

The real presence

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Abstract: The doctrine that Christ is really present in the Eucharist appears to entail that Christ's body is not only multiply located but present in different ways at different locations. Moreover, the doctrine poses an even more difficult meta-question: what makes a theological explanation of the Eucharist a 'real presence' account? Aquinas's defence of transubstantiation, perhaps the paradigmatic account, invokes Aristotelian metaphysics and the machinery of Scholastic philosophy. My aim is not to produce a 'rational reconstruction' of his analysis but rather to suggest a metaphysically innocent alternative that will 'save the phenomena' of religious belief and practice.

The doctrine that Christ is really present in the Eucharist appears to entail that Christ's body is not only multiply located but present in different ways at different locations. Moreover, the doctrine poses an even more difficult meta-question: what makes a theological explanation of the Eucharist a 'real presence' account?

Aquinas's (1274) defence of transubstantiation in *Summa Theologica*, Part III, Questions 75–81 is a philosophical analysis of the real presence doctrine, invoking Aristotelian metaphysics and the machinery of Scholastic philosophy. Taking his discussion as a paradigmatic exposition of the real presence doctrine, my aim is not to produce a 'rational reconstruction' of his analysis but rather to suggest a metaphysically innocent alternative that will 'save the phenomena' of religious belief and practice.

Religious motivation for the real presence doctrine

Leaving aside Aquinas's philosophical analysis, we can extract the following religious claims to which he, and others who hold that Christ is really present in the Eucharist, are committed.

- (i) *Theological realism*: the doctrine that Christ is present in the Eucharist cannot be cashed out in terms of either claims about the psychological states of participants or theological claims about the transmission of grace or other benefits.
- (ii) *Empirical vacuity*: as regards all physical characteristics and ordinary causal powers, the consecrated elements appear to be in every respect ordinary bread and wine.¹
- (iii) *Reference*: the consecrated elements do not *merely* symbolize Christ: if someone were to point at them and say, 'That is Christ', he would speak the literal truth.
- (iv) *Asymmetric dependence*: the change in the elements at consecration depends (in some way) upon Christ but Christ himself is in no way affected by changes in the consecrated elements.

In the next section, I consider (i) and (ii). Aquinas's doctrine of transubstantiation is committed to the occurrence of two miracles to account for both the change in substance and the persistence of the empirical properties of bread and wine. My account of the change effected by consecration does not involve any miracles, metaphysical or otherwise, but nevertheless, as I shall argue, is 'real' in the requisite sense. In the sections which follow, I discuss (iii) and (iv), which pose vexed metaphysical questions about the location of Christ's body. In the final section, I address the concern that the current account is too metaphysically minimalist to be understood as a real presence doctrine.

Theological realism and empirical vacuity

Notoriously, when something is characterized as 'real' we have to ask, 'real as distinct from what?' Real – not hallucinatory? Real – not artificial? Real – not simulated, fake, inferior, marginal, or what? The real presence doctrine asserts that the presence of Christ in the Eucharist is real; Aquinas (1274) cashes out this claim by suggesting that the *substance* of the consecrated bread and wine is Christ's body and blood.

To understand the notion of 'real' or 'objective' presence and to determine whether we can get it without buying into Aquinas's analysis, we should note that his account requires him to address *two* problems concerning what he takes to be a *sui generis* case of substantial change. First, he has to account for the change that occurs to the elements of the Eucharist at consecration. But, second, he also has to explain why, given his understanding of that change, the empirical properties of the bread and wine, including their causal powers, remain the same. God could miraculously replace the bread and wine on the altar with an object that was visibly, tangibly, and effectively the body of Jesus of Nazareth, but that is not what he does. On Aquinas's account, therefore, God performs two miracles: first,

changing the elements into the body of Christ and, second, keeping all the accidents of bread and wine in place.

The second miracle is more problematic than the first. Intuitively, if it looks like a duck, quacks like a duck, and is a microphysical replica of a paradigmatic duck, it's a duck. Given Aquinas's account, however, it is logically possible that it *not* be a duck. God, we may grant, is not bound by the limits of nomological possibility. He could create *ex nihilo* something that was in every respect like a paradigmatic duck. It is, however, debatable whether even God could bring it about that something that was in every respect like a paradigmatic duck was *not* a duck. That seems beyond the bounds of possibility understood in a broader sense. Similarly, while producing a quantity of bread and wine *ex nihilo* (or multiplying a quantity of bread to feed multitudes, or turning water into wine) is clearly within the scope of God's omnipotence, it is controversial whether he can achieve the metaphysically impossible – to bring it about that what is in every ordinary empirical respect like a paradigmatic sample of bread and wine is not bread and wine. The real absence of bread and wine is, to that extent, a bigger miracle than the real presence of Christ.

Maybe God's omnipotence does surpass metaphysical as well as nomological bounds: Descartes, notoriously, thought so. This is, however, heavy metaphysical baggage to carry. If we can explain the reality of Christ's presence in the Eucharist without postulating metaphysical miracles, we are certainly better off. It is at least worth a try.

We can avoid miracles altogether by construing consecration as a conventionally generated action which induces a mere Cambridge change in the elements of the Eucharist. In one sense mere Cambridge changes – the widowing of Xanthippe and the like – are not 'real' since they do not involve any change in the intrinsic properties of the objects to which they occur. They are, however, real in the sense required for Aquinas's purposes insofar as they are not 'subjective'.² Xanthippe's widowing does not depend on the beliefs or other psychological states of observers. It comes about because of Socrates' death, in virtue of legal conventions governing marriage. And legal facts are as 'objective' as rocks: you cannot wish away widowings, debts, or traffic tickets.

On the proposed account, the act of consecration is a conventionally generated action analogous to, for example, the act of writing out a cheque. Cheque-writing occurs (1) in virtue of a conventionally prescribed action (2) by a legitimately credentialed agent (3) intending to write out a cheque (4) using appropriate materials (5) as required by institutional conventions. (1) I write the date, payee, and amount of the cheque with my signature underneath. (2) I, a sane adult with a bank account and the money in it to cover the cheque, am legitimately credentialed. (3) I intend to write out a cheque. (4) The coloured, rectangular bit of paper on which I write is a cheque form bearing the routing number of my bank. (5) Legal and institutional conventions *make* a cheque that meets these

conditions money: I give you that cheque saying, truly, 'Here's my \$200.' You may not believe me. You may doubt that I have the money in my account to cover the cheque; you may be sceptical about the solvency of the financial institution on which my cheque was written; or, more radically, you may not understand the whole cheque-writing convention and wonder how a small piece of paper could be worth \$200. That doesn't matter. I gave you \$200 because conditions (1)–(5) were satisfied. Even if you don't cash it, you have that \$200 until, given the established conventions, the cheque expires.

Following Aquinas, theologians have suggested comparable conditions on the *validity* of a Eucharist. (1) A particular sequence of actions has to be done in concert with the recitation of a specified formula. (2) These actions have to be done by a priest, an individual credentialed by the Church to play this role. (3) In doing these actions he must intend to 'do what the Church does' – deferring to the theological expertise of others and church doctrine. (4) The matter of the sacrament must be correct, as specified by the Church: wine and wheaten bread, leavened or unleavened according to jurisdiction. (5) Institutional conventions *make* that bread and wine the body and blood of Christ. Apart from the intention of the priest to 'do what the Church does', the beliefs and other psychological states of participants are irrelevant: where conditions (1)–(5) are satisfied the elements of the Eucharist are the body and blood of Christ. Virtuous and wicked communicants, believers, unbelievers, and the bone ignorant consume the body of Christ – as do church mice gathering up the crumbs from under the table – even though the wicked, unbelievers, and church mice do not receive the grace that God pours down upon devout communicants.

On the current account, (1)–(5) are not causal conditions for the bread and wine becoming the body and blood of Christ but constitutive conditions. Just as nothing further happens to make the cheque I write money when the conditions for writing a valid cheque are satisfied, nothing further happens when these conditions are met. Meeting these conditions does not *cause* the bread and wine to metamorphose into the body and blood of Christ or prompt God to transform them: the fact that the consecrated elements are the body and blood of Christ is *constituted* by the satisfaction of these conditions.

This account clearly meets the empirical vacuity requirement. Mere Cambridge changes do not induce any change in the intrinsic properties of the objects to which they occur. Xanthippe married is no different as regards her intrinsic properties from Xanthippe widowed and a rubber cheque may be an exact intrinsic duplicate of a valid cheque backed by cash down to every microphysical detail.

Arguably it also meets the realism requirement. On the proposed account, the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, once the bread and wine have been consecrated, does not depend upon the psychological states of participants. It

depends on the conventions of the Church, an institution that Christians believe was established by Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, secured by the collective intentionality of that body.³ It is an institutional fact.

Institutional facts, unlike brute facts, require the existence of humans, or other sufficiently sophisticated, conscious beings. The location of the Rio Grande River is a brute fact; the status of the Rio Grande as a border between the United States and Mexico is an institutional fact. Without people there are no nations or boundaries. Without beings capable of forming intentions and following rules there are no social institutions: no contracts, no marriages or widowings, no money, buying or selling. To that extent institutional facts depend on humans and, indeed, on their psychological states – in particular, intentions.

But marriage, money, boundaries, and the like are not ‘subjective’. They are the products of *collective* rather than individual intentionality and the institutions in which it is embodied. An individual cannot by his own initiative, through believing, wishing, or acting as if it were so, enter into or dissolve a marriage, acquire citizenship or increase the value of his portfolio. And, on the account proposed here, the presence of Christ in the Eucharist is likewise secured by the collective intentionality of an institution, viz. the Church. Christ established the Church and charged members to celebrate the Eucharist in remembrance of him. Priests, whose status as his designated representatives is underwritten by the Church, act on his behalf when they perform the actions he specified – taking bread, blessing and breaking it, and likewise blessing the cup of wine, as he did at the Last Supper – with the intention of ‘doing what the Church does’. When these conditions are satisfied, the bread and wine count as the body and blood of Christ.

To this extent, the presence of Christ in the Eucharist depends on his intentional actions in establishing the Church and on the intentions of priests, minimally, to ‘do what the Church does’.⁴ If Christ had not established the Church, instituted the Eucharist, and charged his followers to do it in remembrance of him, the religious ceremonies members performed would be empty rituals and the Church would be nothing more than a cargo cult.⁵ This is surely what Christians who believe that Christ is really present in the Eucharist want to affirm. We believe that the Eucharist was instituted by Christ at the Last Supper – and that if it wasn’t, it would be nothing more than an empty man-made ceremony.

On the current account we are not to regard the Eucharist as a ceremony whose purpose is to edify, inspire, or induce religious experience, or to think of the elements of the Eucharist as convenient meditation objects. We participate in the liturgy, as the devotional literature reminds us, not to get a buzz but because Christ told us to ‘do this’. The Real Presence doctrine is an affirmation of this insight: we do not do this for material or ‘spiritual’ benefits, to psych ourselves up for greater virtue or increased productivity, or to attain religious experience. If we participate

in the ceremony to get these things we will not get them. Reminiscent of the Paradox of Hedonism, according to which we get pleasure only when we aim for things other than pleasure, we will not get religious experience if we believe that the Eucharist is merely a mechanism for producing religious experience. That is the motive for theological realism regarding the Eucharist, according to which Christ's presence cannot be cashed out in terms of claims about the psychological states of participants.

The current account, therefore, does not reduce the doctrine that Christ is present in the Eucharist to claims about the psychological, spiritual, or material benefits that are supposed to accrue to participants. It therefore meets (i) the theological realism requirement as well as (ii) the empirical vacuity requirement.

Being there

Construing consecration as a conventional action, even if we take that as an adequate account of the change it effects, leaves hanging metaphysical questions about the location of Christ's body that troubled Aquinas and his successors. Christ ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father, but according to the real presence doctrine, the consecrated elements *are* his body and blood. Moreover, according to Aquinas, every consecrated wafer and every bit of every consecrated wafer is Christ's body entire, though lacking in its ordinary 'dimensive properties' as well as other accidents.

This poses two problems. First, as critics of the real presence doctrine long recognized, it seems to treat Christ's body as a stuff rather than a thing – as a substance that pools and coalesces in discrete places where the Eucharist is celebrated. Second, it suggests that Christ's body is not only multiply located, but present in a different way on earth and in heaven – 'locally present' only in heaven, as Aquinas puts it, but on earth in the elements of the Eucharist, 'sacramentally present'.⁶

'Sacramental presence' is exotic – indeed *sui generis* – but not logically incoherent. It is at least logically possible that objects occupy regions in different ways and, in particular, that we may take it that the location relation which holds on objects and regions is not one–one. Hud Hudson (2005), indeed, distinguishes four ways in which objects may be 'located' at regions.

To sort out the ways in which objects may occupy regions we first distinguish between their being entirely and wholly located as follows:

' x is entirely located at r ' = df x is located at r , and there is no region of space-time disjoint from r at which x is located.

' x is wholly located at r ' = df x is located at r , and there is no proper part of x not located at r .

Extended composite objects, as we ordinarily think of them, *pertend* the regions they occupy, where pertension is understood as follows:

‘*x* pertends’ = df *x* is a material object that is entirely located at a non-point-sized region, *r*, and for each proper sub-region of *r*, *r*^{*}, *x* has a proper part entirely located at *r*^{*}.

Christ’s body was locally present at different times in various regions in Palestine during the first century and is current locally present in heaven by *pertending* various non-point-sized earthly and, subsequently, heavenly regions.

Arguably Christ’s body is ‘sacramentally present’ in the Eucharist to the extent that it *entends* the (earthly) regions occupied by certain quantities of bread and wine.

‘*x* entends’ = df *x* is a material object that is wholly and entirely located at a non-point-sized region, *r*, and for each proper sub-region of *r*, *r*^{*}, *x* is wholly located at *r*^{*} (Hudson 2005).

Extension in fact captures just what Aquinas claims about the ‘sacramental presence’ of Christ in the Eucharist. First, it allows us to say, as required, that Christ is wholly located at each of the disconnected spatial regions occupied by quantities of consecrated bread and wine: each wafer and each cup of wine is the whole of Christ and not merely a Christ-part. Second, on this account, Christ is wholly located at each of the connected spatial sub-regions the consecrated elements occupy. Third, Christ is wholly located at the fusion of disconnected regions occupied by quantities of consecrated bread and wine and, though this is not a claim that Aquinas or other advocates of the real presence doctrine consider, it seems unobjectionable.

Finally, insofar as Christ’s body *entends* the fusion of disconnected sub-regions occupied by the Eucharistic elements *entirely* it does not occupy any earthly region from which they are absent. Ignoring for now the local presence of Christ in heavenly regions, this is to say that Christ is not anywhere else. He is *not* present in the elements of the Eucharist because he is in some sense present wherever two or three are gathered together in his name or in the community of believers at all times or in the regions occupied by those who participate in the Eucharist at any given time. He is *not* present in the regions occupied by quantities of consecrated bread and wine because he is ubiquitous and so is present there as well as everywhere else. According to the real presence doctrine, taking Aquinas’s account as paradigmatic, Christ is sacramentally present in the regions occupied by consecrated bread and wine and in no other earthly place.

This account is logically coherent. It is logically possible that Christ’s body *entend* a large, gappy region of space time so there is no reason to reject the view that it is wholly present in every quantity of consecrated bread and wine on purely *logical* grounds (Pruss 2009). The worry is that there is no reason to hold that this

is true of Christ's body. In a trivial sense, assuming mereological universalism, there is an object that occupies a large, gappy spatio-temporal region filled by consecrated bread and wine because the fusion of any collection of objects is itself an object. The question is why we should regard *that* exotic object, or perhaps the fusion of that object and another object which pertends a heavenly region, as Christ's body.⁷

Appeal to God's power to do miracles may not help here because this would require yet another miracle of distinction without difference, comparable to the duck miracle considered earlier. To secure multilocation for Christ's body, but for no other body, God would have to bring it about that it, but no other body, have an exotic mereology. And to do this it seems at least *prima facie* that God would have to bring about a change in bare identity facts.

Consider four spatio-temporal regions apparently occupied by quantities of bread and wine, R₁, R₂, R₃, and R₄, where R₁ is continuous with R₃ and R₂ with R₄. For convenience let us suppose that the occupants of these regions are exactly similar as regards their ordinary empirical properties. Suppose that the occupants of R₃ and R₄ have undergone consecration. On this account, while the occupants of R₁ and R₂ are distinct, the occupants of R₃ and R₄ are identical – and not merely gen-identical, but the very same thing, viz. Christ's body insofar as *it* is, miraculously, identical to Christ's glorified body in heaven.

Intuitively, identity facts are grounded in non-identity facts so that where the non-identity facts are the same the identity facts will also be the same. Apparently the non-identity facts that go for R₃ and R₄ go for R₁ and R₂. The claim is, however, that while R₁ and R₂ are not identical, God miraculously brings it about that R₃ and R₄ are. The thesis that identity facts must be grounded is controversial. So, at least when it comes to diachronic identity, Alexander Pruss rejects 'criterialist' accounts according to which the identities of objects of various kinds are, in part, constituted by criteria in virtue of which we identify them (Pruss 2011). If, however, we assume criterialism, as I shall, then such miracles of distinction without difference are at best problematic – even for God.⁸

Identity is nevertheless negotiable insofar as we can establish conventions for what is to *count as* the same object of a given kind. The stock examples are familiar. Does my house – which was extensively repaired after an earthquake, radically remodelled or dismantled, and after several decades reconstructed – qualify as an historical landmark? It depends on whether it counts as the same building as the house at this site 100 years ago and that is a matter for city officials to decide. They establish such identity claims by convention in virtue of the role they play in city government.

The identity of my house with the house constructed on this site over 100 years ago, which city officials recently established by fiat, is not merely subjective: it is a legal fact. I didn't and couldn't make it so by believing it was so or acting as if it were. Moreover, it is a fact that has consequences because city government is

linked to other institutions including the local historical society and the county tax assessor's office, which in compliance with the Mills Act, gives special breaks on property taxes for historical landmarks: in virtue of the legal fact established by the city my taxes go down, the value of my property goes up, and members of the local historical society bug me about hosting historical home tours. Nevertheless, it is a fact established by convention – no miracles required. In virtue of city officials' decision I can truly say, '*This is the same house that was here 100 years ago.*'

In the same way God could bring it about that pieces of bread *count as* Christ's body entire – no miracles required. And Scripture suggests that this is exactly what he did because the Eucharist was *instituted*. Reading accounts of the Last Supper one does not get the sense that Christ is *predicting* that whenever his followers perform a ceremony of the appropriate kind a metaphysical miracle will occur or even *assuring* them that whenever a suitable ceremony is performed he (or some other Trinitarian person) will faithfully do a metaphysical miracle. He says, '*This is my body*'. And I do not think it is entirely far-fetched to read this as *assigning* significance to the materials of the Eucharist within a practice he institutes for the Church he establishes – in effect declaring, '*Let this – and all other quantities of bread that will figure in the rite I hereby institute – count as my body*'.

Speculative exegesis aside, however, on the current account the elements of the Eucharist count as Christ's body and blood in virtue of a convention Christ instituted, whenever the Church, which he established, celebrates the Eucharist. In pointing towards regions entended by quantities of consecrated bread and wine we can truly say, '*That is Christ*'. Consequently, the current account verifies (iii).

Asymmetric dependence

On the current account Christ is 'sacramentally present' wherever the Eucharist is celebrated, by entending a gappy region of earthly space-time. Christ's body, however, is not just a merelogically exotic object that occupies this region: Jesus was an historical figure who lived and died in first-century Palestine and, according to Christian doctrine, rose from the dead, made a number of post-resurrection appearances, and ascended into heaven. So we need to explain the relation between Christ as present in the Eucharist and Christ crucified, resurrected, ascended, and 'locally present' in heaven that saves the phenomena of religious practice. In particular, it should explain how participants in the Eucharist are, in some *sui generis* sense, *en rapport* with Jesus Christ.

That rapport is indeed peculiar because while claiming that what appears to be the bread on the altar *is* the body of Christ we also want to claim that nothing that happens to it happens to Christ. On the other hand, Aquinas at least wants to claim

that what happens to Christ, crucified, dead, resurrected, and ascended, happens to Christ's body sacramentally present in the Eucharist: 'What would have been the condition of Christ's body under this sacrament if it had been reserved or consecrated during the three days He lay dead?' he asks in Question 81:4 (Aquinas 1274), responding, 'The same Christ Who was upon the cross would have been in this sacrament . . . Therefore, if this sacrament had been reserved, He would have died therein.' At any given time, the sacrament represents Christ as he is at that time: what happens where Christ is locally present happens where he is sacramentally present. However, what happens in church stays in church. In Question 76:6 Aquinas (1274) asks 'whether Christ's body is in this sacrament movably', responding that 'Christ's body is at rest in heaven. Therefore it is not movably in this sacrament.'

So according to Aquinas the character of Christ's sacramental presence depends upon the character of Christ's locally present body but not vice versa. Moreover, Christ's body insofar as it is present in the Eucharist is not only causally inactive – since after consecration the elements retain all the ordinary causal properties of bread and wine – it is also causally impassive: what happens to it does not happen to Christ.

On the most natural reading, the suggestion seems to be that Christ is present in the Eucharist in the way that an object is present in its image in cases of what we take to be indirect observation. I see myself in a mirror. Pointing toward the mirror I can truly say, 'There I am!', even though I am not *locally* present where I appear to be, three feet behind the mirror, or on its surface. The image in the mirror reflects my state at any given time: what happens where I am locally present appears in the mirror image. But what happens to the mirror, and hence to the image reflected in it, does not happen to me. If the mirror is shattered, I am not harmed.

It will be objected that 'there I am', said while pointing at the mirror, is not *literally* true insofar as my presence on the surface of the mirror or three feet behind it is, at most, presence in an attenuated sense. But that is just to say that I am not *locally* present there and likewise on Aquinas's account Christ is not *locally* present on the altar. If someone were to point to the mirror and say, 'That's Baber!', they would, as we ordinarily understand it, speak the literal truth. They are not referring to the mirror image and saying metaphorically if *it*, 'That's Baber!', in the way that I might, metaphorically, refer to my cat as a tiger. They are referring to *me* and speaking *literally*. If the analogy holds, then pointing toward the altar it should be literally true to say, 'That's Christ!' We wouldn't want Christ's presence in the Eucharist to be any more robust than that.

The serious worry is that the presence of Christ in the Eucharist is *less* robust. My image in the mirror resembles me and is causally connected to me in a way that, arguably, backs the claim that I *see* myself in the mirror. The items on the altar don't resemble Christ by a long shot and whatever causal connection obtains

between my viewing them and events in Christ's life on earth or afterlife in heaven is not such as would license my saying that I *see* Christ. On the account I have suggested, the presence of Christ in the Eucharist is backed by an institutional convention rather than a causal connection.

Nevertheless, even when I point to my image in the mirror the truth of my exclamation 'That's me!' depends on a convention that sets rules for reference, which are so entrenched that we do not recognize them as such. It is easy enough to imagine how a naïve subject, unfamiliar with mirrors, might respond. '*That's* you!? Surely not – you're over *here*. Are you trying to tell me that you're in two places at once? Anyway, that thing is flat and thin, and it's made of some hard, shiny stuff – not flesh and blood.' Moreover even given all relevant information about how hard shiny surfaces reflect light he might still refuse to budge. 'Yes I understand all that stuff about optics and the causal connection between you and the image in the mirror. But *it* is not *you*.' He does not disagree about the empirical facts of the matter: rather he rejects a convention for reference according to which pointing to a mirror image *counts as* picking out the reflected object.

We sophisticates, who are used to dealing with mirrors and photographs, TVs, microscopes, and telescopes, operate according to a variety of linguistic conventions for dealing with such devices. We don't turn a hair when we hear that scientists are observing a star that went out of existence a million years ago. We show our children ultrasound pictures of them in utero and say, 'That's you!' Linguistically naïve subjects might well be puzzled even if they fully understood how these devices worked, but we're so used to our rules for reference and conventions for ostension to objects that are not 'locally present' that we don't find these conventions strange – or recognize them as conventions. Causal connections and resemblance by themselves are not sufficient for reference in such cases.

Arguably, they are not necessary either. Suppose I set up a dynamic simulation of the Fall of Constantinople to illustrate the strategies and movement of troops during the siege. I could use toy soldiers to represent the combatants, but I could just as well use matchsticks or sugar cubes and could, for convenience, use single objects to stand for groups. Given the conventions I establish I can say, moving a block, 'this is the Janissaries pressing forward' and, pointing to a paperclip, 'that is Constantine XI Paleologos'. Naïve subjects will challenge these claims on the grounds that the Fall of Constantinople occurred over 500 years ago and that the emperor was nothing like a paperclip. Again, they have the empirical facts right but are either unaware of the conventions I have established or repudiate them. My commentary as I shove around those blocks, matchsticks, and sugar cubes is *about* events that occurred in 1453 and real, historical figures.

Reference, including ostensive reference, always rests on conventions – not only when I pick out an object by pointing to its image or representation but

also when I point in the direction of an object that is ‘locally present’. The proud alumnus points in the direction of a building remarking, ‘I gave *that* to the university.’ That *what?* That *building?* That *wall?* That *brick?* (Perry 1970). To secure reference we need sortals – creatures of language born of our linguistic conventions.

I point in the direction of the altar and say, ‘*That* is Christ’s body.’ Naïve subjects may object that Jesus lived and died almost two millennia ago and is, according to Christian doctrine, in heaven. But that is beside the point. According to the Church’s conventions the consecrated bread goes proxy for Christ so that pointing to it I can refer to Christ – wherever he is ‘locally’. In representing Christ the elements do not have Christ’s causal powers and what happens to them does not happen to Christ who, as Aquinas puts it, is not in this sacrament ‘moveably’. Claim (iv) is therefore satisfied.

Real enough for you?

On the current account the Church adopts a convention according to which we can point at the elements of the Eucharist and say, truly, ‘that’s Christ’ in the way that we could point at a picture and by so doing pick out its subject. This may seem like a very thin interpretation of real presence until we remember that some pictures that hang in churches are not *mere* pictures. Some are icons, which figure as ‘witnesses to divine action in the world, mediators of divine presence and occasions for participation in the founding events of the church’ (Cuneo 2010, 127). Citing John of Damascus, Terrance Cuneo suggests that: ‘icons are vehicles of divine speech... [which] communicate divine presence’, adding that they represent past events so that ‘we can “participate” inasmuch as we can presently allow its significance to shape our lives’. The role icons play, he notes, elicits a fitting response:

By touching and kissing them, Eastern Christians find themselves expressing, in as fitting a way as they know how, gratitude toward the extraordinary witness, invitation, and promise that the icons communicate. In doing so, they express gratitude, love, and laud toward the One who, if the church is correct, is their author. (Cuneo 2010, 141)

For Western Christians, the Eucharist is *the* icon. However theologically inarticulate we are, we regard Communion as a big deal, an occasion when we are in a peculiar way, *en rapport* with Christ. In participating in the Eucharist, ‘in remembrance his blessed passion and precious death, his mighty resurrection and glorious ascension’ (BCP 1928), we ‘participate’ in those events and commit to allowing their significance to shape our lives. In venerating the elements we worship Christ.

The serious worry is that on the kind of account I have sketched it represents the Eucharist as a fiction, which at bottom does not depend on the truth of further

theological claims. Christians, as Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger notes, want to affirm that ‘what is going on in the Eucharist is an event happening to the thing itself and not just something agreed among ourselves’ (Ratzinger 2003, 87). Cardinal Ratzinger continues:

If the latter were true then the Eucharist would be . . . a fiction by which we agreed to regard ‘this’ as ‘something else’. Then it would be only a game, not reality . . . The world of the Eucharist is no game; it does not rest on conventions, to which we agree and which we can also renounce. (Ratzinger 2003, 88)

This concern is serious but rests on a false dichotomy: some games are not *mere* games or fictions. Their character does not depend upon whether participants agree to the conventions of which they are constituted or renounce them. Cheques are issued and used for various financial transactions even though some people pass rubber cheques and others operate cash-only businesses.

On the grand scale the cheque-writing game does depend on agreement. If no individuals or businesses accepted cheques and they ceased to play the role they currently do in the economy, the cheque-writing game would be over. By the same token, if everyone repudiated the conventions constitutive of the Eucharist and the Church collapsed then, arguably, the Eucharist could not be celebrated. We can imagine our remote descendants engaging in ceremonies that bear some resemblance to contemporary liturgy, without a clue as to their origin or significance, which do not play a role comparable to the role liturgy plays for Christians. I doubt that most Christians would want to count our clueless descendants’ activities as Eucharistic liturgy or suggest that Christ was really present in virtue of their going through the motions.

Given the current account, it may take some delicacy to determine when a ceremony counts as a celebration of the Eucharist, because determining the conditions for reference is a subtle matter. What is factual, or semi-factual, discourse at some times and in some contexts is purely fictional in others. For centuries people talked *about* St Nicholas, a fourth-century bishop of Myra, and told increasingly fanciful stories *about* him, who was known variously as Sancte Claus and Sinterklaas. At some point, however, Santa Claus stories became completely fictional: they ceased to be legends *about* Bishop Nicholas of Myra.⁹ But the fact that we cannot now use the name ‘Santa Claus’ or even in most contexts without special qualification ‘St Nicholas’ to refer to that historical figure does not mean that we cannot now refer to him, tell factual or fanciful stories about him, or pick him out by pointing to appropriate representations. Standing in front of Gentile da Fabriano’s *Dowry for the Three Virgins* I can point to the figure tossing bags of gold into an upper story window and say, truly, ‘That’s St Nicholas, a fourth-century bishop of Myra.’ I cannot, however, say that truly when pointing to a Christmas lawn display featuring Santa Claus in full department store regalia

surrounded by elves and reindeer. And this is not the consequence of any psychological shortcoming on my part: the narrow content of my psychological state does not determine whether I am picking out Bishop Nicholas or engaging in pure fantasy.

Likewise, given institutional conventions established by Christ, which are current in the Church, I can point in the direction of the altar and say, truly, 'That's Christ.' My narrow psychological states do not make that so and apart from Christ's institution and the Church practice of doing the Eucharist in remembrance of him it would not be so.

The current account of Christ's presence in the Eucharist is minimalist: it does not invoke the occurrence of miracles or assume any controversial metaphysical doctrines. It is not, however, so minimalist that everyone counts as believing it. Sceptics who do not believe that Christ now exists and pertends a heavenly region, or endorse the conventions of the Church according to which the elements of the Eucharist represent him, do not believe it.¹⁰ But Christians who endorse the Church's conventions and recognize the Eucharist as a representation of Christ in the sense described do. And that belief licenses religious practice, since it means that the Eucharist is not merely a convenient meditation object but rather that it *is* Christ, so that worship directed toward it is directed to Christ who is God, the only fit object of worship.

Members of 'liturgical churches' want a doctrine of Christ's real presence because they are concerned to affirm that the Eucharist is not merely a symbol of religious commitment or a device for inducing religious experience, communal bonding, or the resolve to go into the world to do good works. The current account addresses this concern and so seems good enough to count as a real presence doctrine. If it does not count as a real presence doctrine, it is hard to see why we should want one.¹¹

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Notes

1. On Aquinas's view, the consecrated elements are Christ's body, and they do not have the ordinary causal powers of bread. The causal powers of bread are had by the accidents of bread, which continue to exist. This makes it awkward to state the vacuity condition: it would be incompatible with Aquinas's account to require that *the consecrated elements* retain the ordinary causal powers of bread. I am grateful to the anonymous referee of this journal for bringing this to my attention.
2. According to Catholic doctrine, sacraments yield more than mere Cambridge changes. Sacramental marriage, according to the anonymous referee for this journal, 'is taken to involve a non-Cambridge change in the participants ... [and] the sacrament of reconciliation ... restores the habit of charity'. Likewise, on this account, the Eucharist involves non-Cambridge changes. I am not a Catholic and do not wish to defend this account of either the Eucharist or any of the other sacraments. I hold that any changes these ceremonies bring about are mere Cambridge changes.
3. See Searle (2010). In Baber (unpublished) I discuss in more detail the claim that the presence of Christ in the Eucharist is an institutional fact, making use of Searle's account.
4. For the role of intention in the sacraments see e.g. <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08069b.htm>>.
5. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cargo_cult>.
6. Arguably, Aquinas doesn't need to appeal to 'sacramental presence' to get what he wants, viz. that, picking out any quantity of consecrated bread and wine, one can say, truly, 'that's Christ.' We can refer to objects by indicating their pictures or other representations without implying that they are, in any sense, located where their representations are. However, *if* we want to say that objects are, in some sense, present in their representations, then the mode of location will be exotic. And if, as Aquinas wants to claim, Christ is wholly present at every region where the elements of the Eucharist are present, and wholly present also at every sub-region, then the mode of presence, which he describes as 'sacramental' as distinct from 'local' presence, is entension.
7. I am not recommending mereological universalism here as a way of understanding the manner in which Christ is present in regions where the Eucharist is celebrated. Rather, my purpose is to suggest that showing that objects may be located in weird ways, that they may be gerrymandered, gappy, or, more radically, that they may extend regions of space, doesn't solve our problems. The question is: what makes *this object* – whether it's ordinary or gerrymandered, gappy, or extending – Christ's body?
8. The defender of transubstantiation as traditionally understood may argue that the occupant of R₃ and R₄ has a causal history that the occupants of R₁ and R₂ lack, involving gestation in Mary's womb. I am grateful to the anonymous referee of this journal for pointing this out. Such a causal history, however, assumes a very special metaphysics of causation. The aim of the current exercise is to defend an account of the Eucharist that could reasonably be counted as a real presence account, without taking on any special metaphysical commitments about causation or other non-theological matters.
9. I owe this example to John Baber who, some years ago, informed me that 'there really was a Santa Claus – he's just dead'.
10. Prima facie this account is so theologically minimal that an atheist could accept it: anyone, regardless of his or her metaphysical views, can accept the convention that the bread and wine represent Christ and serve as devices for referring to him. But even if both Christians and others were to accept the convention, there would still be a very significant difference since Christians and others disagree about the character of the individual represented in the Eucharist. Christians believe he is God incarnate; others don't. This disagreement about his character is crucial.
11. I am grateful for comments by participants in the session at the SCP Pacific 2008 meeting at which an earlier version of this article was presented and for discussion by participants at the Calvin College Summer Seminar 'Philosophical Reflections on Liturgy', directed by Nicholas Wolterstorff and Terence Cuneo, for whose help I am especially grateful.