

The *esse* of the Eucharist
by
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Abstract: This paper investigates the act of existence (*esse*) of the Eucharist according to the theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas and presuming the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist as defined by the Ecumenical Council of Trent. The paper proceeds by presenting the question on the existence of Christ in the *Disputed Question on the Union of the Incarnate Word* and the *tertia pars* of the *Summa Theologiae* before presenting a short synthesis showing that Christ exists by the Divine *esse* of the Second Person of the Trinity. Sacramentally, two objections to identifying this Divine *esse* as the existence of the Eucharist are considered. First, given that individuals generally each exist by a numerically distinct act of existence, the consecrated hosts and wine across the globe should all have distinct *esse*. Second, the Real Presence is a mode of sacramental presence which is different than natural modes of existence.

Keywords: Eucharist, Christology, *esse*, Thomas Aquinas, Sacramental Theology

I. Introduction

One of the classical questions in the pursuit of wisdom pertains to the *esse* of things. In the beginning of his *Physics*, Aristotle says, “[W]e do not think that we know a thing until we are acquainted with its primary causes or first principles, and have carried our analysis as far as its elements.”² Amongst these principles of things to be sought for is the principle of actual being—that is, existence or *esse*. It should not be surprising, therefore, that one may wonder about the character of the *esse* of the Eucharist in reflecting on the Eucharistic dogmas, especially the dogma of the Real Presence. The Ecumenical Council of Trent taught, “in the eucharist the author of holiness himself is present.”³ Does this mean that the act of existence of the Eucharist

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² Aristotle, R. P. Hardie, and R. K. Gaye, “Physics,” section, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translations. Volume One*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Bollingen Series (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 315–446, 184a12-15.

³ Norman P. Tanner, ed., “Council of Trent: 1545–1563,” section, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils. Volume Two: Trent to Vatican II* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press,

is simply Christ's *esse*? Such a question would depend upon whether Christ Himself has one or two distinct acts of existence and how He is present in this sacrament. Overall, this line of questioning may illumine this dogma of the Council of Trent and, therefore, the ontological makeup of the Eucharist adored and received by the Faithful.

This brief paper will seek to clarify what the *esse* of the Eucharist is, presuming the Christology and Eucharistic theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas. First, we shall recall Saint Thomas's own teachings on Christ's *esse* and the controversy surrounding his diverse accounts in the *Disputed Question on the Union of the Incarnate Word* and the *tertia pars* of the *Summa theologiae*. Then the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist will be considered. To show that His own *esse* must be the *esse* of the Eucharist, two short objections will be considered, namely the numerical diversity of the Eucharist found throughout the world and the merely sacramental presence of Christ in the Eucharist as opposed to His natural mode of presence. In the end, it will be suggested that the Eucharist exists by a single act of existence.

II. What is *Esse*?

Esse, in the language of Saint Thomas, is the principle of actual existence or the "*actus essendi*"⁴ which operates on creatures' "essential constituent principles."⁵ In the unique case of God in His

1990), pp. 657–799, 694. ". . . at in eucharistia ipse sanctitatis auctor . . ." Cf., *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington D.C.: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2022), CCC no. 1374; CCC nos. 1378-81.

⁴ Thomas Aquinas, "*Scriptum Super Sententiis / Commentary on Sentences*," Aquinas Online, accessed January 20, 2024, <https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~Sent.I, I, d. 8, q. 5, a. 2, resp.> Cf., Aquinas, *ST*, I, q. 4, a. 1, *ad 3*; Thomas Aquinas, "*Quaestiones Disputatae de Potentia / Disputed Questions on the Power of God*," Aquinas Online, accessed January 20, 2024, <https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~QDePot, q. 7, a. 2, ad 9.>

⁵ Aquinas, *ST*, I, q. 3, a. 4, *resp.* "...principiis essentialibus rei..." Here, this paper prescinds from the secondary uses of the term *esse* in the *Corpus Thomisticum*, such as when *esse* also signifies essence, depending upon the modes of being, signifying and predication in use. See, Gregory T.

Simplicity, however, *esse* is not merely a principle external to essence but is really identical to the Divine Essence.⁶ Thus, the Divine *esse* is simply one and not differentiated amongst the Persons of the Trinity, just as the Divine Essence is not.⁷ Hence the Divine Word is identical with Divine *esse*, save for the personal relation of Sonship. However, for complex humanity, the *esse* of any man is the principle whereby human nature is actualized as *this* man—for which reason it is a distinct principle from human nature (which does not have an *esse* for it as a whole) and is numerically distinct.⁸ Thus Socrates has his own distinct being while Plato has another.

III. *Utrum in Christo sit tantum unum esse?*

Hence the classic question as to whether Christ has one being or two? Saint Thomas asks whether there is one existence due to Christ's unity in Personhood as the Person of the Word or two existences due to His duality in nature, while trying to maintain that the convertibility of being and unity. He did so due to the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon defining that Christ is one Person and the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople, alongside Chalcedon, defining that Christ is one in subsistence.⁹ Due to the constraints of time a full textual and

Doolan, "Aquinas on the Distinction Between *Esse* and *Esse*: How the Name 'Esse' Can Signify Essence," *New Blackfriars: A Review Edited by the Dominicans of the English Province* 104, no. 1114 (November 2023): 628–50, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nbfr.12873>.

⁶ See Aquinas, *ST*, I, q. 3, a. 4, *resp.*

⁷ See Aquinas, *ST*, I, q. 28, a. 1-2.

⁸ Cf., Aquinas, *ST*, I, q. 76, a. 1, *ad* 5; Aquinas, *ST*, I, q. 90, a. 2 on the human soul.

⁹ See Aquinas, *ST*, III, q. 17, a. 2; Thomas Aquinas, *De Unione Verbi Incarnati*, trans. Roger W. Nutt, of *Dallas Medieval Texts and Translations* (Bristol, CT: Peeters, 2015), a. 4. For the Council of Chalcedon, see Norman P. Tanner, ed., "Council of Chalcedon: 451," section, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Nicaea I to Lateran V* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 75–103, 86. "[O]ne and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, acknowledged in two natures which undergo no confusion, no change, no division, no separation; at no point was the difference between the natures taken away through the union, but rather the property of both natures is preserved and comes together into a single person (πρόσωπον) and a single subsistent being (ὑπόστασιν / *subsistentiam*), he is not parted or divided

speculative presentation of Saint Thomas's Christological treatment on this subject cannot be offered. However, a short overview of the relevant sections of the *Disputed Question on the Union of the Incarnate Word* and the *tertia pars* of the *Summa theologiae* is necessary.

III.1. *Questio Disputata de unione Verbi incarnati*¹⁰

Saint Thomas, in article four of his Christological disputed question, distinguishes the *esse* which is proper to the accidents of individual substances and proper to the substantial natures (which themselves are principles to independent suppositis).¹¹ It is this latter kind of existence which

into two persons, but is one and the same only-begotten Son, God, Word, Lord Jesus Christ.” For the Second Council of Constantinople see the Fourth and Fifth Anathemas directed at the “Three Chapters,” Norman P. Tanner, ed., “Second Council of Constantinople: 553,” section, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Nicaea I to Lateran V* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 104–22, 115–116. In the Fourth Anathema, “The holy church of God, rejecting the wickedness of both sorts of heresy, states her belief in a union between the Word of God and human flesh which is by synthesis, that is by a union of subsistence (ὑπόστασιν / *subsistentiam*).” In the Fifth Anathema, “If anyone understands by the single subsistence (ὑπόστασιν / *subsistentiam*) of our lord Jesus Christ that it covers the meaning of many subsistences, and by this argument tries to introduce into the mystery of Christ two subsistences or two persons, and having brought in two persons then talks of one person only in respect of dignity, honour, or adoration, as both Theodore and Nestorius . . . if he does not acknowledge that the Word of God is united with human flesh by subsistence, and that on account of this there is only one subsistence or one person, and that the holy synod of Chalcedon thus made a formal statement of belief in the single subsistence of our lord Jesus Christ: let him be anathema.”

¹⁰ The *Disputed Question on the Union of the Incarnate Word* is here covered first in an attempt to follow Fr. Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P.'s chronology of Saint Thomas's life. See Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Robert Royal, Revised, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 329. However, it should be recalled how close together this work and the *tertia pars* of the *Summa theologiae* were written, perhaps even contemporaneously. See Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 205–07; Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 336–37. For further comments on the dating of this text, see Roger W. Nutt and Thomas Aquinas, “Introduction,” introduction, in *De Unione Verbi Incarnati*, Dallas Medieval Texts and Translations (Bristol, CT: Peeters, 2015), 1–78, 6–9.

¹¹ Thomas Aquinas, *De Unione Verbi Incarnati*, trans. Roger W. Nutt, of *Dallas Medieval Texts and Translations* (Bristol, CT: Peeters, 2015), a. 4, *resp.* “For being is properly and truly said of a subsisting *suppositum*. Accidents, of course, and non-subsisting forms are said to be insofar as something is by them: as whiteness is called a being insofar as something is white by it. It should be considered, moreover, that some forms are those by which something is a being, not

Saint Thomas focuses on. In doing so, Saint Thomas points out that the Person of the Word is the one who assumes the individuated human nature. Because of this, no actuality or perfection is added to the Word in the Incarnation. Remember that *esse* is *actus essendi*.¹² Saint Thomas says the humanity of Christ “does not make the Son of Man to be simply...but only to be man.”¹³ Therefore, Christ “has one being *simpliciter* on account of the one eternal being of the eternal *suppositum*.”¹⁴ However, since this humanity is brought into real relation with the eternal Word, another mode of being is present in the Hypostatic Union through which the Word became man.¹⁵ “That is: although it is not accidental being—because man is not accidentally predicated of the Son of God...it is nevertheless not the principle being of its *suppositum*, but a subordinate being [*sed secundarium*].”¹⁶ Therefore, there is an ordered twofold being in Christ which

simpliciter, but in a certain respect, as are all accidental forms. On the other hand, some forms are those by which a subsisting thing possesses being *simpliciter*, since it is apparent that these forms establish the substantial being of a subsisting thing.” / “Esse enim proprie et vere dicitur de supposito subsistente. Accidentia enim et formae non subsistentes dicuntur esse, in quantum eis aliquid est: sicut albedo dicitur ens, in quantum ea est aliquid album. – Considerandum est autem, quod aliquae formae sunt, quibus est aliquid ens non simpliciter, sed secundum quid, sicut sunt omnes formae accidentals. Aliquae autem formae sunt, quibus res subsistens simpliciter habet esse, quia videlicet constituent esse substantiale rei subsistentis.”

¹² See Aquinas, “*Scriptum Super Sententiis*,” I, d. 8, q. 5, a. 2, *resp*; Aquinas, *ST*, I, q. 4, a. 1, *ad* 3; Aquinas, “*De Potentia*,” q. 7, a. 2, *ad* 9.

¹³ Aquinas, *ST*, III, q. 3, a. 1, *ad* 3. “Non enim ex natura humana habet filius Dei quod sit simpliciter, cum fuerit ab aeterno, sed solum quod sit homo.” See Aquinas, *ST*, III, q. 3, a. 1, *ad* 1; Aquinas, *De Unione Verbi Incarnati*, a. 4, *resp*.

¹⁴ Aquinas, *De Unione Verbi Incarnati*, a. 4, *resp*. “. . .ita habet unum esse simpliciter propter unum esse aeternum aeterni suppositi; . . .” Note the relation between suppositis and persons, following Saint Thomas and Nutt, “This means that not every *suppositum* is a person, but every really existing person is a *suppositum*.” Nutt, “Introduction,” 12.

¹⁵ For the humanity’s real relation to the Person of the Word but relation of reason of the Word to the created humanity, see Aquinas, *ST*, III, q. 2, a. 7, *resp*. For the other mode of being which “sustains” the “eternal *suppositum*,” see Aquinas, *De Unione Verbi Incarnati*, a. 4, *resp*.

¹⁶ Aquinas, *De Unione Verbi Incarnati*, a. 4, *resp*. “Quod est, si non sit esse accidentale – quia homo non praedicatur accidentaliter de Filio Dei, ut supra habitum est –, non tamen est esse principale sui suppositum, sed secundarium.” For an explanation of the translation of “*secundarium*” as “subordinate,” see Roger W. Nutt, “*Christus Est Unum Simpliciter*: On Why the *Secundarium* of the Fourth Article of Thomas Aquinas’s *De Unione Verbi Incarnati* Is Not a

transcends the categories of accidental beings previously ruled out at the beginning of the disputed question's article—where the *esse secundarium* of the supposit of Christ's humanity is a resultant from the *esse* of the Word.¹⁷ This twofold being, however, does not constitute two distinctly separate *esse*, one Divine and one properly human, but posits a principal Divine *esse* with a subordinately dependent human *esse*.¹⁸

III. 2. *Summa theologiae*

In the *Summa theologiae*, Saint Thomas forwards a different position denying the twofold being in Christ—whence endless debate as to whether or not he revised his Christology in the disputed question has occurred.¹⁹ Here, Saint Thomas distinguishes between the “*hypostasis*” or “person” which has existence (“*habet esse*”) and “nature” which is that-by-which-something-has-existence (“...*ad naturam autem sicut ad id quo aliquid habet esse; natura enim significatur per modum*

Numerically Second *Esse*,” essay, in *Thomas Aquinas and the Crisis of Christology*, ed. Michael A. Dauphinais, Andrew Hofer, and Roger W. Nutt (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2021), 70–88, 85-87; Nutt, “Introduction,” 58-59. Nutt’s article “*Christus Est Unum Simpliciter*” originally was published as “Thomas Aquinas on Christ’s Unity: Revisiting the De Unione Debate,” *Harvard Theological Review* 114, no. 4 (2021): 491–507.

¹⁷ See Nutt, “Introduction,” 58-59; Nutt, “Introduction,” 70; Nutt, “Introduction,” 73-74. For a defense of this as position as the truth of Christ’s *esse*, See Eric A. Mabry, “The Hypothesis of *Esse Secundarium*: Positions and Interpretation,” *The Lonergan Review: The Journal of the Bernard J. Lonergan Institute* 12 (2021): 79–102, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.5840/lonerganreview2021124>; Eric A. Mabry, “*Mysterium Esse Christi*: Thomas Aquinas & the Supernatural Being of Jesus Christ,” *New Blackfriars: A Review Edited by the Dominicans of the English Province* 104, no. 1109 (January 2023): 92–115, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nbfr.12803>.

¹⁸ See Nutt, “Introduction,” 59. “Christ does have a human life and principle of his assumed created nature that is not the divine *esse*. There is a secondary, or subordinate, *esse* of the human nature of Christ that is other than the divine *esse* and not the divine *esse*, that is, the act by which Christ is human. It is *esse* not in the suppositional sense, but in a legitimate analogical use of the word.” John Froula, “*Esse Secundarium*: An Analogical Term Meaning That by Which Christ Is Human,” *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly* 78, no. 4 (October 2014): 557–80, 580 quoted in Nutt, “*Christus Est Unum Simpliciter*,” 84.

¹⁹ Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 205-07.

formae, quae dicitur ens ex eo quod ea aliquid est...).²⁰ Then, he distinguishes between natures which immediately belong to the subsisting *hypostasis* or person and those that do not—which normally are the natures belonging to an individual’s accidents.²¹ However, the two natures of Christ do not coexist by an accidental union, but by a Hypostatic Union.²² Since the two natures exist together in the *hypostasis*, the fact that both natures call out for being does not duplicate the *esse* which the single Divine Person Christ Jesus has.²³ Instead, the call for *esse* that the

²⁰ See Aquinas, *ST*, III, q. 17, a. 2, *resp.* “Now being pertains both to the nature and to the hypostasis; to the hypostasis as to that which has being—and to the nature as to that whereby it has being. For nature is taken after the manner of a form, which is said to be a being because something is by it; as by whiteness a thing is white, and by manhood a thing is man.” / “Esse autem pertinet ad hypostasim et ad naturam, ad hypostasim quidem sicut ad id quod habet esse; ad naturam autem sicut ad id quo aliquid habet esse; natura enim significatur per modum formae, quae dicitur ens ex eo quod ea aliquid est, sicut albedine est aliquid album, et humanitate est aliquis homo.”

²¹ See Aquinas, *ST*, III, q. 17, a. 2, *resp.* “Now it must be borne in mind that if there is a form or nature which does not pertain to the personal being of the subsisting hypostasis, this being is not said to belong to the person simply, but relatively; as to be white is the being of Socrates, not as he is Socrates, but inasmuch as he is white. And there is no reason why this being should not be multiplied in one hypostasis or person; for the being whereby Socrates is white is distinct from the being whereby he is a musician. But the being which belongs to the very hypostasis or person in itself cannot possibly be multiplied in one hypostasis or person, since it is impossible that there should not be one being for one thing.” / “Est autem considerandum quod, si aliqua forma vel natura est quae non pertineat ad esse personale hypostasis subsistentis, illud esse non dicitur esse illius personae simpliciter, sed secundum quid, sicut esse album est esse Socratis, non in quantum est Socrates, sed in quantum est albus. Et huiusmodi esse nihil prohibet multiplicari in una hypostasi vel persona, aliud enim est esse quo Socrates est albus, et quo Socrates est musicus. Sed illud esse quod pertinet ad ipsam hypostasim vel personam secundum se impossibile est in una hypostasi vel persona multiplicari, quia impossibile est quod unius rei non sit unum esse.”

²² See Anathemas 4-5 against the “Three Chapters” in Tanner, “Second Council of Constantinople: 553,” 114-116; Aquinas, *ST*, III, q. 2, a. 6.

²³ It may be noticed that at least one theologian (Father Dominic Ryan, O.P.) has argued that Saint Thomas’s account of Christ’s *esse* in the *tertia pars* allows for two *esse*, as in the treatise *On the Union of the Incarnate Word*. See Dominic Ryan, “Christ’s Being and Summa Theologiae 3A Q17 Art. 2,” *New Blackfriars: A Review Edited by the Dominicans of the English Province* 104, no. 1109 (January 2023): 57–78, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nbfr.12799>. However, in doing so Fr. Ryan does not sufficiently pertain to the distinction amongst real relations between transcendental and categorical relations. Thus, Fr. Ryan does not sufficiently consider the analogous use of transcendental relations between *esse* and *essentia*. Instead, he mainly considers

individual human nature of Christ has is satisfied by the Divine *Esse*, wherefore Saint Thomas says, “And thus, since the human nature is united to the Son of God, hypostatically or personally . . . , and not accidentally, it follows that by the human nature there accrued to Him no new personal being, but only a new relation (*habitus*) of the pre-existing personal being to the human nature, in such a way that the Person is said to subsist not merely in the Divine, but also in the human nature.”²⁴ Literally, the *esse* of God is the *esse* of the whole Person of Christ wherein His humanity exists by its relation to the supra-abundance of actuality in that *esse*.²⁵

III.3. Synthesis

Esse secundarium and the relation or *habitus*²⁶ of the human nature of Christ to the Divine Existence may verbally seem to be very different speculative ideas for how Christ’s humanity exists. Yet both turn on the transcendental relation that the individuated humanity of Christ has to the *esse* of the Logos without imputing any form of real relation or dependency of the Divine Logos to His creature. Moreover, from these two works, it may be remarked that the overriding

predicamental relations and, perhaps, the transcendental aptitudinal inherence of relations. For transcendental relations, see Henri Grenier, *Thomistic Philosophy*, trans. J. P. E. O’Hanley, vol. 2, 3 vols. (Charlottetown, Canada: St. Dunstan’s University, 1948), 200-01. For aptitudinal inherence, see Grenier, *Thomistic Philosophy*, 188.

²⁴ Aquinas, *ST*, III, q. 17, a. 2, *resp.* “Sic igitur, cum humana natura coniungatur filio Dei hypostatice vel personaliter, ut supra dictum est, et non accidentaliter, consequens est quod secundum humanam naturam non adveniat sibi novum esse personale, sed solum nova habitudo esse personalis praeexistentis ad naturam humanam, ut scilicet persona illa iam dicatur subsistere, non solum secundum naturam divinam, sed etiam humanam.”

²⁵ See Aquinas, *ST*, III, q. 17, a. 2, *ad 2.* “The eternal being of the Son of God, which is the Divine Nature, becomes the being of man, inasmuch as the human nature is assumed by the Son of God to unity of Person.” / “Ad secundum dicendum quod illud esse aeternum filii Dei quod est divina natura, fit esse hominis, in quantum humana natura assumitur a filio Dei in unitate personae.”

²⁶ Note the substantial noun used instead of the more common participle, “*habitus*.” See Aquinas, *ST*, III, q. 17, a. 2, *resp.*

ontological *datum* of orthodox Christology is the substantial unity of Christ Jesus due to the Hypostatic Union wherein His humanity is a true individual.²⁷ However, while every human *suppositum* has human nature merely having human nature is not identical to being a *suppositum*, since the “supposit” adds the notion that every principle and accident requisite for individuation and actuality is present for the person, as Roger Nutt has amply shown in his edition of the disputed question and subsequent research.²⁸ In the Hypostatic Union, the Second Person of the Trinity assumes a human nature which “enjoys the status of individuality and singularity in the order of substance”²⁹ due to the obediential potency within this nature.³⁰ Yet this individual humanity cannot be a secund *suppositum* because it lacks subsistence, which the Second Council of Constantinople condemned the position that Christ had two subsistences, as mentioned above.³¹ Therefore, the particular principle of existence which constitutes a supposit—a numerically distinct and independent *esse*—is missing from Christ’s human nature.³²

²⁷ Cf., Nutt, “Introduction,” 16-19; Tanner, “Council of Chalcedon: 451,” 86; Tanner, “Second Council of Constantinople: 553,” 115-116.

²⁸ See Nutt, “Introduction,” 11-12; Nutt, “*Christus Est Unum Simpliciter*,” 79-85.

²⁹ Nutt, “*Christus Est Unum Simpliciter*,” 81.

³⁰ See Steven A. Long, “The Subsistence of Christ’s Human Nature with the *Esse Personale* of the Eternal Word,” essay, in *Thomas Aquinas and the Crisis of Christology*, ed. Michael A. Dauphinais, Andrew Hofer, and Roger W. Nutt (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2021), 89–98, 94-98.

³¹ See Nutt, “*Christus Est Unum Simpliciter*,” 81. Tanner, ed., “Second Council of Constantinople: 553,” 115-116. “If anyone understands by the single subsistence (ὀπόστασιν / *subsistentiam*) of our lord Jesus Christ that it covers the meaning of many subsistences, and by this argument tries to introduce into the mystery of Christ two subsistences or two persons, and having brought in two persons then talks of one person only in respect of dignity, honour, or adoration, as both Theodore and Nestorius . . . if he does not acknowledge that the Word of God is united with human flesh by subsistence, and that on account of this there is only one subsistence or one person, and that the holy synod of Chalcedon thus made a formal statement of belief in the single subsistence of our lord Jesus Christ: let him be anathema.”

³² The definitional requirement of individual existence for subsistence has been metaphysically argued for by Long, “Subsistence of Christ’s Human,” 91.

As such, this humanity must have a real relation of dependency to the Divine Person whereby it derives its existence. This created, though transcendental, relation of the creaturely nature's aptitude for existence toward the Divine *esse* is what Saint Thomas either regards as constitutive of the "subordinate being" of Christ's humanity in the disputed question or as a new existential *habitus* between the Divine Logos and its assumed humanity in the *Summa theologiae*.³³ As a relation transcending the Aristotelian categories of being,³⁴ it neither constitutes a numerically second *actus essendi* within the Hypostatic Union nor institutes a created accident of being within this personal union.³⁵ It also does not impugn the Divine Simplicity since this transcendental relation is only a real relation of the created nature to God and not a mutual real relation in the Divinity.³⁶ Therefore, Christ only has one *esse*, though the

³³ The speculative explanation of Long to explain this difference in the texts of Saint Thomas should be mentioned here. See Long, "Subsistence of Christ's Human," 98. "Rather, *De unione* simply acknowledges that human nature terminates in the existence of the Word in a way different than does the divine nature because the Word is eternal, whereas the human nature receives union with the Word temporally. This is the second *esse* only *secundum quid* (and in *De unione*, Thomas affirms that Christ has one being 'simpliciter' and two only *secundum quid*)." Long here references, Aquinas, *De Unione Verbi Incarnati*, a. 2, ad 10.

³⁴ See Grenier, *Thomistic Philosophy*, 200.

³⁵ Cf., Long, "Subsistence of Christ's Human," 93. The position here suggested is not to be identified with the claim that *esse secundarium* is a dependent created *esse*, which has been ably argued for by Eric A. Mabry. See Mabry, "The Hypothesis of *Esse Secundarium*"; Mabry, "*Mysterium Esse Christi*." Mabry argues that *esse secundarium* is a true creaturely *esse* specific to the humanity of Christ Jesus which cannot constitute a human *suppositum*. See Mabry, "*Mysterium Esse Christi*," 97-98. This paper, however, follows Nutt's traditional reading of the nature-supposit distinction, where the *supposit* is the individuated nature with all the antecedent and consequent accidents and principles which make existential individuation possible—which includes *esse*. See Nutt, "Introduction," 11-12; Nutt, "*Christus Est Unum Simpliciter*," 79-85. Mabry's view would, therefore, seem to require a novel understanding of supposit and nature to be introduced into Saint Thomas's understanding. This does not, however, obscure the excellence of Mabry's understanding of *esse secundarium* as Christ's humanity's relation of participation to the Divine *esse* of the Word, to which the position suggested in this paper approaches. See Mabry, "The Hypothesis of *Esse Secundarium*," 96.

³⁶ For mutual and non-mutual relations, see Grenier, *Thomistic Philosophy*, 206-07. Note that Grenier does not consider the analogous case of mutual and non-mutual transcendental relations.

relations to this *esse* within His incarnation are complex.³⁷ Here it should be remembered, with Steven Long, that “*Esse* is the form of forms, the act of acts, the perfection of perfections, and God Who is *Ipsium Esse Subsistens Per Se* possesses infinite power. Communicating the personal existence of the Word is not impossible for God” for which reason Christ’s humanity may be granted existence by the *esse* of God.³⁸ Granted that the Person, Christ Jesus, has only one *esse* this paper may now turn to considering the *esse* of the Eucharist.

IV. Eucharistic Dogma

In considering the Eucharist, the dogma of the Real Presence must always be kept in mind. The 13th session of the Council of Trent taught, “our lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is truly, really and substantially contained in the propitious sacrament of the holy eucharist under the appearance of those things which are perceptible to the senses.”³⁹ The Council goes on to say that Christ’s body is present under the appearances of the Eucharistic bread and His blood under the appearances of the Eucharistic wine by the power of the Words of Institution, with His body present under the appearance of wine and His blood under those of bread by natural concomitance.⁴⁰ His human soul too is everywhere present in the Eucharist by this natural

³⁷ Cf., Long, “Subsistence of Christ’s Human,” 95. “The creature obeys God by receiving into itself whatever God wills, and if God wills that a nature terminate not in a created but in an uncreated *esse*, the *esse personale* of the Person of Christ, then the nature receives the grace of union with the Eternal Word.”

³⁸ Long, “Subsistence of Christ’s Human,” 96.

³⁹ Tanner, “Council of Trent: 1545–1563,” 693. “dominum nostrum Iesum Christum, verum Deum atque hominem, vere, realiter ac substantialiter sub specie illarum rerum sensibilibus contineri.”

⁴⁰ See Tanner, “Council of Trent: 1545–1563,” 695. Cf., Aquinas, *ST*, III, q. 76, a. 1-4. Saint Thomas’s doctrine of Eucharistic concomitance is ably summarized in a few short lines by, John T. Slotemaker, “Ontology, Theology and the Eucharist: Thomas Aquinas and William of Ockham,” *The Saint Anselm Journal* 9, no. 2 (Spring 2014): 1–20; Marilyn McCord Adams,

concomitance and the Divine Word is everywhere present by the Hypostatic Union.⁴¹ Therefore, the whole Person is present under the appearances of bread and wine, which truth is taught under anathema,⁴² wherefore the thing which is the Eucharist is the Person Christ Jesus.⁴³ This is why the Eucharist is subject to worship by the Faithful.⁴⁴

V. The *Esse* of the Eucharist

As the actual subsistence which is where the Eucharist is present *is* Christ Jesus, the Eucharist must exist by the same act of existence as Christ. However, there are problems which obscure this fact. First, the Eucharist is numerically diverse and scattered across the globe wherefore numerically diverse *esse* seem needed and, second, the sacramental mode whereby Christ is present under the Eucharistic accidents of bread and wine is an equivocal mode of presence where Christ is not seemingly present personally, that is, existentially present.

Given that there are many Eucharists across the globe, many distinct *esse* seem necessary. This problem rests upon whether or not Christ is present in the sacrament in a local mode.⁴⁵

Some Later Medieval Theories of the Eucharist: Thomas Aquinas, Giles of Rome, Duns Scotus, and William Ockham (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 92.

⁴¹ See Tanner, “Council of Trent: 1545–1563,” 695. Cf., Aquinas, *ST*, III, q. 76, a. 1-4.

⁴² See Tanner, “Council of Trent: 1545–1563,” 697.

⁴³ See Daria Spezzano, “The Burning Coal: Thomas Aquinas on Loving and Eating Christ in the Eucharist,” *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review of Theology and Philosophy* 87, no. 3 (July 2023): 355–413, 355; *CCC* no. 1374; Johannes Betz, Josef Andreas Jungmann, and Leo Scheffczyk, “Eucharist,” in *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology* (New York, NY: Herder and Herder, 1968), 257. “[I]t is the salvific reality placed therein by Christ, which is Christ himself with his being and work.” Cf., “Eucharist,” 262-263.

⁴⁴ See *CCC* nos. 1378-81.

⁴⁵ For an explanation of Aristotelian place with reference to Eucharistic doctrine and the diverse Scholastic theologians who discussed it, see Adams, *Some Later Medieval Theories of the Eucharist*, 19-28.

However, Saint Thomas is clear that Christ is not contained in a place under the Eucharistic accidents. He says,

Christ's body is not in this sacrament definitively, because then it would be only on the particular altar where this sacrament is performed: whereas it is in heaven under its own species, and on many other altars under the sacramental species. Likewise it is evident that it is not in this sacrament circumscriptively, because it is not there according to the commensuration of its own quantity.⁴⁶

For Saint Thomas, as a faithful Aristotelian, place and location require the subject to be quantitatively contained by the place.⁴⁷ Thus, Christ's body and blood would have to be quantitatively contained by the Eucharistic accidents for Him to be contained in that given spot, wherefore He could not be contained by any other place across the globe or in Heaven. However, since Christ's body and blood are the substances which succeed the substances of bread and wine by the Words of Institution, they are only present as substance.⁴⁸ The accidents naturally proper

⁴⁶ Aquinas, *ST*, III, q. 76, a. 5, *ad* 1. "Ad primum ergo dicendum quod corpus Christi non est in hoc sacramento definitive, quia sic non esset alibi quam in hoc altari ubi conficitur hoc sacramentum; cum tamen sit et in caelo in propria specie, et in multis aliis altaribus sub specie sacramenti. Similiter etiam patet quod non est in hoc sacramento circumscriptive, quia non est ibi secundum commensurationem propriae quantitatis, ut dictum est."

⁴⁷ See Aquinas, *ST*, III, q. 76, a. 5, *resp.* "Christ's body is in this sacrament not after the proper manner of dimensive quantity, but rather after the manner of substance. But every body occupying a place is in the place according to the manner of dimensive quantity, namely, inasmuch as it is commensurate with the place according to its dimensive quantity." / "corpus Christi non est in hoc sacramento secundum proprium modum quantitatis dimensivae, sed magis secundum modum substantiae. Omne autem corpus locatum est in loco secundum modum quantitatis dimensivae, in quantum scilicet commensuratur loco secundum suam quantitatem dimensivam."

⁴⁸ See Aquinas, *ST*, III, q. 76, a. 5, *resp.* "Hence it remains that Christ's body is not in this sacrament as in a place, but after the manner of substance, that is to say, in that way in which substance is contained by dimensions; because the substance of Christ's body succeeds the substance of bread in this sacrament: hence as the substance of bread was not locally under its dimensions, but after the manner of substance, so neither is the substance of Christ's body." / "Unde relinquitur quod corpus Christi non est in hoc sacramento sicut in loco, sed per modum substantiae, eo scilicet modo quo substantia continetur a dimensionibus. Succedit enim substantia corporis Christi in hoc sacramento substantiae panis. Unde, sicut substantia panis non erat sub suis dimensionibus localiter, sed per modum substantiae, ita nec substantia corporis Christi."

to body and blood, such as their physical size or dimensive quantity, are only present concomitantly.⁴⁹ Since Christ's physical form is not present according to its natural quantitative mode, He is not contained by any place when the sacrament is multiplied around the world.⁵⁰

Moreover, the Eucharistic accidents do not adhere to Christ's body and blood. If they did then the accidents of bread and wine which phenomenally act like bread and wine when consumed would actually have become the proper accidents of Christ's own human body and human blood and would no longer be the appearances of bread and wine that the Council of Trent spoke of!⁵¹ Instead, the Eucharistic accidents adhere in the dimensive quantity that had belonged to the original substances of bread and wine prior to transubstantiation, as Saint Thomas explains in question 77 of the *tertia parts* of his *Summa theologiae*.⁵² This means, however, that Christ's body and blood are also not bounded by the Eucharistic accidents' adherence in His body and blood, wherefore He is not in the place of those accidents.⁵³ Christ is, therefore, "in place on the alter only *per accidens*, by being present in the mode of substance to alien quantitative dimensions," namely the accidents of bread and wine, "that are in place *per se*."⁵⁴ Instead, His presence is *sacramental*, that is, according to the mysterious power of God who vivifies the sacraments of the Church.⁵⁵ As such, there is no natural container of place acting upon Christ keeping His infinite Divine Power from making Himself present wherever the

⁴⁹ See Adams, *Some Later Medieval Theories of the Eucharist*, 93-96.

⁵⁰ See Adams, *Some Later Medieval Theories of the Eucharist*, 96-97. Cf., Adams, *Some Later Medieval Theories of the Eucharist*, 115.

⁵¹ See Tanner, "Council of Trent: 1545-1563," 697.

⁵² See Aquinas, *ST*, III, q. 77, a. 2.

⁵³ Note that the place of the sacrament is filled by the Eucharistic accidents themselves. See Aquinas, *ST*, q. 76, a. 5, *ad* 2.

⁵⁴ Adams, *Some Later Medieval Theories of the Eucharist*, 94.

⁵⁵ Cf., Aquinas, *ST*, III, q. 75, a. 1, *ad* 3.

sacrament is. Moreover, since He is not determined to any single place, His *esse* is not determined to any single Eucharistic host.

Not only is he present under the Eucharistic accidents, but he is acting upon them. Saint Thomas says, “the accidents are preserved by Divine power when the substance is withdrawn” meaning that the Eucharistic accidents exist by the presence of the Logos acting upon them.⁵⁶ This is analogous to how spiritual beings are present by containing “those things in which they are”⁵⁷ because they apply their power in that place,⁵⁸ whence the infinite spiritual being—God—contains all things and is present to all things.⁵⁹ Christ is sacramentally present in each sacrament of the Eucharist by application of His infinite Divine Power. He is present according to the mode of His choosing wherever He applies this power. Therefore, there need not be a multiplicity of *esse* to account for the sacrament across the globe beyond Christ’s *esse* concomitantly and sacramentally present in the Eucharist. Indeed, as the Eucharistic accidents are preserved in actual being by Divine Power, the only *actus essendi* needed to account for both the Real

⁵⁶ Aquinas, *ST*, III, q. 77, a. 2, *ad* 3; David Francis Sherwood, “Aristotelianism in Eucharistic Theology: Father Thomas Reese and Transubstantiation,” *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, May 26, 2023, <https://www.hprweb.com/2023/05/aristotelianism-in-eucharistic-theology/#fn-29902-12>. Cf., Long, Long, “Subsistence of Christ’s Human,” 96.

⁵⁷ Aquinas, *ST*, I, q. 8, a. a, *ad* 2.

⁵⁸ See Aquinas, *ST*, I, q. 52, a. 1, *resp.*

⁵⁹ See Aquinas, *ST*, I, q. 8, a. 1; Aquinas, *ST*, I, q. 52, a. 2, *resp.* For an explanation and defense of the *analogia entis* for theology, philosophy, and Saint Thomas, see Steven A. Long, *Analogia Entis: On the Analogy of Being, Metaphysics, and the Act of Faith* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011). The importance of this doctrine cannot be underestimated in speaking of the diverse things of Creation, the ways Creation relates to God, and of God Himself. See, Thomas De Vio (Cardinal Cajetan), *The Analogy of Names and the Concept of Being*, trans. Edward A. Bushinski and Henry J. Koren, 2nd ed., of *Duquesne Studies: Philosophical Series* (Louvain, Belgium: Editions E. Nauwelaerts, 1959), 28. “By means of analogy of proportionality we know indeed the intrinsic entity, goodness, truth, etc. of things, which are not known from the preceding analogy. For this reason, metaphysical speculation without knowledge of this analogy must be said to be unkilld.” Similarly, Cajetan, “Analogy of Names and the Concept of Being,” 40-43.

Presence of Christ in the sacrament and the preservation of the appearances of bread and wine is the Divine *esse*.

To the second problem, that sacramental presence seems insufficient for positing Christ's being present in the full meaning of His Personhood, one should point out the degree of importance that the mystery of real concomitance has in explaining the doctrine of the Real Presence.⁶⁰ According to Saint Thomas, the Logos's concomitance with the body of Christ is the reason why the Divinity Himself is present in the Eucharist. He says, "it is necessary for the Godhead to be in this sacrament concomitantly with His body."⁶¹ Due to the Divine Simplicity, the *actus essendi* proper to the Divinity is, therefore, in this sacrament by the same concomitance. Concomitant presence does mean that the Logos and His *esse* are not present in the Eucharist according to the mode of presence proper to the Divine Person, which is a "lack" shared by everything merely concomitantly present in the Eucharist.⁶² Thus, Christ's personhood is not present in a wholly personal and substantial fashion. However, this means that only the *natural modes* of presence of concomitant aspects of Christ's Person are lacking in the Eucharist—Christ's accidents, soul, and Divinity are *really and wholly* there upon the altar

⁶⁰ See Adams, See Adams, *Some Later Medieval Theories of the Eucharist*, 96-97.

⁶¹ Aquinas, *ST*, III, q. 76, a. 1, *ad* 1. ". . .in hoc sacramento necesse est esse divinitatem Christi concomitantem eius corpus."

⁶² C.f., Aquinas, *ST*, III, q. 76, a. 4, *ad* 1. "Since, then, the substance of Christ's body is present on the altar by the power of this sacrament, while its dimensive quantity is there concomitantly and as it were accidentally, therefore the dimensive quantity of Christ's body is in this sacrament, not according to its proper manner (namely, that the whole is in the whole, and the individual parts in individual parts), but after the manner of substance, whose nature is for the whole to be in the whole, and the whole in every part." / "Quia igitur ex vi sacramenti huius est in altari substantia corporis Christi, quantitas autem dimensiva eius est ibi concomitanter et quasi per accidens, ideo quantitas dimensiva corporis Christi est in hoc sacramento, non secundum proprium modum, ut scilicet sit totum in toto et singulae partes in singulis partibus; sed per modum substantiae, cuius natura est tota in toto et tota in qualibet parte."

through His Divine Power. As such, His principle of existence is truly there as well. Therefore, Christ's one *esse* is present in this sacrament and, as mentioned above, the single Divine *esse* in Christ is sufficient to account for the *esse* of the Eucharist.

It should be noted that the Eucharistic accidents' relation to the Word's Power, which is the power of existence keeping them in existence after transubstantiation, does add another created relation to the Divine *esse* similarly to how Christ's humanity adds a relation to the Word's existence as Saint Thomas explained in the *Summa theologiae*. In the Christological context, this was the ground for the dependent "subsequent existence" of the *Disputed Question on the Union of the Incarnate Word*. However, the Eucharistic accidents are not hypostatically united to the Person of the Word as Christ's humanity is. Indeed, these accidents are in no way united to Christ Jesus but exist independently over Him. This is admitted by Saint Thomas when he insists that these accidents do not have an independent *esse* because they are not a substance, but instead exist by being externally preserved by the Word's infinite power and actuality.⁶³ "[T]he accidents are preserved by Divine power when the substance is withdrawn."⁶⁴ Therefore, *esse* is not multiplied, though another transcendental relation of external dependence is added within the Eucharist.

VI. Conclusion

This paper has explored the classical debate on whether or not Christ Jesus has one or two *esse* insofar as this debate is found in the last two works in which Saint Thomas spoke on this question, his *Disputed Question on the Incarnation of the Word* and the *tertia pars* of the *Summa*

⁶³ See Aquinas, *ST*, III, q. 77, a. 1-2.

⁶⁴ Aquinas, *ST*, III, q. 77, a. 2, *ad* 3. Cf., Sherwood, "Aristotelianism in Eucharistic Theology"; Long, "Subsistence of Christ's Human," 96.

theologiae. In recounting his two positions—that there is both the personal *esse* of the Divine Word and the *esse secundarium* or that there is only the one Divine *esse* belonging to the Logos—it has been proposed that both positions of Saint Thomas actually posit a single *esse* in Christ. The humanity of Christ relates to the Person of the Word by a transcendental relation, which real relation is considered as a subsequent mode of existence in Saint Thomas's disputed question and is considered merely as the relation in the *Summa*. In either case, it is proper to say that there is only one distinct *esse* of Christ—the Divine *esse*.

Since Christ is really present in the Eucharist—or to put it better, since the Eucharist is Christ Jesus though He is hidden by the accidents of bread and wine—this single *esse* is similarly present in the Eucharist. The numerical diversity of the sacrament does not require a multiplicity of *esse* over and above the *esse* of Christ since Christ is not bound by place when He is sacramentally present upon the altar. Instead, His sacramental presence contains the sacrament wheresoever it is found by His Divine Power. As such, His Divinity is the power whereby the Eucharist exists—both because Christ exists by the Divine *esse* concomitantly present in the sacrament and because the Logos is the one who preserves the Eucharistic accidents in existence. The Eucharist, therefore, has one *esse*—the Divine *esse* of the Word.

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