection (around 35 AD). They must have shared their common experience of Christ; Paul must have spoken about what happened to him on the road to Damascus while Peter and James must have spoken about their experience of the risen Christ and the empty tomb. Rational persons adjust their beliefs to the evidence. The first-person account of Paul, Peter, and James explains how the Eucharist is the bread of life. The resurrection also explains how the dead have life after death. We do not know why Christ gives us life, but the evidence suggests that he cares about us.

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and disappears at will, is physical because he breaks bread with friends on the road to Damascus but seemingly ethereal because he walks through walls; his wounds are palpable, but they neither heal nor fester.⁷

At this point, permit me to wear my philosophy cap as I seek to interpret the explanation uncovered in my study of some biblical texts. The texts selected from the gospel of John put us in the presence of a mystery as the bread and wine are transformed into the real, divine, presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist. Occam's razor advises us to seek the simplest explanation possible because some layers of explanation are unnecessary and misleading. In my classes on death and dying, for instance, we move through progressive layers of complexity to explain the occult, but only do so as necessary. We refuse to accept that a phenomenon provides evidence for the existence of supernatural ghosts until all other explanations are exhausted.

The first path as we wonder how Christ is the bread of life is the view of pantheism that the world is identical to God; God is everything and everything is God! The pantheistic explanation of the transubstantiation is weak because the all of existence includes the degrees of perfection found in things. While some things express more perfection than other things as is evident through their operation, the absence of a perfection normally due to a subject leads us to the possibility of two types of evil, namely physical and/or moral evil. This view conflicts with the explanation of the Eucharist as the body of Christ. While we do not understand the nature of the divine presence in the Eucharist, the explanation of this mystery is based on the insight that God is without the limitations and imperfections of the temporal world.

⁷ For more details on this line of thought see my article 'What we learn from the resurrection of Jesus Christ. *Art and Realism* (Festschrift). (Lublin: Polish Society of St. Thomas Aquinas and the Faculty of Philosophy. Catholic University of Lublin), 2014, 771-786.

The case for panentheism is stronger, however. Panentheism affirms that all is in God. The tension between God's transcendence and God's immanence in the world is ongoing.⁸ The view of the Eucharist in this light suggests that God is present in the bread and wine before the consecration of the Eucharist. The presider's words "this is my body, this is my blood" are not the occasion for the presence of God in the Eucharist but the symbol of that awareness. This view is fraught with promise as well as difficulties. The promise is that God is never far from us. God and the world are interdependent. The difficulty arises because of God's eternal essence as this view contradicts the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. Since God is eternal his creation must be eternal, if panentheism is correct. Creation *ex nihilo*, on the other hand, establishes a real distinction between the eternity of the divine essence and the temporality of the created world. The early Christian church seems to be unaware of the urgency of making this distinction. We read in Paul's address to the people of Athens that God is not far from any of us; "In him we live and move and have our being." (Paul, Acts 17, 28-29). Research on the theology of panentheism appears to walk a fine line between the connection that exists between God's essence and his operations. We are not necessary to God's essence, although God experiences God in part through our operations. The distinction between God's creation and the world is essential to God's free redemption of the world. We otherwise open the door to the possibility latent in panentheism that God's redemption of the world is also the redemption of his own dark side.⁹

⁸ See Culp, John. Panentheism. Criticisms and Responses. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Edward N. Zalta (ed.) Summer 2017 edition. URL= <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/panentheism>

⁹ The Gnostic claim that God sends his Son to redeem himself as well as humankind from Satan is advanced by C.G. Jung in *Answer to Job*. Translated by Richard Francis Carrington Hull. London: Ark Paperbacks, 1992, 72. In Jung's psychological analysis of the book of Job, God refuses to use force against Satan because God's dark side favors the evil angel. Jung says that God appears to be unaware of his own dark side, although Job is keenly aware of that side of God.

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We read in the creation text of *Genesis* that God the Father is the creator of the world and all things contained in it. Thus, it seems possible to suggest that God's divine footprint exists in all things, as panentheism affirms. While human artifacts bare the characteristics of contingent things, that is they change, wear, and come to an end, the word 'creation' does not refer to a process taking place in our world but is said to underscore the possibility of our world coming into existence from nothing. The suggestion that panentheism holds more promise than pantheism is based on the possibility that the created world existed in the state of potentiality in the divine mind before it sprang into real existence approximately 13.8 billion years ago.

If God is ubiquitous, that is everywhere, then God is present in each speck of sand in the cosmos as well as in all things visible and invisible. The world of created things is intelligible; each speck of sand is seen to glow with the presence of the divine as it sends us on an errand to discover its mysteries. Each speck of sand, each snowflake has an identity that testifies to the greatness of God's creative act. Things have dimension, size shape and form valued by God; "God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good." (*Genesis* 1:31).

Does the gospel of John suggest the possibility of panentheism? We find no evidence to support this claim. The Gospel of John is silent on the nature of the Eucharist in his discourse on the Last Supper, although he recognizes the centrality of the Eucharist in Christology. John (6:53-56) affirms the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, but his focus at The Last Supper is on how Christ invites Christians to be of service to others. St John omits many other facts that are found in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke such as the baptism of Christ, but the simplest explanation is that he prefers to get behind the facts to their essential consequences. The gospel of John focuses on the consequences of the events surrounding the Last Supper. *Instead of writing about the events surrounding the Eucharist at the Last Supper, John focuses on the importance that Jesus places on serving one another.* We read in John (13:4-6); "(Jesus) rose from the meal and took off his cloak. He picked up a towel and tied it around himself. Then he

poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet and dry them with the towel he had around him). St. John explains Jesus' action in more detail John (13:15-17); "What I just did was to give you an example: as I have done so you must do ... Once you know all these things, blest will you be if you put them into practice." *The Gospel of John uses the centrality of the Eucharist to explain the core of Christianity as being of service to others.* St. John dwells on the consequence of the real presence of Christ at the Eucharist to explain what it means for the

followers of Christ.¹⁰ We read in John (13:34-35); "I give you a new commandment: Love one another. Such as my love has been for you., so must your love be for each other. This is how all will know you are my disciples: your love for one another." The love we have for others encapsulates the spirit of the Eucharist as Christ's love for us was such that he gave his life for us that we might have eternal life. On the other hand, the Gospels of Mark (14:22-25); Matthew (26:26-29); and Luke (21.1:17-20), draw on the text of the Last Supper to express the carefully chosen words of Jesus' desire to be with us. Jesus took bread broke it and said; "Take this" (bread, wine) as my (body, blood) and (eat, drink) of it to institute the sacrament of the Eucharist as a source of the living presence of God in the Eucharist. God is with us. Jesus uses the forcible phrase "Take this" to indicate how the gift of his death and resurrection gives us new life. He gives his life freely that we might live. The evangelists Matthew, Mark and Luke focus precisely on the same words of Christ. We read in Matthew; "*Take this* and eat it, this is my body"; in Luke; "*Take this* and divide this among you ... This is my body to be given for you"; and in Mark; "*Take this*, this is my body"

¹⁰ I serve as extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist in a nearby home for seniors. On one occasion, a resident did not come to chapel for the Eucharist because she had her pet dog with her and did not wish to disturb anyone. We stood in the hall she and I, pet dog and all, and felt the presence of Christ around us and heard the laughter of small children as we said the Lord's prayer in peaceful and joyful preparation to receive the Eucharist. There were no actual children there that day, but as we opened our eyes, we smiled in gratitude for the gift of happiness that Christ had given us.

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(italics added). The Eucharist is a gift, the most important sacramental gift of all, for without it the real ongoing presence of Christ in our lives is difficult to imagine. The presence of Christ in being's intelligibility is also evident because we are called to build a better world in service to each other as we share with everyone the responsibility of civilization. But is this an argument for the legitimacy of panentheism as a viable explanation of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist?

We take a closer look at how things change; Aristotle's thoroughgoing analysis of the principles that underlie all explanations of change suggest that we will need to develop an alternative explanation to make sense of how God *comes to be* present in the Eucharist. To clear the way to an analysis of my argument that the Eucharist is an event, we begin with a study of Aristotle's study of change, and time. The early Greek thinkers reasoned that the universe must be eternal because of the state of potentiality. Time as the measure of states of change must itself be eternal. This leads us to wonder if this view sheds light on how God comes to be present in the Eucharist, that is, if the presence of Christ in the Eucharist can be traced to a change taking place in the eternity of time? Aristotle and the early Greek thinkers believed in polytheism. But the belief in theism and the creation of the world *ex nihilo* appears to shift the belief in the eternity of God to a different level. The belief that God creates the world and all things contained in it from nothing not only refutes panentheism but raises the discourse on the Eucharist to a place outside time (and space).

Aristotle's analysis of locomotion explains hylomorphism through the interaction between three principles of reason that accompany all change—act, potency, and privation. Aristotle defines motion (*Physics* Book 3, 1, 10); "*The fulfilment of what exists potentially, in so far as it exists potentially, is motion*" as what can be altered, increased or decreased, of what can come to be and can pass away, of what can be carried along (locomotion). For example, the fact that bread nourishes us means that the properties of bread undergo change as they transform into our flesh and blood. Aristotle's philosophy of nature explains the change that takes place in bread and in us through principles of reason,

namely potency (matter as limiting principle) and act (form as perfecting principle). Eating bread is a process in which the perfecting principle or form of the bread is reduced to the limiting principle or potentiality of matter while the form of our flesh and blood is educed from the potentiality of matter to become human flesh and blood. The transformation takes place in time across the boundary of one material to another. The principle of privation (bread as human flesh and blood in waiting) explains why potency limits act.¹¹ In the human consumption of bread, it must exist in potency towards becoming flesh and remains in a state of privation until the potency is reduced to act. Bread is not in potency to becoming steel, aluminum or any other product. Thus, it limits the incoming perfecting principle to a specified type of change. A change in degree, on the other hand, refers to a change in the accidental properties that modify a substance. Aristotle says thathylomorphism focuses on substantial change or change in kind. In eating bread, the essence or substance of the bread changes into a qualitatively different substance to become the flesh and blood of a person.

Two main difficulties arise as we seek to apply the hylomorphic theory of matter to the transubstantiation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. The first obstacle is that the body of Christ is a spiritual presence that cannot be reduced to the potentiality of matter; in a created world, Christ is not standing in privation to be actualized by an

¹¹ The history of the principle of potency reveals that it has been described as either the extrinsic limitation of act, or as the intrinsic limitation of act. In the latter case, potency arises where act ends. In other words, the ultimate reducibility of essence to existence claims that what a thing is, its essence, is determined by where its existence stops or ends, bordered by nothingness. Thus, a human being's essence is determined by a human being's existence. For example, my potentiality is determined by the fact that I exist as a human being rather than as a monkey or tree. The monkey and the tree have a potentiality that is determined by their mode of existence. The extrinsic limitation of act by potency, on the other hand, gives rise to a dualistic explanation of creation. It is most at home in the early Greek vision of an eternal world of essences. When Aquinas explains his philosophy of divine creation, he thereby provides a justification for the untethered world of eternal essences by rooting them in the primacy of real existence and the theory of direct perception.

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incoming determination found in matter (form or act). The bread is not in privation of Christ before the transubstantiation nor is it in potency to the coming of Christ. The second difficulty is that the consecration of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ does not take place as a transition from one temporal place to another as in the numbering of anterior and posterior states of existence. The consecration is instantaneous; it does not take place by the passive potentiality of bread but takes place instantaneously by the active power of the Creator. This means that the change taking place in the bread and wine is not what Aristotle identifies as being a substantial change; the change is ‘from heaven’ rather than from earth. We are witness to the presence of the dual nature of Christ in the temporal but cannot fully explain the transformation through the philosophy of nature. How do we shed light on this matter of profound faith when the words we use to describe the Eucharist are rooted in space and time as they must be to explain the physical as well as the divine presence of Christ in the consecrated bread and wine? The question is raised to reinforce the view that the failure to understand the meaning of ‘the bread that came down from heaven’ (John 6:58) from the point of view of Christ, opens the door to produce an explanation based on the principle of sufficient reason. Our confusion arises because of Christ’s dual nature. We understand his words when he speaks as a man, but we can only seek to explain what he means when he speaks about his Father in heaven because of Jesus’s words; “Not that anyone has seen the Father—only the one who is from God has seen the Father.” John (6:46).¹² The answer to my question about the presence of the real body and blood, and divinity of Christ in the bread and wine can be answered from the fact of the immaculate conception, that is the birth of Jesus Christ according to the dual natures of Christ is wholly divine (from heaven)! The body of Christ though like us in every way except sin, is not from Mary and Joseph or the potentiality of matter. The physical body of Mary carries the infant child Jesus in the same way that the bread and wine carries the real

¹² Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologica* 1.12.1) reasons that the Blessed must see the essence of God. The natural desire to see God would otherwise be in vain.

body and blood of Christ without being educed from the potentiality of matter or reduced to it.

The term Thomas Aquinas reserves for this mystery is transubstantiation. He leaves no doubt about the centrality of the Eucharist in Christian life; “Absolutely speaking, the sacrament of the Eucharist is the greatest of all the sacraments” (*Summa Theologica* 111:65:3). Aquinas says that Christ is contained substantially in this sacrament, while all the other sacraments are ordered towards the Eucharist as to their end, and nearly all the sacraments terminate in the Eucharist. The significance of the Eucharist moves us out of Aristotle’s focus on the temporality of contingent beings towards the (1) the Redemption and (2) the primacy of God’s creative act that Saint Augustine’s Tractate develops in the Gospel of John. Aquinas’s theory of direct perception encapsulates the Gospel of John (1:1-5);

In the beginning was the Word; the Word was in God’s presence, and the word was God. He was present to God in the beginning. Through him all things came into being, and apart from him nothing came to be. Whatever came to be in him, found life. Life for the light of men. The light shines on in darkness, a darkness that did not overcome it.

The transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ is no less significant and incomprehensible than the divine creation of the world and all things contained in it. How can we make sense of the fact that the same events (the Eucharist and creation) are significant and incomprehensible at the same time, if not through the process of explanation? The fact of creation is given to us in a theory of direct perception. The world is already there before we become conscious of it being there. The intuition of existence is given directly to the agent intellect (the intellect in potency) in the order of specification as it moves to the practical intellect (the intellect in act) and the order of operation to the production of knowledge about things

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(simple apprehension, reasoning, and judgement).¹³ *The centrality of the Eucharist follows a similar path towards spiritual growth as the intuition of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist specifies the agent intellect to direct our God given faith towards the production of acts of love and mercy (washing feet). The foregoing is a clear formulation of how the inability to understand a matter of faith nonetheless leads to a logical productive outcome.*

To say that the Eucharist contains the real presence of the body and blood of Christ is not to say that Christians are cannibals. The real presence of Christ in the bread is a spiritual invitation to unite with Jesus through faith to participate in the mystery of his sacrificial death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sin. Christians believe that they are eating the actual spiritual body and drinking the actual spiritual blood of Christ under the appearance of ordinary bread and wine. The distinction between accidental, substantial, and spiritual change provides a clarification we can apply to the transubstantiation. The accidental form of bread and wine remains after the consecration. The change is in the essence of the bread and wine as they become the body and blood of Christ. The outward appearance remains the same as the Eucharistic banquet tastes of bread and wine after as before the consecration takes place. But the mystery of the real presence of Christ takes place in the changed essence of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ which we receive invisibly rather than as a substantial change in the bread. Aquinas' explanation provides a refutation of pantheism and panentheism. The panentheistic claim that the consecration is an occasion for the faithful to become keenly aware of a divine presence that was already in the bread and wine before the consecration is in error because it reduces the presence of Christ to the potentiality of matter. The pantheistic suggestion that the Creator is all things in virtue of the creative act, ergo in the Eucharist before consecration, is also in error because it presents an image of God in which privation and the spirituality of imperfection reside side by side

¹³ See Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica* 1.1:75-87. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Chicago, Ill.: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952.

with the Abrahamic I Am who Am of scripture. God as subsistent *esse* (pure existence or perfecting principle) is a being without privation, limitation or potency! The body and blood of Christ come to the bread and wine instantaneously, invisibly, from eternity time as is evident from the analysis of the root of the possibility of being's intelligibility.

The discovery of the first moment of creation is limited by the methodology of big bang science, namely observation and measurement. Science reports on what it measures and is therefore silent on what exists before measurement takes place. The creation *ex nihilo* of the world suggests that nothing measurable or quantifiable exists before the big bang, even if an infinite number of big bangs and big crunches precede the existence of the known measurable universe. Even if the universe exists eternally, Christian philosophy still needs to explain why something exists rather than nothing and is moved towards the creation text of *Genesis* to uncover a sufficient reason for the existence of contingent things.¹⁴

Therefore, the meaning that the gospel of John assigns to the 'bread of life' discourse cannot be taken in the Aristotelian sense of the eternal state of potentiality or expect that God comes down from heaven as from a place in space or that God lives forever in the sense of the infinite numbering of antecedent and consequent states of change. Eternal life is not a function of change approaching the limit to infinity. In big bang science space and time are pushed ahead of the expanding and contracting universe. This explains why time travel can go back in time but never ahead into the realm of not-yet existing time. But this is exactly what the imagery of eternal life brings to the fore. I think that when Christ speaks about life eternal, and descending from heaven, he is not referring to what human beings experience. Heaven is not a place in the expanding universe. The dead that ascend into heaven do not go behind the living in time or ahead into the future of a not-yet time space.

¹⁴ Thomas Aquinas develops five arguments or ways in which the existence of God can be argued. His arguments are based on our experiences of the five causes of being, the principle of sufficient reason and the impossibility of infinite regress to explain the real existence of things. See *Summa Theologica* 1.2:3.

Thus, the Eucharist does not draw the body of Christ out of heaven as a place in space or eternal time as the numbering of anterior and posterior states of being. We need a fresh concept to make sense of the Eucharist. *Perhaps the distinction between eternity time and eternal time can be used to indicate two concepts that are distinct without being separate.* They parallel the distinction made earlier between the order of time and the order of existence. The universe can exist eternally, but the order of existence provides justification for creation *ex nihilo*. Plato's world of eternal forms can exist eternally, but creation coincides with the emergence of eternity time in Christianity, and subsequently the resurrection of Christ reopens the possibility of being's unconcealment for consciousness at human death.

It seems to me that we can explain the presence of Christ in the Eucharist as being from eternity time. This most holy supernatural place (heaven) expresses the possibility of creation, along with the sacrificial presence of the redemptive suffering of Christ in the Eucharist, and the possibility of the resurrection from death as constituting a reversal in being's unconcealment from consciousness at the time of personal death. Heaven expresses the root of the metaphysical, epistemic, ethical, and logical possibility of existence as we know it. The work of authentic theology, philosophy, poetry, music, and the arts is nourished by the intuited apprehension of the responsibility and privilege of standing in the presence of this holy mystery. Human death is the metaphysical refusal of creation (the primacy of direct perception) to be for consciousness. Death is a consequence of sin and a reversal in the gift of creation now redeemed by the Cross of Christ's presence in the Eucharist as the Blessed arise anew in eternity time. Human death is a means to an end.¹⁵ Death according to Aquinas is partly from nature and partly from sin. Death is a substantial change. It takes place as the separation of the soul from

¹⁵ The silence in being's unconcealment does not imply the annihilation of matter because this is contrary to the ways of human understanding. On the contrary, the silence in being's intelligibility implies a reversal in that intelligibility in eternity time. I develop the argument in the *Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 27, 2, (2015), 259-288.

the body. In his ‘Treatise on Man’ (*ST* 1. Q.75, 2), Aquinas explains that the soul is a subsistent form, capable of existing without the body. The soul exists in the supernatural order after death. But since death is partly from nature, we can also look at nature (being’s unconcealment) to explain death. How does this connect to the Eucharist? The mystery of the eucharist suggests that the way the Creator is present in the Eucharist signals a possible way in which God is present in the phenomenon of human death. God is the Creator of the world and all things contained in it. The claim that a connection exists between the Eucharist and human death passes the test of internal consistency since it uses the metaphysical insight gleaned from the presence of Christ in the Eucharist to explain the metaphysical presence of Christ in our death and resurrection. The redemption assures the Blessed that the transitive undoing of creation for the dead (because of sin) is the occasion for a metamorphosis in being’s intelligibility in the supernatural world as the dialogue of the Blessed with Christ takes place in eternity time. In simpler terms, God’s creation exists for each person, but something about that creative act must transform to explain the state of the Blessed at death. It seems to me that the resurrection of the dead is built on the same foundation as the metaphysical presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

The centrality of God’s creative act is affirmed in Augustine’s Tractate on the Gospel of John. To create is to produce something from nothing. God created being to exist as intelligible entity. The expression used here to express this intelligibility is unconcealment. The glow of things weakens as we die but ceases at the death of a person. Thus, God’s creative act occupies a metaphysical place in the divine plan as the concealment in being’s unconcealment sets the stage for a fresh round of dialogue in the meta spatial-temporal order of eternity. In other words, being sends us on an errand to discover and study what God gives us in creation as well as in the Eucharist. To grasp the richness of God’s gift we need to move beyond surface appearances to discover the essence of things. The Aramaic text of the Lord’s prayer ‘lead us not into temptation’ (*Wela tahlan l’nesyuna*) is a supplication to God that we might have the wisdom of the Holy Spirit not be deceived by

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the glitz or surface appearance of things (*Ela patzan min bisha*).¹⁶ Being's unconcealment does not undergo a process or in-itself move through degrees of intelligibility, but God gives us the gifts of faith, intellect, and will to ponder the mysteries of creation and the Eucharist as we become increasingly more personal. We operate within the parameters of a spirituality of imperfection, a limitation imposed by sin and our thirst for spiritual relationships. Being shows herself fully in itself, from itself from the first moment of its appearance into existence, but we bring a small cup to the ocean of divine love and tend to focus more on selfish goals than on the Eucharist.

The temporal dimension of being's unconcealment is on the side of human consciousness and the knowledge we have of being. A parallel exists between the presence of Christ in the Eucharist and the presence of God in being's unconcealment as sacred mysteries. They move us from the invisible and supernatural order of God's existence to the awareness of the presence of the divine in the temporal world. We bring our spiritual thirst to the seas of these mysteries. The metaphysical view of death suggests that God's presence in the visible and natural world of human existence departs from being's unconcealment for the deceased as we transition into the invisible and supernatural world of the afterlife state, thanks to the forgiveness of sins. However, we need not wait for death to share in this experience of God because Christ makes it readily available for us here and now in the Eucharist.

Conclusion

The study of Saint John's bread of life discourse introduces spiritual ideas that exist outside the range of human understanding. We do not understand the presence of Christ in the Eucharist as we have no supernatural language to make sense of it. However, the study of biblical texts allows us to explain what we do not understand. Rational persons adjust their beliefs to the evidence of the resurrection of Christ. The bread and wine are not in privation of or in potency to becoming

¹⁶ My translation from the Aramaic is from Neil Douglas-Klotz. *Prayers of the Cosmos*. (San Francisco; Harper & Row Publishers), 1990, 34-35.

the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The metamorphosis of bread into the body of Christ is not a substantial change that takes place in the bread. That view leads to panentheism and contradicts creation *ex nihilo*. The Father does not travel from heaven to be in the bread nor is the Father waiting in space from time eternal for the opportunity to take a trip(s) into the Eucharist. The idea of transubstantiation as used by Saint John is an instantaneous event (not a process) leading us to explain it as taking place in eternity time rather than in eternal time. *The sacred moment of the real presence of Christ is not seen as a substantial change in the way we perceive bread and wine but as a mystical experience of creation.* The transubstantiation places us in the presence of a spiritual act as God becomes present in the material world of bread and wine. Saint John focuses on the explanation of the Eucharist, and the discovery of the sufficient reason for the Eucharist, as the divine assistance we require to love one another and be of service to others. This view of the Eucharist supports the explanation of personal death as the occasion for an ongoing encounter with God in eternity time through the portal of being's unconcealment. The Immaculate Conception and the Resurrection are the two pillars necessary to explain the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. And for this insight found in the teachings of the Church, I give thanks.