Plus C’est Pareil, Plus Ça Change

The Influence of Cartesianism on the Internal Catholic Eucharistic Debate

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by
Erin Glunt
Under the advisement of:
Dr. Thomas Robisheaux
Dr. Raymond Gavins
Table of Contents

Acknowledgements........................................................................................................3

Explanation of Important Terms...................................................................................5

Introduction: Reformation Religiosity and the Eucharistic Debates..........................6

Chapter 1: The Eucharist Controversy and Aristotelian-Thomist Hylomorphism.........19

Chapter 2: The State of Affairs in Descartes’ France.................................................38

Chapter 3: L’Eucharistie Chez Descartes.................................................................49

Chapter 4: The Cartesian Legacy...............................................................................73

Conclusion.................................................................................................................110

Bibliography.............................................................................................................115
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my best work. His passion for history is contagious, and working with him unquestionably has solidified my decision to become a professional historian.
Explanation of Important Terms

**Host**—The Host refers to the consecrated bread, believed by Catholics to be the body of Christ.

**Consecration**—The moment during the Catholic mass at which transubstantiation occurs. It symbolized by the priest raising the Host.

**Eucharist**—The Catholic Church has seven sacraments (baptism, penance, communion, confirmation, holy orders, marriage, and extreme unction). The term “Eucharist” is often interchangeable with the term “communion,” though the Eucharist more properly refers to the consecrated Hosts, while communion includes both the consecrated Hosts and the consecrated wine, believed by Catholics to be the body and blood of Christ, respectively.

**Transubstantiation**—Transubstantiation refers to the Catholic doctrine that “by the consecration of the bread and wine, a conversion (or change) is made, the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of His blood.”¹

**Substance**—I choose to refrain here from giving a textbook definition of substance, as the definition of the word varies among theologians and philosophers and these differences will prove to be critical to this study. To increase general understanding, however, substance can be thought of as the main part of something, that which we easily conceive. Bread, wine, and the body of Christ are all examples of substance.

**Accident**—As with substance, I will not give a definition of accident but, rather, an explanation. Accident refers to the qualities of something—a thing’s physical attributes. Shape, color, and texture would all be considered accidents.

**Extension**—Extension is best explained through analogy. Take for example, an un-inflated balloon. The balloon is small and takes up very little space; it could fit in a pocket, a wallet, or a small bag. All of these are descriptions of its extension. Now, if one inflates the balloon, the balloon remains the same except that it becomes full of air and, thus, takes up more space. It, therefore, has greater extension.

**Hylomorphism**—The philosophy historically used by the Catholic Church to explain the sacrament of the Eucharist. Hylomorphism employed Aristotelian metaphysics, interpreted by St. Thomas Aquinas. Hylomorphism uses the concepts of substance, accident, and extension to explain the Church’s mystery.

As the European Reformation spread across the German lands, and then England, the Low Countries, and France, ultimately splintering all of Christendom, debates over a myriad of issues surrounding the Christian faith became ubiquitous, the most potent of which, perhaps, being transubstantiation. The world of the Reformation was one that is nearly impossible for most moderns to conceptualize. It was a world where religion in large part organized life, a world where people relied on their faith to get them through the day, a world where the ideal of salvation and fear of eternal limbo or, worse, damnation, dominated the daily thoughts of the average person, a world where even the nuances of dogma mattered to the common layman. When many people think of the Reformation, they immediately envision the clash between the Catholic Church and the Protestant sects. They think of the bloody and violent Wars of Religion. The names Luther and Calvin come to mind, as do such key words as “95 Theses,” “Huguenots,” “confessionalization,” and “excommunication.”

While the Reformation period is of correctly characterized by this clash of different Christian groups, one must also remember that the Reformation was a period of self-analysis for the Catholic Church. The advent of reform movements forced the Church to carefully consider its doctrine and to decide whether reform was prudent and necessary. During this Counter-Reformation, the Church largely refused to reform itself in terms of doctrine, and, instead, remained steadfast in its ancient beliefs. In addition to the onslaught of Protestant protesters, the Catholic Church faced internal dissent as various Catholics debated how best to
face the challenge faced by the Protestants and, consequently, how their own dogma was best defined.

This era of such dominant religiosity was also an age of new science and philosophy. The rise of this natural philosophy challenged both theologians and lay believers to reconcile new rational understanding, including new conceptions of material and matter, with their faith. Often the new knowledge illuminated by science seemed to contradict the long held beliefs of the Church—in many ways, religion and science appeared diametrically opposed. English poet John Donne explicated the calamity that ensued from this tension. He wrote in 1611,

[The] new philosophy calls all in doubt,
The Element of fire is quite put out,
The Sun is lost, and th’earth, and no man’s wit
Can well direct him where to look for it…
‘Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone.²

The philosophical-theological debate surrounding material and matter manifested itself most powerfully in the Eucharistic debate. The term “Eucharistic debate” actually refers to a surfeit of debates surrounding the Church’s central sacrament. This debate, however, took on two primary forms, external and internal to the Catholic Church. The external debate involved challenges to the belief in transubstantiation itself. While the Catholic Church remained adamant that the entirety of the bread and wine are converted into the body and blood of Christ at the consecration and that only the accidents of the original bread and wine remain, members of the various reform movements believed the bread and wine were not, in fact, converted into the body and blood of Christ, that the bread and wine remained after the

consecration, and that Christ was present in the Eucharist in a different manner. The external Eucharistic debate epitomized the immense tensions among the different confessions. The Protestant reform groups differed significantly in their specific theologies, though they were unified in their distaste for the Catholic understanding of the Eucharist—the doctrine of transubstantiation. The cross-confessional Eucharistic debate is best characterized as the Protestant sects asserting various alternatives to the Roman doctrine. The specificities of these new Eucharistic theologies will be expanded upon in chapter two, but what is most important is the fact that the Eucharistic controversy was one of the primary points of contention between the Protestant movements and the Roman Church.

The internal Catholic debate differed significantly from the external debate and focused almost exclusively on the material philosophical question. This debate centered on how specifically the Church could philosophically explain the transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. This question was fundamental, as the Church had always employed Aristotelianism to explain the sacrament, unifying theology and contemporary mainstream natural philosophy. In the seventeenth-century, however, the contemporary accepted natural philosophy had begun to change, and the question of mechanical philosophy, a central point of interest of the Scientific Revolution and a specific branch of natural philosophy, had become a focus of the Church. The philosophers who studied mechanical philosophy, known as “mechanists,”3 asserted that the Earth functioned as a machine. This idea was objectionable to the Church, as it implied that God had little to do with the workings of the world.4 The Church’s objections to this new philosophy were

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4 Ibid., 16-20.
manifest in many issues, one of the most prominent being transubstantiation. With the popularity of this new philosophy, the issue at hand became not whether the bread and wine are really converted into the body and blood of Christ but, rather, how. That is, what system of philosophy should the Church employ to explain its most sacred sacrament? The Church historically employed the Aristotelian-Thomist philosophy known as hylomorphism. This philosophy defined the Church’s conception of substance, accident, and extension and served as the only accepted explanation of how the miracle of transubstantiation worked in a mechanical, natural philosophical, sense. It was to the employment of hylomorphism that René Descartes directed his criticisms of the Church doctrine as he sought to replace the Aristotelian-Thomist hylomorphism with his own Cartesian metaphysics.

One cannot overstate the importance of the sacrament of the Eucharist within both the Catholic Church and the Reformation. Belief in transubstantiation not only served and continues to serve as one of the defining differences between the Roman faith and the plethora of Protestant splinter religions, but the sacrament is also an elemental rite of the Church. For early modern Catholics, this belief in transubstantiation was literal and fundamental to their lives. Catholics believe that receiving the Eucharist is a good work and helps lead one to salvation. It serves as a reminder of their belief in the ultimate sacrifice of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, his death on the cross for the sins of mankind. A sixteenth century piece of Catholic propaganda insisted “that [Jesus Christ] does not at all need to sacrifice the blood of male goats, bulls, lambs, crude beasts, or the blood of another, but [he] offered for sacrifice his own blood to erase our sins.”

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5 Remonstrance a la Royne Mere du Roy, par ceux qui sont persécutes pour la parole de DIEU. En laquelle ils rendent raison des principaux articles de la Religion, & qui font aujoudhuy en dispute. 1561, 60.
of the body and blood of Christ himself in the eyes of Catholics and, thus, the Eucharist received at mass. Moreover, the Eucharist is a unifying force within the community of believers of the Church. The cohesion that resulted from sharing in the Eucharistic rite was particularly important during the Reformation as the various Christian groups battled over doctrine and political power. In sum, particularly in the early modern period, the Eucharistic rite was not something to be taken lightly by anyone—Catholic or otherwise. Because the Eucharist is such a crucial element of the Catholic faith, it is not surprising that debate surrounding the sacrament proved to be one of the most polemical issues in the history of the Christianity and, in particular, Catholicism.

Because the importance of early modern Eucharistic theology and the impact of new science on that theology are so difficult to conceptualize on modern terms, they are perhaps best grasped through example. In 1509, Raphael created a fresco originally titled either The Triumph of the Church or The Triumph of the Eucharist, depending on the source. An image of the fresco is reproduced on the following page.

Original: Que [Jésus-Christ] n’a besoing de sacrifier point le sang des boucs, des taureaux, des agneaux, des bestes brutes, ni le sang d’autrui, mais a offert sacrifier son propre sang pour effacer noz péchés.

According to historian Pietro Redoni, this image provides the modern historian with a glimpse into the equilibrium that was present between natural philosophy and religion in 1509. Despite the fact that the debate surrounding the philosophical underpinnings of the sacrament of the Eucharist began long before 1509, this fresco demonstrates the overwhelming unity between scientific and theological understanding of the sacrament prior to the Scientific Revolution. According to Redoni, “For [the] historian, the room [in the fresco] is a doctrinal speculum of uncommon intellectual value…on the history of Eucharistic theology, on its inseparable connections with the history of philosophy and science.”\(^7\) Redoni notes the peacefulness of this single, unified vision of the sacrament of the Eucharist at the mass. “In that room it becomes clear that in 1509, when Raphael frescoed it, there did not exist an insoluble antinomy between classical naturalism and Christian transcendentalism, between

pagan philosophical materialism and Catholic sanctity.”8 In the seventeenth-century, the clash between philosophy and religion became ubiquitous, forever eliminating the calming stability originally expressed in Raphael’s work. In that century, the title of Raphael’s work was changed to *The Dispute Concerning the Holy Sacrament*, which it remains to this day. The fact that seventeenth-century Europeans went to the trouble of changing the name of this fresco demonstrates the profound impact both the Reformation and the new age of science had on the Church and, thus, the lives of early modern Europeans.

The discussion surrounding the Eucharist is multifarious, and while it has been studied from a myriad of angles by a variety of scholars, this study seeks to examine the Eucharistic controversy in a new manner by analyzing the history of the debate specifically surrounding the philosophical underpinnings of the sacrament and by focusing particularly on the philosophy of René Descartes. Descartes provides an important lens through which historians can view the Eucharistic controversy for several reasons. First, Descartes’ approach to his critique of the Church’s established Eucharistic theology was unique because he was a natural philosopher, not a theologian. His criticism, as such, came directly out of his metaphysics, rather than stemming purely from theology. Descartes’ contributions, moreover, were marked significantly by the social, religious, and scientific culture of his time, rendering them unique to those of his predecessors. In fact, it is clear that the reason Descartes’ writings surrounding the issue of the Eucharist caused such an outcry compared to past criticisms was largely a matter of timing and circumstance. Because he became a main voice of criticism of the Church’s Eucharistic theology in this era of new science and philosophy, Descartes became the focal point of the Eucharistic debate after his death. As such, future theologians and

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8 Ibid., 205.
philosophers had to choose whether or not to align themselves with Descartes’ Eucharistic theology. That is, those who followed Descartes were forced to distinguish themselves as either Cartesian or anti-Cartesian in terms of the Eucharist. Because Descartes’ theology became such a central element of a long-lived debate within the Church, this study serves to illuminate a new mode of approaching the internal Catholic Eucharistic controversy.

My thesis draws primarily on works that have specifically focused on the philosophical aspect of the Eucharistic debate and on Descartes himself. The amount of scholarship discussing on this philosophical aspect of the Eucharistic controversy is significantly smaller than the body of scholarship analyzing the cross-confessional debate. One work focusing on the philosophical-theological debate that proved particularly useful to me is Steven Nadler’s 1988 article “Arnauld, Descartes, and Transubstantiation: Reconciling Cartesian Metaphysics and Real Presence,” published in the Journal of the History of Ideas. In this article Nadler discusses the background of the Eucharistic controversy regarding the philosophical underpinnings of the sacrament and includes much of Descartes’ discussion of the subject. The article is organized as a chronicle of Antoine Arnauld, one of Descartes’ most ardent supporters. Arnauld, however, refused to support Descartes until he was convinced Cartesianism did not violate Church beliefs. Nadler discusses Arnauld’s hesitations to Descartes’ philosophy, thereby illuminating what was generally accepted as the official views of the church. Nadler provides a relatively simple explanation of Aristotelian-Thomist hylomorphism, which served as a useful starting point for my analysis of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas. Aristotle’s Metaphysics and St. Thomas Aquinas’ Summa Theologica provided a more nuanced understanding of hylomorphism.
My study was also largely informed by Michael Adam’s *L’eucharistie chez les penseurs français du dix-septième siècle*. This book provided pivotal background information into the controversy and the key figures of the debate. Most importantly, it was from this work that I originally decided to study Descartes. Adam’s work contains a chapter discussing Descartes and his contribution to the Eucharistic debate in seventeenth-century France. In addition to serving as a catalyst for my interest in studying Descartes, this chapter of Adam’s work served as the baseline for my research of Descartes’ view of the sacrament. I was able to follow many of his footnotes, which helped guide my reading of Descartes’ large body of correspondence.

Adam’s work led me to several other secondary sources such as Redondi’s *Galileo: Heretic*. His work contains an extraordinarily useful history of the philosophical debate surrounding the Eucharist. The information in this work served as a catalyst for the research on my first chapter detailing the long-lived history of the internal Catholic debate.

Tad Schmaltz’s work *Radical Cartesianism* was by far the most useful secondary source for my fourth chapter, as his work outlines the French reaction to Cartesianism in the decades immediately following Descartes’ death. Schmaltz’s work was particularly useful in terms of setting a background of the actions taken against Cartesianism by the French government and the Sorbonne. Schmaltz’s work also clarified the very complex and nuanced philosophies and Eucharistic theologies of Desgabets and Arnauld, as well as their relationships to Cartesianism.

The first chapter of this study will trace both the doctrine of and debate within the Catholic Church surrounding transubstantiation. It will delineate the development of the official Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) and at the
thirteenth session of the Council of Trent (1551). It will also explore the meaning of the Aristotelian-Thomist hylomorphism and the path through which the Church came to accept this philosophical explanation of the Eucharist. It will discuss a key critic of the Church’s official Eucharistic theology during the period of its development, establishing the early presence of debate surrounding the sacrament. This chapter will elucidate the extreme tension between science (natural philosophy) and religion at the time. It will, moreover, clarify the importance of this tension both during the development of the Eucharistic doctrine and in the future during the life of philosophers such as Descartes. Moreover, this chapter will address the challenge of analyzing dissent against the Church’s theology in the interim period during which the Church’s Eucharistic theology was widely accepted, though not yet official. The central purpose of this explanation of the development of the Church’s Eucharistic theology and the acceptance of hylomorphism is to demonstrate the fact that through the centuries leading up to the Council of Trent, the Church’s Eucharistic theology could be considered mainstream because it was associated with the accepted natural philosophy of the time, Aristotelianism. While dissent and disagreements ensued surrounding the details of the theology, what is important is the fact that the dissenters of this period sought to reconcile the doctrine with the conventional natural philosophy of the era.

The second chapter of this study will demonstrate the impact of the European Reformation and the Scientific Revolution on the immediate context of Descartes’ writing and on Descartes’ hesitancy to write about such a controversial doctrinal issue. It will first examine the European Reformations in France in particular, paying exacting attention to the ongoing conflict within France as Huguenot communities gained considerable strength. It will further discuss the French Wars of Religion and the tenuous Edict of Nantes to
demonstrate the fragility of the peace of Descartes’ era, helping to show why many Catholics were quick to question Descartes’ Eucharistic theology. Moreover, this chapter will discuss the Eucharistic theologies to which the writings of Descartes were compared, predominantly that of Jean Calvin. This chapter will also spell out the influences of the Scientific Revolution on the context of Descartes’ writing, specifically the rejection of Aristotelianism and ancient natural philosophy in general by many natural philosophers. Descartes’ goal of replacing Aristotelian-Thomist hylomorphism with his own philosophy was not radical; it fit into the thinking about the mechanical philosophy of his era. As a whole, this chapter shows that the immediate context for Descartes writing about the Eucharist—a France torn by the European Reformation and a center of controversy over the Scientific Revolution—differed significantly from the one delineated in chapter one. In contrast to the late medieval Church, the Catholic Church of Descartes’ time was on the defensive.

The third chapter of this thesis will analyze the writings and correspondence of René Descartes to explicate Descartes’ specific understanding of transubstantiation. This chapter also examines his secular metaphysics, which developed in part through his interactions with several of his contemporaries. This investigation into Descartes’ thoughts will clarify his distinct views regarding the most important Eucharistic questions and distinguish his beliefs from those of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas. It will lay out the reasons for which Descartes believed that his conceptions of substance, accident, and extension could be better used to explain the mystery of the Eucharist than those of other theologians and natural philosophers, including Aristotle. Moreover, it will explore the key analogies and metaphors used by Descartes to explain his philosophy. This chapter will also place Descartes’ argument regarding transubstantiation within the greater Eucharistic debate by juxtaposing him not only
against his predecessors, but also his contemporaries who took interest in his work. It is the function of this chapter to clarify exactly what about Descartes’ writings Catholic theologians found objectionable, and how Descartes defended his metaphysics against these criticisms. This explanation is critical to this study, as it was these objections by Church leaders that led the Church to ultimately reject Cartesianism—and new natural philosophy as a whole—and thus, move itself away from mainstream thought and into isolation as Europe progressed towards the Enlightenment.

Finally, this study analyzes the legacy of Cartesianism in the theological and philosophical communities of France after Descartes’ death. It will explore how Descartes became a pivotal figure in the Eucharistic controversy of the late seventeenth-century. It will first describe the heated debate that came to encircle Cartesianism in France surrounding the Eucharist following Descartes’ death. It will lay out the measures taken by the French crown to silence the teaching of Cartesianism in the French universities. It will then examine the views of both Descartes’ allies and enemies including Arnauld, Desgabets, and Leibniz, demonstrating the fact that Descartes’ writings were at the center of debate among some of the most prominent philosophers in the decades immediately following his death. This chapter will establish the fact that Cartesianism had gained significant strength in France in the seventeenth-century and that the Church, had it so desired, could have chosen to explain its most sacred doctrine using this new natural philosophy. By giving voices to the dissenters of such a proposition, this chapter will also illuminate the reasons for which the Church chose not deviate from its employment of Aristotelianism.

Ultimately, this study will reveal a connection between Descartes and the Catholic Church that is largely ignored in scholarship both of the history of the Roman Church and
Descartes himself. Descartes’ impact on the internal Catholic Eucharistic debate was inestimable, yet Descartes’ name rarely receives even a mere mention in books about Catholic theology or the Reformation. As has been explained, prior to the Reformation and the Scientific Revolution, the Church was able to attach its most hallowed sacrament to the natural philosophy of Aristotle and, in doing so, remain completely mainstream. Aristotle was the accepted voice regarding natural philosophy at the time and, prior to the Reformation, the Church faced no powerful, organized dissenting Christian groups. The Scientific Revolution and the Reformation, however, changed the context entirely and put the Church on the defensive, creating an environment out of which it would have been possible for the Church to consider real change both in theology and in the natural philosophy used to explain the theology. Such a “change,” however, would have actually kept the Church in the mainstream of Western European society. That is, as natural philosophy progressed, a “change” in the Church’s understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of the sacrament would actually have meant a keeping with the past—the concurrence of the Church with the conventional natural philosophy of the time. The Church’s decision, then, to reject Cartesianism and, instead, remain steadfast in its ancient employment of Aristotelianism, while it ostensibly demonstrated a lack of change, was a critical moment in the history of the Catholic Church. The Church’s resolution to continue to rely on ancient natural philosophy took the sacrament of the Eucharist out of the mainstream and, instead, made it archaic, mysterious, and essentially inexplicable in terms of natural philosophy. The fact that the Church could no longer explain one of its most elemental beliefs using mainstream science alienated the Church from the erudite members of European society and contributed to the isolation that characterized the Church during the Enlightenment.
Chapter 1

The Sacrament of the Eucharist and Aristotelian-Thomist Hylomorphism

In order to understand Descartes’ Eucharistic theology and why it was so fundamental to the long-lived Catholic debate, one must step back and examine both the specific, canonical doctrine he was criticized for attacking as well as the philosophical debate he entered surrounding the sacrament. How did the Church arrive at its official doctrine of transubstantiation? What exactly is the Aristotelian-Thomist hylomorphism Descartes countered with his new metaphysics, and why was the Church so adamant in its decision to employ hylomorphism? The answers to these crucial questions provide the necessary background for understanding the context in which René Descartes wrote by illuminating the fundamental details of the Church tradition dating back centuries before Descartes’ birth. It is only with this complete understanding of the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation that one can begin to appreciate the implications of Descartes’ Eucharistic theology and, then, make sense of the dramatic impact his writing had on the debate as a whole. This understanding provides the first fundamental context to this study—the context of the Church’s doctrine before the Scientific Revolution and the Reformation. In this context, Aristotelianism was the accepted, conventional natural philosophy and, as such, the Church’s decision to employ this natural philosophy to explain its most hallowed rite is indicative of the fact that in the centuries leading up to the thirteenth session of the Council of Trent (1551), the Church employed mainstream philosophy to explain the sacrament of the Eucharist. This is a critical point, as this meant that at this time this mysterious sacrament was understood to be explicable using the standard natural philosophy of the period. Given this, it is not surprising
that the Church’s beliefs were so completely interwoven into European society. This chapter will explore the manner through which the Church arrived at its doctrine of transubstantiation and, in turn, became attached to the mainstream natural philosophy at the time, Aristotelianism.

The official theological views of the Church and the decrees of the Council of Trent set the immediate context out of which the controversy over Descartes’ position was argued. A general acceptance of the doctrine within the Roman Church, however, dated back to even before the Church’s official sanctioning of the doctrine. This long standing acceptance of the Church’s doctrine indicates that the Church’s Eucharistic theology was deeply engrained by the time Descartes wrote on the subject.

Before the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) when the term “transubstantiation” was first used by the Catholic Church, believers accepted that sufficient basis for and proof of the doctrine exist in the scriptures. According to the Church, the scriptural basis for transubstantiation rests in the passages of the Bible discussing the Last Supper. For example, in his Gospel, Matthew proclaimed, “And whilst they were at supper, Jesus took bread and blessed and broke and gave to his disciples and said: Take ye and eat. This is my body.”

The argument for the scriptural basis of transubstantiation insisted that Jesus saying, “This is my Body” directly implied that the bread and wine are transformed truly and completely into the body and blood of Christ at the consecration, and that they no longer contain any of the original bread and wine. Moreover, it was argued that the scriptures support transubstantiation in Psalms 113:11 which reads, “But our God is in the heavens: he hath done

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Original: cenantibus autem eis accepit Iesus panem et benedixit ac fregit deditque discipulis suis et ait accipiter et comedite hoc est corpus meum.
Therefore, man must not entirely understand the mechanics of the mystery—he must simply accept it to be the work of his omnipotent God. However, while the scriptures can be read as the basis for transubstantiation, they do not provide a mechanical explanation as to how the mystery works. Moreover, this scriptural justification for the sacrament was employed by early modern Christians—its study is not the presentist bias of modern historians. According to historian Pietro Redoni, the “neologism” of transubstantiation had already appeared in “sermons, liturgical works, and polemical treatises” long before the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. As such, long before it was officially sanctioned by the Church, the doctrine of transubstantiation had become “unofficial dogma” within the Catholic community.11

The conflict between reason and faith apparent in Descartes’ time manifested itself as early as the 11th century. In the second half of that century, Berengarius of Tours (999-1088), a theologian at Chartres, became the first known theologian to comment publicly on the issue of philosophy and Eucharistic theology. Although the Church had no official, canonical doctrine of transubstantiation at the time, and even though Berenarius asserted his criticisms centuries before the Fourth Lateran Council, he was aware of the potential danger of his expressing an opinion contrary the generally accepted view of the sacrament,12 further demonstrating the ubiquity of the belief in transubstantiation within the Church and the Catholic community at the time. The centricity of this belief is important, as it helps to explain why the Church would later be so hesitant to accept even the slightest change to its

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11 Galileo, 208.
12 Ibid., 209.
doctrine. Feeling as though he had the support of key Church leaders, however, Berengarius ventured to express his unadulterated opinion on the subject:

The senses perceive the Eucharistic appearances—colors, odors, and tastes. But since, in good dialectics, these are inseparable from their substance, the bread and wine continue to exist after the Consecration.

In this statement, Berengarius made the philosophical suggestion that not only do the accidents of the bread and wine remain after the consecration, as the Church doctrine would later explicitly state, but that the bread and wine themselves remain as well. In the age of the Reformation, holders of such a belief were considered heretics by the Church as this idea, later named ‘concomitance’ or ‘consubstantiation’ was held by Luther and his followers. Despite the fact that an official canonical opinion of the doctrine of transubstantiation had not yet been asserted by the authorities of the Catholic Church, “Berengarius was condemned by the Abbey of Bec for attempting to reduce ‘the entire Eucharist to a pure symbol.’” He was condemned by seven councils and at the Lateran Council of 1079 he recanted, acknowledging his belief in the generally accepted view of transubstantiation—that which would later become official doctrine. This signifies that the doctrine of transubstantiation, while officially “new” in the 16th century, was actually deeply entrenched in the Church even centuries before. What is important about Berengarius’ criticism in this context, however, is the fact that even though Berengarius disagreed with some of the fundamental elements of the Church’s long-held Eucharistic beliefs, he continued to use Aristotelianism to explain his understanding. As such, while dissent surrounding the Eucharist dates back centuries before

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13 Ibid., 209.
14 Ibid., 210.
15 Ibid., 210.
Descartes, prior to the Scientific Revolution there was no question that Aristotelianism—the unquestioned natural philosophy of the age—was to be used to explain the mystery.

Because the pre-Reformation and pre-Scientific Revolution Catholic Church wanted to harmonize theology and natural philosophy in an effort to remain in the mainstream, the Church had essentially no choice but to turn to Aristotle to explain its most sacred sacrament. “The sole alternative would have been the radical choice of stipulating the autonomy of science and faith,”16 something the Church simply could not do since it wanted to remain in-line with contemporary natural philosophy. This meant employing hylomorphism, which was based on St. Thomas Aquinas’ interpretation of Aristotelian metaphysics. Moreover, the decision to use hylomorphism to explain the sacrament is not surprising as “any philosophy introducing into the notion of substance quantitative elements in the form of extension, number, and mechanical properties would have rendered more difficult—if not contradictory—the condition of substance existing in the Sacrament.”17 That is, among contemporary natural philosophies, only Aristotle’s interpretation of substance rendered an explanation of the sacrament possible. Like Descartes’ mechanical philosophy, hylomorphism attempted to explain substance, accident, and extension, all concepts that are critical to the philosophical explanation of transubstantiation. The philosophy of hylomorphism asserted that a body “is composed of two metaphysical principles: matter, which gives the body its extension; and form, a qualitative principle that confers on it activity and scientific properties. Substance is the product of these two principles.”18 What was clear, however, was that the substance present at the Eucharist had to be separate from its

16 Ibid., 212.
17 Ibid., 209.
18 Ibid., 212.
extension as it was clear that the entirety of the human form of the body of Christ could not fit within the physical confines of the Hosts and sips of wine. The edge the hylomorphic philosophy had over other philosophies at the time in terms of the Eucharistic debate was the fact that the acceptance of the hylomorphic theory allowed the Church to conceive of the Eucharistic mystery in terms of a single miracle, that miracle being the fact that a body could be separated from its extension.

In order to fully understand Aristotelian-Thomist hylomorphism, one must examine both the writings of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas. In the case of Aristotle, his *Metaphysics* addressed the issues of accident, substance, and extension in a purely philosophical manner. In contrast, St. Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologica* took that mechanical philosophy one step further and used it to explain theological matters.

The seventh book of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* provides a cogent explanation of Aristotle’s understanding of substance, one of the most important elements of Eucharistic theology. The definition of substance is crucial to a study of transubstantiation at its most basic level because before one can discuss the miraculous transformation of substances, he must first understand what is—and is not—considered substance. Aristotle wrote, “That which is primary, not in a qualified sense, but absolutely, will be substance.” His implication here was that descriptive qualities that are associated with a given substance [accidents] are not themselves substances. Substance is defined as that which can exist on its own. Aristotle continued, rejecting the idea that a substance is what is left of a thing after it has been stripped of its accidents. According to Aristotle, this was a common misunderstanding of substance. He wrote,

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19 Ibid., 212.
The term substance is used, if not more, at least in four principal cases; for both the essence and the universal and the genus are held to be the substance of the particular, and fourthly the substrate. The substrate is that of which the rest is predicted, while it is not itself predicted, while it is not itself predicted of anything else. Hence we must first determine its nature, for the primary substrate is considered to be in the truest sense substance.21

That is, according to Aristotle, the term “substance” was often used in reference to things that should not rightly be called substance. He insisted that we must conclude that substance is defined as the essence of a thing—that which makes it what it is. Substance must also be primary, meaning that it does not presuppose the existence of something else. Aristotle used the example of noses. He wrote,

If ‘snub nose’ is the same as ‘concave nose,’ ‘snub’ will be the same as ‘concave.’ But if not, since it is impossible to speak of ‘snub’ apart from the thing of which it is a per se affection (because snub means concave in the nose), either it is impossible to call the nose snub, or it will be a tautology, ‘concave-nose nose.’ Hence it is absurd that such terms as these should have an essence. Otherwise there would be an infinite regression, for in ‘snub-nose nose’ there would be yet another nose.22

Therefore, according to Aristotle, only substance can be defined in this manner because otherwise one begins defining qualitative attributes which do not denote the essence of the thing.

Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* was intended to be entirely secular and philosophical; however, the theological implications of Aristotle’s works in terms of the Eucharist are clear. If substance is defined by the essence of a thing, then the substance of the body and blood of Christ must be defined by its essence, not its outward appearance and physical attributes.

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21 Ibid., 317.
22 Ibid., 329.
Thus, the body and blood of Christ are still wholly substantially present in the Eucharist even though the outward appearance of the bread and wine remain.

Aristotle continued, describing his analysis of form, asserting that an understanding of matter is impossible if one cannot make sense of its form. Aristotle wrote that conceptually, “For that which is generated will always have to be divisible, and by partly one thing and partly another; I mean partly matter and partly form.” However, according to Aristotle, the form and the matter make up a whole and the individual pieces cannot exist without one another. This can be applied to the accidents. Abstractly, one can discuss qualitative distinctions, but these qualities cannot exist on their own without a substance to attach themselves to. This question of the separation of essence (substance) from form (accidents) becomes critical when Aristotle’s metaphysics is applied to the Eucharist. As was previously discussed, the Catholic Church employed the metaphysics of Aristotle because Aristotelianism resolved the issue of transubstantiation with the use of just a single miracle—the separation of substance from extension. That is, it is by the omnipotence of God that the extension of the substance becomes separated from the substance itself, but all other elements of the mystery can be explained philosophically.

Saint Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologica* applied Aristotle’s conceptions of matter and material to theology. It is out of this interpretation that Aristotle and Aquinas became joined in the hylomorphic philosophy. Aquinas’ focus turned to the Eucharist in book three, questions 73-83. While these eleven questions focus on the Eucharist, it is in questions seventy-five through seventy-eight where Aquinas delved into some of the most important writing regarding philosophy, theology, and this sacrament.

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23 Ibid., 347.
Aquinas began his philosophical argument regarding the Eucharist in question seventy-five. Question seventy-five, article 1 posed the question of “whether the body of Christ [is] in this sacrament in very truth, or merely as a figure or sign.” Unequivocally, this question is pivotal, as it directly tackled the issue of the truth of the doctrine of transubstantiation. In response to this question, Aquinas began, “The presence of Christ’s true body and blood in this sacrament cannot be detected by sense, nor understanding, but by faith alone.” He continued, criticizing those who did not subscribe to this view. He wrote, “Some men accordingly, not paying heed to these things, have contended that Christ’s body and blood are not in this sacrament except as a sign, a thing to be rejected as heretical, since it is contrary to Christ’s words.” Aquinas went even further, specifically mentioning Berengarius as a perpetrator of this offence. He wrote, “Hence Berengarius, who had been the first deviser of this heresy, was afterwards forced to withdraw his error, and to acknowledge the truth of the faith.”

Aquinas’ reference to Berengarius long after his death demonstrates the importance of this discussion within the Catholic community and the strong contempt for dissenters. This early condemnation of opposition even before the age of the Reformation, moreover, indicates the importance of the doctrine itself within the Church and helps to explain the Church’s strong reaction to Descartes.

Question seventy-five foreshadowed a debate that became prominent during the Reformation with the question of “whether in this sacrament the substance of the bread and wine remains after the consecration.” One sees here Aquinas’ union of philosophy and

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25 Ibid., 264.
26 Ibid., 265.
27 Ibid., 265.
theology, as he specifically refers to the ‘substance’ of the bread and wine, meaning, of course, the Aristotelian interpretation of substance. Aquinas responded in the negative to this question for four principal reasons. First, “By such an opinion the truth of this sacrament is destroyed.”

Second, “[The idea that the bread and wine remain] is contrary to the form of this sacrament, in which it is said: ‘This is my body,’ which would not be true if the substance of the bread would to remain there.”

Third, “Because it would be opposed to the veneration of this sacrament, if any substance were there, which could not be adored with adoration of latria,” and, finally, “Because it is contrary to the rite of the Church, according to which it is not lawful to take the body of Christ after bodily food, while it is nevertheless lawful to take one consecrated host after another.”

Aquinas’ argument here is important; he based his response that the bread and wine do not remain after the consecration purely on the beliefs of the faith, not on philosophy. All four elements of his argument place the pre-existing understood values of the Church ahead of philosophy. This response is especially interesting given the philosophical nature of his question. Moreover, Aquinas insisted that the bread and wine cannot remain after the consecration because conversion is the only possible mechanism through which the body and blood of Christ can become present at the consecration. It is here that the idea of conversion became central to the Thomist explanation of transubstantiation which later became one of the defining points of his theology. Taking this belief in conversion, Aquinas rejected both the possibility that the bread and wine remain after the consecration and that they are annihilated at the consecration.

28 Ibid., 267.
29 Ibid., 267.
30 Ibid., 268.
31 Ibid., 268.
In article five of this question, Aquinas tackled one of the most polemical questions relating to the Eucharist—whether or not the accidents are, in fact, real. Aquinas averred the existence of the accidents after the consecration: “It is evident to sense that all the accidents of the bread and wine remain after the consecration. And this is reasonably done by Divine providence.”\footnote{Ibid., 275.} He went on to explain this phenomenon, writing, “It is not customary, but horrible, for men to eat human flesh, and to drink blood. And therefore Christ’s flesh and blood are set before us to be partaken of under the species of those things which are the more commonly used by men, namely, bread and wine.”\footnote{Ibid., 275.} Thus, according to Aquinas, while after the consecration only the body and blood of Christ are present, the accidents of the bread and wine do in fact remain, creating the appearance of an exterior that is more pleasant and appropriate to receive the sacrament. This assertion was followed by a reiteration in question seventy-five, article six that the substantial forms of the bread and wine do not remain along with the real accidents. Aquinas’ affirmation that the accidents of the bread and wine remain following the consecration is fundamental to this issue because the question of the real accidents became one of the primary points of contention between Descartes and the Catholic Church. Two of the articles of question seventy-seven also addressed the accidents. In article one Aquinas asserted that “the accidents continue in this sacrament without a subject.”\footnote{Ibid., 306.} This statement is important not only because the issue of the real accidents became so significant later, but also because Aquinas was the first theologian to directly address this critical question. According to Redoni, other theologians “from Albert the Great to St. John of Demascus and Algero” had hinted at the idea that the Eucharistic accidents are real without a
subject even though they continue to behave as though they were attached to the subjects of the bread and wine. However, St. Thomas Aquinas was the first to have the “audacity” to assert this officially.\(^{35}\) The question of the accidents is one that hinges on philosophical understanding. Nevertheless, Aquinas substantiated this claim with theological belief: “God Who is the first cause both of substance and accident, can by His unlimited power preserve an accident in existence when the substance is withdrawn.”\(^{36}\)

The next article further explained the presence of the real accidents by discussing the dimensive\(^{37}\) quality of the bread and wine. Aquinas made a direct reference to Aristotelian philosophy to come to his conclusion that “the other accidents which remain in this sacrament are subjected in the dimensive quality of the bread and wine that remains.”\(^{38}\) “The dimensive quantity is that in virtue in which a corporeal substance is impenetrable, that is to say, in virtue of which it occupies a certain bounded area to the exclusion of any other corporeal substance.”\(^{39}\) The fact that humans continue to perceive the accidents of the bread and wine implies that they are real; man’s senses are not tricked: “Because something having quantity and color and affected by other accidents is perceived by the senses; nor is sense deceived.”\(^{40}\) Aquinas continued, asserting the importance of the dimensive quality of matter. He wrote, “Because the first disposition of matter is dimensive quantity…and because the first subject is matter, the consequence is that all other accidents are related to their subject through the medium of dimensive quantity.”\(^{41}\) He concluded that since “when the subject is withdrawn,

\(^{35}\) Galileo, 213.

\(^{36}\) *Metaphysics*, 307.

\(^{37}\) Meaning without boundaries.

\(^{38}\) *Metaphysics*, 310.


\(^{40}\) *Metaphysics*, 310.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 310.
the accidents remain according to the being which they had before, it follows that all accidents remain founded upon dimensive quantity."\footnote{42}

Aquinas addressed the remaining critical philosophical-theological debates surrounding the Eucharist in question seventy-six. In the first article of this question, Aquinas addressed the issue of whether or not the whole of Christ is contained in this sacrament. Aquinas affirmed the presence of the whole Christ under the sacrament, writing, “It is absolutely necessary to confess according to the Catholic faith that the entire Christ is in this sacrament.”\footnote{43} This happens, according to Aquinas, “by the power of the sacrament…[and] from natural concomitance.”\footnote{44} Aquinas further explained his argument of natural concomitance by writing that if two substances are really and truly united, then wherever one is, the others must be as well. That is, if Christ’s body and soul are present in the sacrament then, in fact, all of his body and soul must be present; it is not possible for the sacrament to contain only some of his body and blood.\footnote{45} According to Aquinas, this conversion “is one of substances, not of accidents. On the other hand, it is the substance of the body and blood which terminates the conversion.”\footnote{46} This idea was further elaborated in the third article of question seventy-six where Aquinas asserted that “it is evident that the whole nature of a substance is under every part of the dimensions under which it is contained.”\footnote{47} This meant that in eating any of the Hosts or drinking any of the consecrated wine one receives all of the body and blood of Jesus. Descartes later addressed this same crucial question in his discussion of extension.

\footnote{42}{Ibid., 310.}  
\footnote{43}{Ibid., 286.}  
\footnote{44}{Ibid., 286.}  
\footnote{45}{Ibid., 285.}  
\footnote{47}{\textit{Metaphysics}, 291.}
Interestingly, unlike the doctrine of transubstantiation itself which was officially and deliberately defined at the Council of Trent, the sanctioning of the philosophy used to define it came about in a more unique manner. Jan Hus (1372-1415) was widely criticized for his “heretical” views regarding a plethora of theological issues. Many church authorities saw the Hussite movement as a continuation of the Wycliffites. Led by John Wycliffe (1330-1384), such followings preached conceptions of the Eucharist that were unacceptable to the authorities of the Catholic Church. “For Wycliffe, the sacrament contained by nature the bread and the wine, but (on the other hand) only in a sacramental manner the body and blood of Christ.”

That meant that after the consecration, which should be considered simply as the sanctification of the substance, “The Host stays localized and substantiated of the bread and becomes concomitantly with the body of Christ which, for its part, becomes sacramentally present and is spiritually received by believers.” As such, the bread and wine do, in fact, remain as they were before the consecration. Jan Hus was ultimately condemned at the Council of Constance and burned at the stake in 1415. What is most about his condemnation is the fact that “the text of the condemnation officially adopted as its own the doctrine of accidents without subject. Perhaps unwittingly, Bishop Berthold von Windungen, who that day read the condemnation of Hus, in the same moment authenticated the hylomorphic theory.

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Original: Pour [Wycliffe] le sacrement contenait par nature le pain et le vin et (en outre), mais seulement de manière sacramentelle, le corps et le sang du Christ.

49 Ibid., 19.
Original: L’hostie reste *localiser* et *substantialiser* du pain, et elle devient *concomitanter* le corps du Christ qui, pour sa part, devient présent *sacramentaliter* et est reçu par les fidèles *spiritualiser*.

50 Ibid., 19.
51 Ibid., 19.
of the Eucharist’s sensible phenomena.”52 In doing so, according to modern analysts, von Windungen “put Aristotle on Catholic alters.”53 Accordingly, despite the fact that at the Council of Constance the doctrine of the Eucharist had not been officially established by the Catholic Church, in 1415 the hylomorphic, Aristotelian-Thomist explanation of the mystery of transubstantiation became the de facto official explanation of the sacrament.

The mid-seventeenth century leaders of the Catholic Church felt that, especially given the rise of many Protestant splinter sects and, then, new “heretical” Eucharistic theologies, a more concrete basis than the scriptures was needed to define transubstantiation. Because the first assertion of the doctrine from the Fourth Lateran Council was more than three centuries old and had simply stated the doctrine of transubstantiation without further explanation, those at the Council of Trent wanted to push the doctrine further. “The Council of Trent…regarded it as its first and principal task to shed theological light on the doctrinal controversies of the Reformation.”54 Because Trent had provided the most significant definition of Church theology regarding transubstantiation at the time, it was the decrees of this council that primarily shaped Descartes’ understanding of the Church’s theological position.

Largely a response to the onslaught of Protestant counter-religions, the Council of Trent met over a series of years (1545-1563) to discuss a variety of issues pivotal to the Catholic faith. With this council the Church sought to more clearly and fully defines its doctrine so as to be a formidable, unified force against the Protestants. The thirteenth session of the Council of Trent (October 11, 1551) involved reasserting and strengthening the church’s beliefs regarding transubstantiation. Out of this session came the following

52 *Metaphysics*, 220.
53 Ibid., 220.
statement: “In the Eucharist, after the consecration of the bread and wine, our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and man, is truly, really, and substantially contained under the species of those sensible things [the bread and wine].” Moreover, “He be, in many other places, sacramentally present to us in his own substance, by a manner of existing, which [we can] by the understanding illuminated by faith, conceive, and we ought most firmly to believe, to be possible unto God.” This statement began getting to the core of the issue of transubstantiation. It was understood to mean that while the bread and wine are replaced by Jesus Christ, the real accidents of the bread and wine do remain. The decrees of Trent provided a series of canons relating to transubstantiation and the Eucharist. The purpose of these canons was to more fully define and explain the sacrament. The canons also threatened severe and frightening consequences for anyone who did not accept the doctrine. The first canon of this session of the Council of Trent stated:

If any one denieth, that, in the sacrament of the most holy Eucharist, are contained truly, really, and substantially, the body and blood together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and consequently the whole Christ; but saith that He is only therein as in a sign, or in figure, or virtue; let him be anathema.

This canon reiterated the idea that the transubstantiation of the elements that occurs at the moment of consecration is real and whole. It is not a symbolic transformation as was being advocated by many reformers of the era. The second canon of this session read:

If any one saith, that, in the sacred and holy sacrament of the Eucharist, the substance of the bread and wine remains conjointly with the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and denieth that wonderful and singular conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the Body, and of the whole substance of the wine into the Blood-the species Only of the bread

55 Canons and Doctrines, 78.
56 Ibid., 78.
57 Ibid, 82.
and wine remaining—which conversion indeed the Catholic Church most aptly calls Transubstantiation; let him be anathema.\(^\text{58}\)

In this canon, the Council of Trent established that at the moment of the consecration at the mass, the bread and wine cease to exist and that only the body and blood of Christ remain—the two do not continue in union. It is in this canon that the Council of Trent truly began to expand upon the understanding of transubstantiation. Whereas in all previous statements the Church simply stated that Catholics believed in Christ’s presence in the Eucharist without comment on its continued facade of bread and wine, here the church added that, despite this appearance, none of the original bread and wine remained; the new substance after the consecration is wholly and completely the body and blood of Christ. Here the Church made official doctrine what had been the long believed Aristotelian view of the sacrament. It is important to note, however, that the Church did not mention Aristotle or hylomorphism anywhere in its canons at the Council of Trent.

The third and fourth canons defined the doctrine of transubstantiation more precisely. The third affirmed what Aquinas asserted regarding whether the whole Christ is present in the Eucharist: “If any one denieth, that, in the venerable sacrament of the Eucharist, the whole Christ is contained under each species, and under every part of each species, when separated; let him be anathema”\(^\text{59}\). Thus, this canon insisted that the whole of Christ is present not only in both the bread and the wine following the consecration, but in every morsel and drop of the bread and wine. Once again, however, the assertion by the church does not attempt to explain how this is possible; it is simply stated as fact. The fourth canon asserted that the presence of

\(^{58}\) Ibid, 82.  
\(^{59}\) Ibid., 83-84.
Christ within the consecrated bread and wine remains after communion and is not lost after being taken. It officially read,

> If anyone saith, that, after the consecration is completed, the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ are not in the admirable sacrament of the Eucharist, but (are there) only during the use, whilst it is being taken, and not either before or after; and that, in the hosts, or consecrated particles, which are reserved or which remain after communion, the true Body of the Lord remaineth not; let him be anathema.\(^{60}\)

The Council of Trent’s statements regarding the Eucharist and transubstantiation continued beyond the introduction and first four canons; however, these were the most critical in terms of the definition and explanation of the Church’s understanding of transubstantiation and, in particular, Descartes’ views of the mystery.

Clearly, the Catholic Church’s doctrine of transubstantiation had a long history of development even before it was established at Trent. The specific writings of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas are critical to understanding the pre-Trent debate surrounding the philosophical underpinnings of the Eucharistic and to illuminate the types of questions that continued to be posed after Trent in particular by Descartes. The Church’s views of the doctrine—supported by scriptural passages and doctrines from the Council of Trent and reinforced by the application of Aristotelian-Thomist hylomorphism provided the basis for the understanding of transubstantiation in seventeenth-century France which Descartes, naturally, had to be well aware of when he set out to expand upon this theological doctrine. The fact that the Church’s ideology was deeply engrained in Catholic society and controlled by the ecclesiastical hierarchy even before its official sanctioning helps to explain why Descartes’ writings were seen by many Church leaders as a direct challenge that needed to be silenced.

\(^{60}\) Ibid., 84.
Moreover, the fact that the Church had become so attached to the Aristotelian-Thomist hylomorphism is critical, as in this time period the Church’s resolute employment of hylomorphism placed the Church in the mainstream of contemporary natural philosophy. While the Church did face some criticism from within regarding the specific interpretations of Aristotelianism in terms of the Eucharistic doctrine, what is important is the fact that prior to the Scientific Revolution and the Reformation the Church was not criticized for its employment of Aristotelian-Thomist hylomorphism, largely because the unanimously accepted natural philosophy at the time was Aristotelianism. Furthermore, because the doctrine conformed to mainstream natural philosophy, the Church was able to explain even the most holy of mysteries mechanically, which helps to explain why the Church was so completely interlaced into European society at the time. It is at the same time important, however, for the historian to remember that while hylomorphism was generally accepted by the Church especially after the Council of Constance in 1415, it was not included in the Church’s official doctrine at the Council of Trent. This fact proves essential in a study of the effect of the introduction of Descartes’ new metaphysics on the Church’s understanding of its own sacred doctrine. As such, because the Church did not include hylomorphism and, thus, Aristotelianism in its official canons, there existed a potential for the Church to later choose to deviate from Aristotle and to employ a different philosophy. The fact that the Church refused to acquiesce to the modern natural philosophies of the mid to late seventeenth-century demonstrates a critical decision by the Church to remain steadfast in its ancient, if undefined and unofficial, beliefs.
Chapter 2

The State of Affairs in Descartes’ France

The first chapter of this study delineated the Church’s pathway to its doctrine of transubstantiation and, more importantly, its resolute acceptance of Aristotelianism in the form of the philosophy of hylomorphism. While the Fourth Lateran Council, the Council of Trent, and the broad acceptance of hylomorphism provide the intellectual background for Descartes’ writing, the context surrounding the Catholic sacrament of the Eucharist began to change in the early sixteenth-century, a change that continued into the seventeenth-century. This change was exemplified by the Church’s decision to more precisely elucidate its doctrine at the Council of Trent in the wake of the Reformation that was sweeping across Europe. To understand this new world in which the internal Catholic Eucharistic debate took place in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, one must step back and trace the path of the Reformation in France. A more complete picture of the status quo in terms of religion, politics, and society of Descartes’ France will help to set the context in which Descartes wrote and the extreme tension surrounding Eucharistic theology at the time. The context for Descartes’ Eucharistic theology also requires an understanding of the impact of the Scientific Revolution in France because the Scientific Revolution, of which Descartes was one of the most renowned thinkers, caused significant tension between the worlds of natural philosophy and theology. Moreover, it was during this new age of science that the very philosophy Descartes questioned, Aristotelianism, was attacked and, ultimately, discarded by many members of the scientific community.

It is clear that Descartes was well aware of and sensitive to the extreme religious tensions of his time because he was initially very cautious about his decision to tackle the
delicate question of the Eucharist. Descartes insisted that he was a strong Catholic who did not want to contradict his faith: “I take much care not to put the slightest thing in my writings that the theologians would be able to rightly sensor.”61 Instead, he believed his new natural philosophy to present a true understanding of the world and, as such, he wanted to use his metaphysics, rather than that of Aristotle, to explain the mystery of transubstantiation. In a letter to Marin Mersenne, a French philosopher and mathematician who was also a personal friend of Descartes, dated January 28, 1641, he wrote, “There will not be, it seems to me, any difficulty in accommodating the [Church’s] theology with my philosophy because I don’t see anything to change in terms of transubstantiation, which is extremely clear and easy by my principles.”62 Two months later he again wrote to Mersenne that he wanted to use his philosophy to explain what had been asserted by the Church regarding the Eucharist which, in his mind, could not be well explained by the accepted Aristotelian-Thomist philosophy: “I compare my philosophy to what has been determined by the councils concerning the Saint Sacrament, which I claim that is impossible to explain well by the common Philosophy.”63 Descartes went even further, asserting that had his philosophy been available centuries earlier, the Church would have found hylomorphism deplorable because of its inadequacy in terms of

62 René Descartes, Correspondance: Volume IV, ed. Ch. Adams and G. Milhaud, "Lettre à Mersenne, 28 janvier 1641" (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1947), 267. Original : Il n’y aura, ce me semble, aucune difficulté d’accommoder la théologie à ma façon de philosopher ; car je n’y vois rien à changer pour que la transsubstantiation, qui est extrêmement claire et aïsée par mes principes
63 Ibid., “Lettre à Mersenne, 31 Mars 1641,” 330. Original : J’y accord tellement avec ma Philosophie ce qui est déterminé par les conciles touchant le St Sacrement que je prétends qu’il est impossible de le bien expliquer par la Philosophie vulgaire.
explaining the Eucharist. He wrote in the same letter to Mersenne, “I believe that we would have rejected it as repugnant to the faith, if my philosophy had been known first.”

Descartes’ assertion that his philosophy was more efficacious than Aristotelianism was novel in terms of the sacrament of the Eucharist, but not in the wider scientific community. In fact, many of the crowning achievements of the Scientific Revolution overturned the work of Aristotle. Astronomers of the period promulgated the heliocentric model of the universe that placed the sun at its center. Until this period, the Aristotelian model, which was reinforced by the Bible, showed the Earth at the center. As was the case in the field of astronomy, before the Scientific Revolution, physics relied on Aristotelian mechanics to explain motion. Once again, the theory of Aristotle was discarded, as Galileo’s hypothesis of inertia and Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727) defined laws of motion that proved more effective. Without question, the fact that Aristotelian beliefs were rapidly being rejected during the Scientific Revolution is central to a study of Descartes’ Eucharistic theology. The presence of anti-Aristotelian sentiment during Descartes’ life reveals an acceptance of the dismissal of Aristotelianism outside of the Church community and also helps to explain why many Church leaders were so quick to condemn Cartesianism—they were already on the defensive because they were well aware that the Aristotelianism to which they clung was under attack. The fact that Aristotelianism was being discarded in other areas outside of the Church demonstrates the fact that, in many ways, Descartes’ work was current.

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64 Ibid., 330. Original: Je crois qu’on l’aurait rejetée, comme répugnante à la foi, si la mienne avait été connue la première.
65 The West, 16-4.
66 Ibid., 16-7, 16-8.
Despite his insistence on the benefits of his philosophy, Descartes was well aware that his writings regarding transubstantiation would not be well received by the Church and the French Catholic community as a whole because he knew that his explanation of metaphysics required the accepted Aristotelian-Thomist understanding of the mechanics of transubstantiation to be discarded. He realized many would resist this, especially because the potential theological implications of doing so had social and even political consequences. Moreover, Descartes was initially hesitant to tackle the question of transubstantiation because he knew the immediate context in which he was writing. He knew of the delicate balance that scientists and theologians were trying to strike between the two disciplines, and he realized that other contemporary natural philosophers as well as theologians believing their ideas to be concurrent with those of the Church had been condemned.\(^67\) In a letter to Mersenne dated March 31, 1641, he told his friend that despite the fact that his philosophy could explain the mystery of transubstantiation better than hylomorphism, he knew that those who condemned Galileo would want to do the same to him: “I understand those who had Galileo condemned and who would have my opinions condemned in the same way if they can.”\(^68\)

The contemporary context of Descartes—the collision of the Reformation and the Scientific Revolution—is perhaps best exemplified by the condemnation of Galileo. Galileo was not condemned because of his Eucharistic theology but, rather, for his heliocentric view of the universe. His trial was in 1633, just eight years before the publication of Descartes’ *Méditations Métaphysiques*.\(^69\) The controversy started in 1616 when a committee consisting

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\(^67\) *Correspondance Volume IV*, “Lettre à Mersenne, 31 Mars 1641,” 95.

\(^68\) Ibid., 330.

Original : J’entends de ceux qui ont fait condamner Galilée, et qui feraient bien condamner aussi mes opinions, s’ils peuvent.

\(^69\) *The West*, 16-22.
of eleven theologians deemed the heliocentric theory of the universe heretical and reported their findings to the Roman Inquisition. Heliocentricism, according to this group, was heretical because it implied a lack of obedience to the authority of both the Bible and the Catholic Church. As such, Galileo provided Descartes with the perfect example of what the interplay of the European Reformations and the Scientific Revolution looked liked. It meant condemnation—and possible punishment—even for views that were widely accepted by the scientific community and that were not intended as attacks on the Church.

However, despite the fact that he was a lay scientist and a philosopher, not a theologian, and the fact that he was clearly aware of the condemnation of Galileo, Descartes chose to begin trying to answer the questions posed by his critics regarding transubstantiation. He believed that his metaphysics could explain the mystery of transubstantiation more completely and, thus, that he had an obligation to the Catholic community to spread his understanding. He wrote to Mersenne in April, 1630, that even though he was not a theologian by profession, he did not feel excluded from entering the debate on the subject because the issue was not one that was purely theological: “In terms of your question of theology, once again while it exceeds the capacity of my mind, it doesn’t seem to me to be outside of my profession because it doesn’t stop exactly at what depends upon the revelation, which is what I properly name Theology.” Rather, Descartes saw philosophy as a critical element of this discussion. He continued in the same letter, “But it is more a metaphysical

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70 Ibid., 16-22. A body established in 1542 with the mission of preserving the fait hand safeguarding it against heresy.
71 Ibid., 16-22.
question and should be examined by human reason. It is my assessment that everyone to whom God gave the ability to use this reason is obligated to use it especially to extend this understanding and to understand themselves.”

In order to appreciate Descartes’ hesitation to discuss the question of the Eucharist despite the fact that many fields of natural philosophy were rapidly rejecting Aristotelianism, one must understand not only the long history of the Church’s doctrine of transubstantiation, but also the intense religious divisions in France caused by the Reformation. As the protestant splinter sects gained strength in France, the Church was put on the defensive. While the Reformation period is often said to have begun in 1517 with Marin Luther (1483-1546) posting his 95 theses on the door of a Wittenberg, Germany, church, France was one of the later places in Western Europe to which the European Reformations spread, with evidence of underground religious movements being found in France beginning in 1546. From then on, continuing throughout the remainder of the sixteenth century and into the seventeenth, France was marked by the mix of religious doctrines that were swarming around the country and creating widespread religious intolerance. Because both sides of this polemical debate, the Catholics and Protestants, felt so passionately that theirs was the true religion and, thus, that theirs was the one and only path to salvation, it is not surprising that sixteenth and seventeenth century France was plagued by strong religious intolerance between the two groups. In fact, even the common French laity categorically rejected the idea of

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73 Ibid., 135.
Original: Mais elle est plutôt métaphysique et se doit examiner par la raison humaine. J’estime que tous ceux à qui Dieu a donné l’usage de cette raison, sont obligés de l’employer principalement pour tacher à le connaître et à se connaître eux-mêmes.
74 The West, 13-9.
76 Ibid., 5.
tolerance. Catholic leaders saw unified religion as a necessity to a state whose king ruled with divine law. As such, they were intolerant of any dissent and refused to recognize a Protestant king. This profound intolerance helps to explain Descartes’ hesitation to write about the Eucharist—he knew that if his writings were considered heretical, he would undoubtedly face sanctions from the Church.

Despite the fact that the reform movements all professed peace as their goal, a series of civil wars broke out, ravaging the French countryside. At their core, the wars were both doctrinal and political in nature, demonstrating the inextricable union of religion and politics of the era. They were fueled both by immeasurable intolerance and the desire on both sides to gain political power. In France, the Protestant movement was dominated by the Calvinist Huguenots and, as such, the French Wars of Religion can be characterized as pitting the Huguenots and the Catholics against one another. While the reign of Henri II (r.1547-1559) was marked by a relative peace between the two groups, the tension between them continued to grow exponentially. When Henri II was killed in a jousting accident in 1559, he left his widow, Catherine de Medici (1519-1589), and several children to rule France. In comparison to her late husband, Catherine and her sons proved far less successful at preventing war.

The French Wars of Religion, which “officially” began in 1562, are somewhat difficult to elucidate, as a variety of wars, battles, and massacres devastated France for decades with little, if any, real organization. Moreover, the battles often ended without a victor, causing

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77 Ibid., 7.
78 Ibid., 37.
79 Ibid., 5.
80 The West, 13-15.
81 Ibid., 14-23.
more calamity than military or political gain.\(^{82}\) Perhaps the most famous massacre of the
nearly forty years of bloody battles in France was the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre which
took place on August 14, 1572. The precise origins of the massacre are difficult to discern;
what is clear is that the Parisian Catholics massacred between 3,000 and 4,000 Huguenots
during the night. The massacre then spread from Paris, killing more than 20,000 Huguenots
throughout the French countryside.\(^{83}\)

The period of the French Wars of Religion came to an interim with an ostensible act of
tolerance, the Edict of Nantes, passed in 1598 by King Henry IV. He was known as a
politique, one of the rare leaders of his era who focused more on political peace than religious
victory. With the Edict, he attempted to establish full liberty of conscience within France and,
even more impressively, outside his kingdom, though it did put limitations on the
Huguenots.\(^{84}\) The Edict of Nantes did end the violence that had been ravaging the French
countryside for decades. However, the tenuous peace that resulted was perhaps more correctly
called an “armed truce”\(^ {85}\) and was more indicative of a unified decision to end the war than a
universal conviction of tolerance.\(^ {86}\) The Edict of Nantes was officially revoked in 1685, but in
practice even this professed tolerance actually ended in 1629 when Cardinal Richelieu ended
the Wars of Religion in France by enacting the Peace of Alias.\(^ {87}\)

In a study of Eucharistic theology, it is critical to take a close look at the Eucharistic
theologies professed by the Protestant movements. This is a vital element to the context of
Descartes because any Eucharistic theology asserted during the age of Reform was

\(^{82}\) Ibid., 14-23.
\(^{83}\) Ibid., 14-23.
\(^{84}\) Ibid., 60.
\(^{86}\) *Politics and Religion*, 32.
immediately compared to the “heretical” reformers. Some theologians, most famously Martin Luther, argued for consubstantiation, the belief that after the consecration there remains a copresence of bread, wine, and the body and blood of Christ. Moreover, Luther explained that he could not accept an Aristotelian-Thomist explanation of the sacrament because “the opinion of Thomas hangs so completely in the air without support of Scripture or reason that it seems to me he knows neither his philosophy nor his logic.”88 Luther was even critical of the union of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas in hylomorphism accepted by the Church.

The Calvinist opinion that Christ is spiritually, though not physically present in the Eucharist was also widely accepted, and is vital to this study because those who called Descartes a heretic most frequently associated him with Calvinism. Jean Calvin (1509-1564) laid out much of his theology in his most influential work, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536). Calvin wrote that Christ “attests himself to be the life-giving bread upon which our souls feed unto…immortality.”89 Calvin further refuted the idea that a sacrifice took place at the mass—that Christ’s body was once again sacrificed for the believers as is advocated by the Catholic faith. Rather, he saw the communion as a symbol and remembrance of the sacrifice of Christ. Calvin asserted that the fact that Christ sacrificed himself once for mankind meant that it was unnecessary for the sacrifice to be repeated at mass. He wrote in his *Instruction et Confession de Foy* that “The body of the Lord was once given to us in such a way, that it is now ours and will also be there perpetually; that his blood
was once spread for us, that it will always be ours.” 90 The fact that Calvin argued for a
symbolic presence, however, did not mean that he did not find this presence to be profound.
“Calvin taught that Christ’s ‘fleshy’ presence was a reassurance of his closeness; his ‘flesh
and blood’ fed the soul as food and drink fed the body.” 91 Calvin wrote, “The Lord presents
us with the true communication of his body and his blood, but spiritual, which, content with
the tie to his Spirit, does not at all require an enclosed presence, or the flesh under the bread,
or the blood under the wine.” 92

Before Descartes’ writings and, ultimately, the effects of his Eucharistic theology on
the internal Catholic Eucharistic debate can be analyzed, one must fully understand the
context in which Descartes wrote. This new post-Trent context is critical, as it serves to
explain why Descartes’ writings were so polemical and, then, had such a strong impact on the
long-lived Catholic debate. The history of the development of the Catholic doctrine of
transubstantiation, including the acceptance the Aristotelian-Thomist hylomorphism was
established in the first chapter of this study. This chapter expanded upon that context,
demonstrating the powerful effects of both the European Reformations and the Scientific
Revolution on this context. The Reformation forced the religious debate and intolerance to
the forefront of European affairs and, thus, helps to clarify why Descartes’ writings were an
immediate cause of concern for the Catholic Church. Moreover, this demonstrates why

Original: Le corps du Seigneur a une fois tellement esté donné pour nous, qu’il est maintenant noste et le sera aussy petuellement; que son sang a une fois tellement esté espandu pour nous, qu’il sera toujours nostre.
91 European Reformation, 165.
92 Instruction et Confession, 99.
Original: Le Seigneur nous presente la vraye communication de son corps et de son sang, mais spirituelle, laquelle, contente du lien de son Esprit, ne requiert point une presence enclose, ou de la chair soubz le pain, ou du sang soubz le vin.
Descartes was initially tentative in his decision to tackle the question of the Eucharist. This hesitancy was augmented by the extreme religious tensions of the time. The French Wars of Religion had been long and violent. A tentative and fragile peace had been reached by the time of Descartes’ publications, but the French, regardless of religious conviction, had reason to fear that the omnipresent religious tension would once again explode into civil war. In fact, during Descartes’ life the French monarch was consistently encouraged to revoke the tenuous Edict of Nantes. Furthermore, this background contributes to an understanding of the mindset of the seventeenth century French community—the audience of Descartes’ writings.

Descartes’ attack on Aristotelianism was neither isolated nor wholly radical for his era. In addition to the desertion of Aristotelianism, thinkers of the Scientific Revolution departed from the philosophies and sciences of other ancient philosophers, demonstrating a trend towards replacing old philosophy with new. This is important, as many Catholics argued that Descartes should have shown deference to the work of Aristotle. The Reformation and the Scientific Revolution were the two movements that most dramatically shaped sixteenth and early seventeenth century Europe. The clash between the two is epitomized in the trial and condemnation of Galileo Galilei, making him an excellent example of the immediate context Descartes found himself in when he took on the immense challenge of explaining the theological implications of his mechanical philosophy and, ultimately, changed the face of the internal Catholic Eucharistic debate.
Chapter 3

L’Eucharistie Chez Descartes

Having delineated the path to the doctrine of transubstantiation and the acceptance of Aristotelian-Thomist hylomorphism in chapter one and the context of sixteenth and seventeenth century France, particularly the Reformation and the Scientific Revolution, in chapter two, this chapter will delve into the writing of Descartes himself, primarily his personal correspondence and his *Méditations Métaphysiques*, to establish Descartes’ Eucharistic theology. This chapter will address several key questions: Why did Descartes, a lay scientist, choose to address such a divisive religious question? How did Descartes use his metaphysics to explain the sacrament of the Eucharist? How did he answer the Church’s key questions such as the existence of the real accidents and the extension of Christ’s body within the Hosts and sips of wine? What about Descartes’ metaphysics triggered his critics’ concern over its implications in terms of “orthodox” Eucharistic theology? In what ways did his Eucharistic theology seemingly come close to the “heretical” theology of the reformers? Who were Descartes’ contemporary critics, why did he solicit their opinions, and how did he respond to their critiques? This analysis of Descartes’ writings will provide a coherent understanding of Descartes’ Eucharistic theology. Because this study ultimately seeks to demonstrate the profound impact that the rejection of Cartesianism had on the history of the Catholic Church and, in particular, on the history of the doctrine of transubstantiation, such an understanding is imperative.

It is important to note that other than his discussion of his hesitancy to write on the subject, most of Descartes’ work directly addressing transubstantiation did not appear until

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93 The Eucharist according to Descartes.
1640 and after, with the majority being published in his 1641 *Méditations Métaphysiques*. His discussion of transubstantiation appeared before 1640 primarily only in private correspondence with his close friends. This demonstrates Descartes’ keen awareness that his theological ideas were likely to be seen as a direct challenge to the Church. Because Descartes chose to reveal his thinking to so few of his contemporaries, it appears that Descartes did not immediately want to attach his name to his new theology. He clearly saw the theological implications of his natural philosophy early on but, until 1640, was not prepared to publicly provide a solution to the potential problems his writing posed.

Moreover, as a Catholic, Descartes respected the canons of the Council of Trent and paid close attention to the specific words of the theologians at Trent. He wrote to Mesland: “In terms of the manner in which we can conceptualize that the body of Jesus Christ is in the Saint Sacrament, I believe that it is not for me to explain after seeing what was taught at the Council of Trent that within the capability of our existence we can, with difficulty, explain the sacrament with words.”94 That is, Descartes understood that the Council of Trent asserted transubstantiation as something that is extremely difficult to explain in words, potentially implying that this central mystery of the Church should not, in fact, be explained through philosophy.

However, within the confidence of his correspondence to his friend Mesland, Descartes felt comfortable defending the theology he proposed in his 1641 *Méditations* as well as the fact that he, a philosopher, was attempting to explain the mystery at all. He first told

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Original: Pour la façon dont on peut concevoir que le corps de J. C. est au St Sacrement, je crois que ce n’est pas à moi à l’expliquer, après voir appris du Concile du Trente qu’il y est, *ea existendi ratione quam verbis exprimere vix possimus*. 
Mesland that because he was not a theologian by profession, it might seem that he would be scared to write about transubstantiation because his words would be less well received than if they had come from someone else.\textsuperscript{95} Nevertheless, he wrote that the Council of Trent did not determine that “\textit{verbis exprimere non possumus}, but only that \textit{vix possumus}.”\textsuperscript{96} He then added: “I will venture to tell you here, in confidence, a manner which to me seems convenient enough and very useful for avoiding the slander of the heretics, who object to us that we believe in something that is completely incomprehensible, and that implies a contradiction.”\textsuperscript{97} What is most interesting about this particular defense is that Descartes made direct reference to the conflict between science and religion that was becoming so polemical as the Scientific Revolution and the Reformation collided in seventeenth-century France. Descartes insisted upon the fact that the Council of Trent did not, in fact, forbid his attempt to explain the Eucharist with words or philosophy. Rather, the council stated that such an undertaking could only be done \textit{vix}, meaning with difficulty. As such, it was in this letter to Mesland that Descartes affirmed his understanding of the difficulty of the endeavor on which he had embarked. Moreover, in this same statement Descartes averred his desire to explain the mystery of the Eucharist without contradicting the doctrines of the Catholic Church. This is clear from his references to his avoidance of the slander of heretics who assert that transubstantiation cannot, in fact, be explained using philosophy. It is further interesting that

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 191.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., 191.
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 191.
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
Translation: We cannot explain the sacrament with words, but only that we can do so with difficulty.
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Original: Je me hasarderai de vous dire ici, en confidence, une façon qui me semble assez commode, et très utile pour éviter la calomnie des hérétiques, qui nous objectent que nous croyons en cela une chose qui est entièrement incompréhensible, et qui implique contradiction.
\end{flushleft}
Descartes reminded his friend that this letter was to remain in confidence, even though it was written after the 1641 publication of his *Médiations Métaphysiques*. Clearly, even after Descartes began publishing on the question of transubstantiation, he was not always confident of the perceived orthodoxy of his ideas and, thus, used his correspondence with his contemporaries as a means through which he could flush out his ideas, not a means to publicize new theology.

Furthermore, it appears that Descartes felt secure enough to begin publishing his theology in 1641 but not earlier because he had sought criticism from several theologians and philosophers and, after receiving their approval, he believed he could publish his ideas without censure. He received substantial feedback from a variety of theologians, in particular Antoine Arnauld (1612-1694), a member of the religious community at Port-Royal, philosopher and mathematician Marin Mersenne, and Father Mesland. Descartes chose to solicit this criticism from theologians and philosophers whom he trusted and respected. He complimented the philosophy of Mesland: “I did not find anything in the writing that you sent me, to which I do not subscribe entirely; and even though there are many ideas [in it] that are not in my *Meditations* or at least are not deducted in the same manner.”

98 Ibid., 189-190.

Original: Je n’ai trouvé pas un mot dans l’écrit qu’il vous a plu me communiquer, auquel je ne souscrive entièrement; et bien qu’il y ait plusieurs pensées, qui ne sont point dans mes *Méditations*, ou du moins qui n’y sont pas déduites en la même façon.

99 Ibid., 189-190.

Original: Il n’y en a aucune, que je ne voulusse bien avouer pour mienne.
criticism Descartes received from his contemporaries undoubtedly helped to shape his Eucharistic theology and his writings seem to indicate that it was through his correspondence that he solidified many of his crucial ideas regarding his metaphysics and Eucharistic theology. Arnauld’s tentativeness regarding his acceptance of Descartes’ Eucharistic theology was unambiguous. Arnauld wrote in his objections to Descartes’ Meditations that he could not support him unless Descartes could convincingly answer his questions regarding Descartes’ theology and the Church’s accepted Eucharistic theology because “even though his intention was to defend the cause of God against the impious, he may appear to have endangered the very faith, founded by divine authority, which he hopes will enable him to obtain that eternal life which he has undertaken to convince mankind.”

In spite of the significant criticism Descartes encountered from the French Catholic community and from the majority of the Port-Royalists, he did receive support from Arnauld. Arnauld was significantly younger than Descartes, but Descartes nonetheless frequently consulted the rising theologian throughout the development of his Eucharistic theology. Arnauld took a particular interest in Descartes’ philosophy as a doctor in theology and licentiate in 1641 and later as a young member of the Sorbonne. Descartes was very pleased with the criticism he received from Arnauld, calling his objections “les meilleures de toutes.” Furthermore, “It is clear that the objections [Arnauld] raise[d] [were] offered not by an adversary seeking to foil Descartes’ project but rather by an ally hoping to see it move

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Translation: The best of all [of them].
towards greater clarity and consistency.”103 Arnauld, however, was not joined by his colleagues at Port-Royal in his support of Cartesianism, and the Eucharistic controversy was at the heart of the debate over whether or not the theologians would support Descartes. One of the challenges Cartesianism faced was the fear that a philosophical explanation of the sacrament de-mystified the faith. Such a claim was made by several of Antoine Arnauld’s counterparts at Port Royal. Le Maistre de Sacy “preferred a simple faith (une foi simple) to the Cartesian philosophy, which he saw as undermining true religion by demystifying nature and emptying the world of its theological significance.”104 He wrote to Nicolas Fontaine, “God created the world for two reasons…one to provide an idea of his greatness; the other to depict invisible things in the visible. Monsieur Descartes has destroyed the one as well as the other.”105 Another Port-Royalist “felt that Descartes’ ‘suspicious and dangerous’ mechanistic world picture also threatened the spirituality of human-kind.”106 Descartes’ implicit counter to such arguments came in his explanation of certain elements of his Eucharistic theology during which he relied on the omnipotence of his God. As such, while Descartes tried to explain the mystery of transubstantiation through his metaphysics, his explanation was not void of a reliance on the divine.

Before Descartes began his analysis of transubstantiation, he, like Aristotle, first discussed his philosophy of substances. First, he wrote of “substances” themselves: “We don’t know the substances immediately by themselves, but by the shapes and attributes that must be attached to something for it to exist. We call this thing to which these attributes are

103 “Reconciling Cartesian Metaphysics,” 231.
104 Ibid., 229.
105 Ibid., 229.
106 Ibid., 229.
attached a “Substance.” This definition insisted that substances are defined by their essential qualities—the elements that are necessary for the subject to exist. Further, Descartes distinguished between “complete” substances and “incomplete” substances, asserting than an incomplete substance is not sufficient on its own and requires other substances to make it useful. Thus, according to Descartes, a complete substance “is a substance that has forms, or attributes, that suffice for me to recognize it as a substance.” Descartes stressed that humans are frequently incapable of discriminating between like substances, and that only God can understand the differences between two unique substances that appear to be one in the same. He wrote, “There is only God who knows that he has the complete and perfect knowledge of all things.” However, Descartes justified his analysis of the various substances involved in transubstantiation by asserting that, while it is true that only God can really and truly conceptualize the minute differences between substances, it is sufficient for a human to fully understand the substances to analyze and discuss them. What was important was an ability to determine whether they are complete. Accordingly, he wrote, “Thus, when I said that it was necessary to conceive a substance fully, it was not my intention to say that our

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Original: Nous ne connaissons point les substances immédiatement par elles-mêmes ; mais, de ce que nous apercevons quelques formes, ou attributs, que doivent être attachés à quelque chose pour exister, nous appelons du nom de *Substance* cette chose à laquelle ils sont attachés.
109 Ibid., 201.
Translation: Is a substance that has forms, or attributes, that suffice for me to recognize it as a substance.
Original: [Est] une substance revêtue des formes, ou attributs, qui suffisent pour me faire connaître qu’elle est une substance.
110 Ibid., 199.
Original: Il n’y a que Dieu seul qui sache qu’il a les connaissances entières et parfaites de toutes les choses.
conception must be complete and perfect, but only that it must be distinct enough to know that
the substance is complete.”

Descartes’ definition of “complete” or “real” substances was fundamental, as it
implied that the accidents of the bread and wine that remain following the consecration are
not, in fact, complete or “real.” This, of course, directly contradicted the canons of the
Council of Trent. It was largely because of Descartes’ statements regarding the real accidents
that his philosophy became controversial in France and that he faced such fervent opposition
from the Catholic Church. It was here that many Catholics felt his metaphysics directly
contradicted essential elements of the Church’s doctrine, and, thus, offended the faith.
However, here Descartes was challenging the Aristotelian-Thomist mechanics used to explain
the doctrine, not the theology itself. He saw his natural philosophy as the truth and,
accordingly, believed he could explain the workings of the Church’s central mystery through
his metaphysics. As has been discussed, this supposition of the superiority of his own, new
philosophy over the ancient philosophy of Aristotle was in line with much of the work of
other thinkers of the Scientific Revolution.

Descartes’ explanation of his view of real accidents began after his solicited criticism
from Antoine Arnauld. He quoted Arnauld’s Fourth Objections: “We believe on faith that the
substance of the bread is taken away from the bread of the Eucharist and only the accidents
remain.” He began by writing,

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111 Méditations., 200.
Original: Ainsi, quand j’ai dit qu’il fallait concevoir pleinement une chose, ce n’était pas mon
intention de dire que notre conception devait être entière et parfaite, mais seulement qu’elle
devait être assez distincte pour savoir qu’elle était complète.
112 Thomas M. Lenon and others, ed., Problems of Cartesianism (Kingston and Montreal : McGill-Queen’s
University Press, 1982), 132.
113 Philosophical Writings, 173.
I have never denied that there are real accidents. It is true that in the *Optics* and the *Meteorology* I did not make use of such qualities in order to explain the matters which I was dealing with, but in the *Meteorology*...I expressly said that I was not denying their existence.\(^{114}\)

Descartes continued, saying that while in his *Meditations* he “was supposing that [he] did not yet have any knowledge of them, [he] did not thereby suppose that none existed.”\(^{115}\) These early statements regarding the real accidents appear evasive to the question, perhaps indicating that at the time Descartes was not yet completely prepared to address this essential and volatile issue. To understand Descartes’ precise position on this critical subject, the historian must turn directly to Descartes’ *Méditations* and, more specifically, his replies to Arnauld’s “Fourth Set of Objections.” He began, “We cannot suppose that the accidents are real, except by the miracle of transubstantiation, which can be inferred by the words of the consecration.”\(^{116}\) This beginning is crucial, as it is here that Descartes asserted that while the idea of “real accidents” does not function within his metaphysics in average situations, the miracle of transubstantiation allows the accidents to behave as though they are real.

Moreover, here Descartes appealed to the omnipotence of God as he wrote that it is only with the words of the consecration that it is possible for accidents to exist without substance.

Descartes’ discussion of real accidents continued with an analysis of the surface of substances and how one perceives the exterior of substances. This was a logical link, as the accidents and the surface often appear the same to the human eye. Descartes sought to carefully differentiate between the two to make his explanation of transubstantiation as accessible as possible. Descartes began, writing that our senses perceive the surface of a

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\(^{114}\) Ibid, 173.

\(^{115}\) Ibid., 173.

\(^{116}\) *Méditations*, 223.

Original: On ne peut pas supposer que les accidents soient réels, sans qu’au miracle de la transsubstantiation, lequel peut être inféré des paroles de la consécration.
substance, meaning the thing’s physical boundaries. “I will not hide the fact that I am convinced that what affects our senses is simply and solely the surface that constitutes the limit of the dimensions of the body which is perceived by the senses.”117 He asserted that this is because human contact with the substance takes place at the surface: “For contact with an object takes place only at the surface, and nothing can have an effect on any of our senses except through contact, as not just I but all philosophers, including even Aristotle maintain.”118 Descartes took this opportunity to point out the overlap between his philosophy and that of the accepted Aristotelianism. Descartes then applied his metaphysics to the Eucharist, writing that bread and wine “are perceived by the senses only in so far as the surface of the bread or wine is in contact with our sense organs, either immediately, or via the air or other bodies, as I maintain, or, as many philosophers hold, by the intervention of ‘intentional forms.’”119 That is, as humans we are only capable of immediately perceiving the surface of substances, in so far as our ‘sense organs’ (taste, touch, smell, etc..) are able to recognize these surfaces. This question of human perception of surfaces is unmistakably important to the Eucharistic debate because this implies that it is only through the surface that we, as humans, can immediately perceive the bread and wine post consecration, or the body and blood of Christ. Additionally, those elements of the body and blood of Christ which can be perceived are often referred to as the accidents. This raises the question of how one can know that what is perceived as the same bread and wine is, in fact, the body and blood of Christ. Descartes went on to explain this dilemma using his analysis of the surface, but continued also to insist on faith and the importance of pure belief in the doctrine of

117Philosophical Writings, 173.
118 Ibid. 173.
119 Ibid., 173.
transubstantiation. Continuing his discussion of real accidents, Descartes wrote that humans cannot consider the surface of an object to be simply the palpable exterior.

We should also consider all the tiny gaps that are found in between the particles of flour that make up the bread, and the tiny gaps between the alcohol, water, and vinegar and lees or tarter that are mixed together to form wine; and the same applies to the particles of other bodies.  

Descartes then explained that in the case of the bread, these gaps are often visible even to the naked eye. One could fill those gaps with wine, water, or air, none of which would change the fundamental nature of the bread. According to Descartes, “since bread does not lose its identity despite the fact that the air or other matter contained in its pores is replaced, it is clear that this matter does not belong to the substance of the bread.” This analogy, of course, referred back to the body and blood of Christ. While the surface of the body and blood of Christ after the consecration appear the same as the original bread and wine, the bread and wine do not, in fact, ‘belong to the substance’ of the body and blood of Christ.

Descartes followed his explanation of substance by clarifying how, in fact, his metaphysics demanded the accidents to function. Descartes began to assert his philosophy by answering the question of the mystery of how the accidents of the bread and wine seem to remain after the bread and wine have been fully and completely replaced by the body and blood of Christ, even though, according to his natural philosophy, they cannot be considered “real.” First, following his discussion of substances and their properties, he began to analyze how the accidents of the bread and wine can become separated from the substances themselves. The accidents are “incomplete substances”—they cannot function unless they are in conjunction with the complete substance such as the bread and wine themselves. The fact

120 Ibid., 174.
121 Ibid., 174.
122 Ibid., 174.
that the accidents of the bread and wine are, according to Descartes, nonessential properties of
the complete substances it is possible that the accidents separate from the substances
themselves at the consecration, which is necessitated by the Catholic doctrine. Descartes,
however, did not provide a metaphysical explanation for how the substances and their
accidents separate. Instead, he relied on the mystical workings of his God. He wrote, “By the
omnipotence of God they can be separated, because I remain well assured and firmly believe
that God can do an infinite amount of things that we are not capable of understanding.”123

Having established how the accidents of the bread and wine can become separated
from the substances themselves, Descartes then needed to explain how the body and blood of
Christ could possibly appear in the same manner as the pre-consecration bread and wine. For
this explanation, Descartes once again relied on the omnipotence of God, but, unlike with the
separation of the accidents from their substances, he also referred to his philosophy of the
human body and soul. Descartes wrote that the manner in which the body of Christ is present
in the sacrament differs from how one commonly conceives of presence in a place. He wrote,
“The body of Jesus Christ is not there as rightly in a place, but sacramentally.”124 He
continued, writing that this new conception of location is difficult for man to understand, but
that it is, in fact, possible for God and man must accept it. “This manner of existing, which,
whatever we can explain with difficulty in words, nevertheless after which our spirit is
illuminated of the lights of the faith, we can conceive as possible a God, to which we are very

123 Méditations, 221.
Original: Par la toute-puissance de Dieu ils en puissent être séparés, parce que je tiens pour
très assuré et crois fermement que Dieu peut faire une infinité de chose que nous ne sommes
pas capables d’entendre.
124 Ibid, 223.
Original: “[Le corps de Jésus-Christ] ne soit pas là comme proprement dans un lieu, mais
sacramentellement.
firmly obligated.” Arnauld explained that “Christ’s body is present without being ‘enclosed in a place’ or having ‘a closed surface.’” Philosopher Tad Schmaltz explained such a unique presence, writing that, “Christ’s body is present at the alter, but like a ghost it penetrates and is penetrated by other bodies, and thus does not exclusively occupy any place there.”

Descartes’ explanation continued, explaining how the entirety of Jesus Christ can be found within the extension of the original bread and wine, a pivotal issue also addressed by hylomorphism, in his Letter to Mesland, dated February 9, 1645. In this letter he wrote that just as one would never consider another to be a lesser human because he had lost some part of his body, neither can one say that all of Christ is not contained within the Eucharistic Host simply because the extension of the substance does not appear sufficient for the entirety of Christ’s body. He first wrote of that when one describes a human body, he means all the matter that is joined with the human soul. “When we talk about the body of a man, we do not mean a determined part of substance, nor a piece that has a determined size, but we simply mean all the substance that is together, unified with the soul of this man.” Thus, according to Descartes, even if this material changes—specifically if it increases or decreases—it is still the same body: “Even though this substance changes, and its quantity augments or diminishes,

125 Ibid, 223.
Original: Cette manière d’exister, laquelle, quoique nous ne puissions qu’à peine exprimer par paroles, après néanmoins que notre esprit est éclairé des lumières de la foi, nous pouvons concevoir comme possible à un Dieu, et laquelle nous sommes obligés très fermement.
126 Radical, 57.
127 Ibid., 57.
Original: Quand nous parlons du corps d’un homme, nous n’entendons pas une partie déterminée de matière, ni qui ait une grandeur déterminée, mais seulement nous entendons toute la manière qui est ensemble uni avec l’âme de cette homme.
we continue to believe that it is the same body.”

Descartes provided another example through which his point could be understood, the idea that we while one’s body changes throughout his life, and, of course, grows, he still has the same body as an adult that he had as a child: “There is nobody who believes that we do not have the same bodies that we have had since our childhood, even though they have grown substantially.”

His argument regarding the bodies of other humans went even further. He wrote,

For me, who has studied the circulation of blood and who believes that nutrition makes only a continual expulsion of parties from our bodies, which are driven to their place by others who enter, I do not think that there is any particle of us that resides in the same numero a single moment, again that our bodies, in being human bodies, always reside the same numero, while it is unified with the soul.

Thus, according to Descartes, when the doctrines of the Church state that Christ wholly and completely replaces the bread and wine after the consecration, and that all of Christ is contained in each piece of each Host, this does not mean that the physical entirety of the body of the living Jesus Christ must fit into the physical confines of the extension of the Host. Rather, all of Jesus—body and soul—is contained in each piece of him and, thus, all of him can be—and is—contained in even the smallest piece of the Host.

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129 Ibid., 192.
Original: Bien que cette matière change, et que sa quantité augmente ou diminue, nous croyons toujours que c’est le même corps.

130 Ibid., 192.
Original: Il n’y a personne qui ne croie que nous avons les mêmes corps que nous avons eus dès notre enfances, bien que leur quantité soit de beaucoup augmentée.

131 Ibid., 192.
Original: Pour moi, qui a examiné la circulation du sang, et qui crois que la nutrition ne se fait que par une continuelle expulsion des parties de notre corps, qui sont chassées de leur place par d’autres qui entrent, je ne pense pas qu’il y ait aucune particule de nos membres, qui demeure la même numero un seul moment, encore que notre corps, en tant que corps humain, demeure toujours le même numero, pendant qu’il est uni avec le même âme.
The analysis of how the entirety of Jesus Christ can be contained within the shape, extension and mobility of the pre-consecration bread led Descartes back to the issue of the surface, this time addressing how Jesus Christ comes to appear the same to the human eye as the bread and wine did before the consecration. The Church doctrine stated that the bread and wine are transformed wholly and completely into the body and blood of Christ, and that none of the bread and wine remains. How, then, is it possible that they look no different after the consecration than before? In his letter to Mesland dated February 9, 1645, Descartes wrote, “When, at the occurrence of the Holy Sacrament, I talk of the surface which is halfway between two bodies, specifically between the bread (or really the body of Jesus Christ after the consecration) and the air that surrounds it.”132 Descartes defined surface, writing, “By this word “surface” I don’t mean exactly a substance, or real nature, which can be destroyed by the omnipotence of God, but only a method, or a mode of being which can not be changed without changing in what or by what it exists.”133 As such, Descartes established that a surface cannot change unless the substance for which it is a surface changes. He added that the surfaces of the bread, the air that touches the bread, and the surface that is halfway between the two actually differ only in human perception. They are really the same surface. “This middle surface between the air and the bread does not really differ from the surface of the bread, nor from the air that touches the bread, but these three surfaces are, in effect, a

132 Ibid., 190-191. Original: Quand à l’occasion du St. Sacrement, je parle de la superficie qui est moyenne entre deux corps, à savoir entre le pain (ou bien le corps de Jésus Christ après la consécration) et l’air qui l’environne.
133 Ibid., 190-191. Original: Par ce mot de superficie, je n’entends point quelque substance, ou nature réelle, qui puisse être détruite par la toute puissance de Dieu, mais seulement un mode, ou une façon d’être qui ne peut être changée sans changement de ce en quoi ou par quoi elle existe.
single thing, and they differ only in regard to our thought.”\textsuperscript{134} These surfaces are the same, Descartes explained, because the body of Christ, having replaced the bread, and

\textit{Coming from a different air in the place of that which surrounds the bread, the surface, which is between this air and the body of Jesus-Christ lives \textit{eadem numero} which was before between another air and the bread, because the air doesn’t take its numerical identity from the identity or resemblance of its dimensions.}\textsuperscript{135}

Despite the fact that here Descartes began to explain how the body and blood of Christ appeared no different from the pre-consecration bread and wine through his understanding of substances and their accidents, he continued to rely to a certain degree on the mystery of God to explain this phenomenon.\textsuperscript{136}

Descartes also provided further explanation of how he believed one can conceptualize the mystery of transubstantiation if the stated doctrines and his metaphysical explanations do not suffice. Throughout his writings, Descartes attempted to explain his understanding of extension and other physical properties of substances by using a myriad of references to wax. In his Second Meditation, Descartes wrote, “Let us take, as an example, this morsel of wax…it is hard, it is cold, one touches it, and if you hit it, it makes a sound. In fact, all the things that can distinctly make one know a body are found it.”\textsuperscript{137}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid., 190-191.
\item Original: Cette superficie moyenne entre l’air et le pain ne diffère pas réellement de la superficie du pain, ni aussi de celle de l’aire qui touche le pain ; mais ces trois superficies sont, en effet, une même chose, et diffèrent seulement au regard de notre pensée.
\item Ibid., 190-191.
\item Original: venant d’autre air en la place de celui qui environnait le pain, la superficie, qui est entre cet air et le corps de Jésus-Christ, demeure \textit{eadem numero} qui était auparavant entre d’autre air et le pain, parce qu’elle ne prend pas son identité numérique de l’identité ou ressemblance des dimensions.
\item Ibid., 190-191.
\item \textit{Méditations Métaphysiques}, 45-46.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
used this wax to assert that nobody could claim that it did not contain all of the necessary ‘essence’ needed to be considered the ‘complete’ substance known as wax. He then discussed potential transformations that can take place within such a piece of wax. First he asked his reader to consider what happens when the wax is heated: “What remained of the taste exhales, the odor evaporates, the color changes, it loses its shape, it increases in size, it becomes liquid, it becomes hotter, it is difficult to handle, and however it is touched, it no longer makes a sound. Does the same wax remain after this change?”

According to Descartes, when this same wax, which had all the fundamental, necessary qualities of being considered a ‘complete’ substance is heated, many of its palpable and visible qualities change and the wax no longer appears the same. Descartes assured his reader that despite these apparent differences, the substance of the wax remained the same. Because in this case the wax expanded greatly, thereby increasing its extension, Descartes was compelled to ponder the question of extension. He wrote,

\[
\text{Is it not also unknown, since it becomes greater when it is heater, greater still when it is boiled, and even greater when the heat increases?} \\
\text{And I should not conceive clearly and, according to the truth of what the wax is, if I thought it was capable of receiving more variation, then its extension I cannot ever imagine.}^{139}
\]

138 Ibid., 46.

Original: Prenons pour exemple ce morceau de cire…il est dur, il est froid, on le touche, et si vous le frappez, il rendra quelque son. Enfin, toutes les choses qui peuvent distinctement faire connaître un corps se rencontrent en celui-ci.

Original: Ce qui y restait de saveur s’exhale, l’odeur s’évanouit, sa couleur se change, sa figure se perd, sa grandeur augmente, il devient liquide, il s’échauffe, à peine le peut-on toucher, et quoiqu’on le frappe, il ne rendra plus aucun son. La même cire, demeure-t-elle après ce changement?

Original: N’est-elle pas aussi inconnue, puisque dans la cire qui se fond elle augmente, et se trouve encore plus grand quand elle est entièrement fondue, et beaucoup plus encore grand la chaleur augmente davantage? Et je ne concevrais pas clairement et selon la vérité ce que
This extended analogy regarding the physical attributes of wax, which, in this context can be seen as the ‘accidents’ which are variable within the same substance, the wax, is ultimately a metaphor to explain the variable extension of Christ throughout the transubstantiation process. That is, Christ himself has the full extension of a human, but, naturally, this entire extension does not appear to fit within the physical constraints of the Host and wine. Just as the change in the wax’s extension does not change its fundamental qualities—its essence—and, thus, does not change its existence as substance, so does Christ’s body exist in its entirety in each Host and sip of consecrated wine even though the full extension of Christ’s human body does not fit the confines of the Hosts and wine.

Descartes used another analogy when he explained how the bread and wine are transubstantiated into the body and blood of Christ by comparing the miracle to what he referred to as “natural transubstantiation”—a phenomenon that, according to Descartes, occurs within the human body. He explained to Mesland that when “we eat the bread and drink the wine, the small particles of this bread and wine dissolve in our stomach, flow forthwith from there in our veins and it is from that only that they mix with the blood, they transubstantiate naturally and become parts of our bodies.”\(^{140}\) He then wrote of what would happen were one able to more closely examine these particles that have become part of the human blood and, thus, body. He wrote that if this were possible (in his time), “we would see

\[^{140}\text{Correspondance : Volume VI. "Lettre à Mesland, 9 février 1645," 193.}\]
that they are the same *numero*, as those who before composed the bread and wine; so that, if we did not have that same consideration of the union that they have with the soul, we could call them bread and wine, like before.\textsuperscript{141} Here Descartes asserted that natural transubstantiation—essentially human digestion, can be seen as a way of understanding the miraculous transubstantiation that occurs at the consecration. He wrote that when the tiny particles of bread and wine that one ingests at the mass are digested, they go into his veins and become part of his blood—part of his body even. Moreover, if one were able to examine the blood on a closer level, he would not be able to distinguish the particles of bread and wine from the original blood. According to Descartes, this is the same union the blood and wine have with the divinity. He continued,

\begin{quote}
I don’t see any difficulty at all in thinking that the entire miracle of transubstantiation, which happens at the Saint Sacrament, consists in what at the place of the particles of the bread and the wine would have had to blend with the blood of [Jesus-Christ] and arrange themselves there in certain particular manners, so that its soul informs them naturally, it informs them, without that, by the force of the words of the Consecration; and instead of this soul of [Jesus-Christ] couldn’t live naturally joined with each of these particles of bread and wine, if it is not that they are assembled with many other that compose all the organs of the human body necessary for life, it lives joined naturally to each of them, even though we separate them.\textsuperscript{142}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 193.

Original: nous verrions qu’elles sont les mêmes *numero*, qui comptaient auparavant le pain et le vin ; en sorte que, si nous n’avions point d’égard à l’union qu’elles ont avec l’âme, nous les pourrions nommer pain et vin, comme devant.

\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 193.

Original: Je ne vois point de difficulté à penser que tout le miracle de la transsubstantiation, qui se fait au St Sacrement, consiste en ce qu’au lieu que les particules de ce pain et de ce vin auraient dû se mêler avec le sang de [Jésus-Christ] et s’y disposer en certaines façons particulières, afin que son âme les informât naturellement, elle les informe, sans cela, par la force des paroles de la Consécration ; et au lieu que cette âme de [Jésus-Christ] ne pourrait demeurer naturellement jointe avec chacune de ses particules de pain et de vin, si ce n’est qu’elles fussent assemblées avec plusieurs autres qui composaient tous les organes du corps humain nécessaire à la vie, elle demeure jointe naturellement à chacune d’elles, encore qu’on les sépare.
Thus, Descartes asserted that what occurs at the consecration of the bread and wine is not fundamentally different from the natural processes within the human body, with the very noteworthy exception that that which happens within the human body is not divine and does not occur as the result of a miracle, while the transubstantiation that occurs at the consecration is both divine and a miracle.

In a similar fashion, Descartes suggested that those having difficulty fully understanding transubstantiation consider the phenomenon from the perspective of two substances other than the bread and wine and Jesus Christ. In a letter to Clersier dated March 2, 1646, Descartes wrote,

> For the difficulty that you propose regarding the Saint Sacrament, I can only respond that if God put a purely corporal substance in the place of another substance that is also corporal like a piece of gold in the place of a piece of gold or a piece of bread in the place of another, it only changes the numerical unity of their material in making that the same material numero that now receives the accident of the bread; or, really, that the same material numero that was the bread A receives the accidents of bread B, that is to say that it is put under the same dimension and that the material of bread B is then removed. But, there is something more of the Saint-Sacrament, because in addition to the material of the body of Jesus Christ that is put under the dimensions where the bread was, the soul of Jesus Christ, who informs this material, is there too.\(^{143}\)

\(^{143}\)Correspondance: Volume VII. “Lettre à Clersier, 2 mars 1646,” 24-25.

Original: Pour la difficulté que vous proposez, touchant le Saint-Sacrement, je n’ai autre chose à y répondre, sinon que, si Dieu met une substance purement corporelle en la place d’une autre aussi corporelle, comme une pièce d’or en la place d’un morceau de pain, ou un morceau de pain en la place d’un autre, il change seulement l’unité numérique de leur matière, en faisant que la même matière numero, qui était, or reçoive les accidents du pain ; ou bien que la même matière numero, qui était le pain A, reçoive les accidents du pain B, c’est-à-dire qu’elle soit mise sous les mêmes dimensions, et que la matière du pain B en soit ôtée. Mais, il y a quelque chose de plus au Saint-Sacrement ; car outre la matière du corps de Jésus-Christ, qui est mise sous les dimensions où était le pain, l’âme de Jésus-Christ, qui informe cette matière, y est aussi.
In this analogy, Descartes asked his reader to consider the workings of transubstantiation using substances other than bread, wine, and the body and blood of Christ. This series of analogies were employed by Descartes to demonstrate the efficacy of his philosophy vis-à-vis that which was employed by the Church. The end result of the juxtaposition of Descartes’ detailed philosophical explanations of the sacrament and his metaphors and analogies is a fairly comprehensive philosophical explanation of what is often considered to be the greatest mystery of the Catholic faith.

Descartes was acutely aware of the potential danger of writing anything that contradicted the Church; it was largely for this reason that he relied on the acceptance of Antoine Arnauld to verify the legitimacy of his writing. As has already been explicated, Arnauld did not immediately accept Cartesianism; he refused to fully support Descartes’ work until he was fully convinced that it did not violate the teachings of his faith. He wrote to Descartes in June of 1648 that he had “read with admiration and approved almost everything that [he had] written concerning the first philosophy.”144 Here Arnauld expressed his particular contentment with Descartes’ response to how the accidents remain present in the bread of the Eucharist.145 In a second letter to Descartes dated July of 1648, Arnauld wrote, “Your response helped me a lot in understanding some very difficult issues.”146 However, in the same letter, Arnauld continued to ask Descartes questions about his philosophy, one of Arnauld’s most ardent criticisms of Descartes’ Eucharistic theology related to extension. When Arnauld reiterated this question to Descartes in 1648, Descartes remained silent on the

144 “Reconciling Cartesian Metaphysics,” 233.
145 Ibid., 233.
issue, despite the fact that he had already addressed this question in his letter to Mesland dated February 9, 1645. Because of Descartes’ continued emphasis on confidentiality to Mesland, it seems most likely that Descartes was “unsure of the orthodoxy of his solution and probably wanted to minimize the number of written documents that explicitly [attached] his name to this dangerously Calvinistic-sounding explanation of Eucharistic transubstantiation.” Nevertheless, once Arnauld became aware of Descartes’ explanation of the question of extension, he was finally completely convinced by Cartesian Eucharistic theology, a view he defended after Descartes’ death.

The acceptance of Descartes’ metaphysics by the Catholic Church would have changed the specific manner in which the doctrine of transubstantiation is viewed, but it would not have changed the fundamental understanding of the theology of the belief. That is, while the sacrament had traditionally been understood using Aristotelian-Thomist hylomorphism as an explanation, Descartes sought to supplant this understanding with his own metaphysics. Thus, Descartes’ desire to explain the central mystery of the Catholic faith did not contradict Church theology, but, rather, sought to replace the science used to understand it with his own. It is important to remember that Descartes’ attack on Aristotelian metaphysics was not unique in the era of the Scientific Revolution, but, unlike many fields of science, the Church ultimately refused to reject the Aristotelianism it had historically employed to explain the sacrament. Descartes’ natural philosophy perhaps faced the strongest resistance because of his denial of the existence of real accidents. However, this perceived incongruence with church doctrine can, in fact, be explained as a difference in terminology and, more importantly, scientific understanding. Descartes continued to explain the mystery

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147 “Reconciling Cartesian Metaphysics,” 236.
of transubstantiation by expanding upon how it is possible that one continued to perceive the accidents of the bread and wine after these two substances have been wholly and completely replaced by the body and blood of Christ, as well as how the entirety of Christ’s body and blood can be contained within the small physical parameters of the Host and wine. To explain these two self-posed questions, Descartes relied on both his metaphysical philosophy and the mystery-filled workings of his omnipotent God. Once again, the newness of his ideas lay in the differences between his metaphysics and those of Aristotle, not in an essential theological change. Thus, despite the fact that Descartes faced substantial opposition for his theology during his life, in terms of his philosophy surrounding transubstantiation, he accomplished his goal of writing nothing that could be rightly censored by the theologians of his era. As such, the Church, had it so desired, could have accepted Descartes’ metaphysics and, thus, employed it to explain this, its most sacred sacrament. In doing so, the Church could have attached its theology to the new modern science and, at the same time, not contradicted the fundamental tenants of the faith.

That does not mean, however, that it is surprising that Descartes received such strong criticism from the seventeenth century French Catholic community, as Aristotelian-Thomist hylomorphism had come to be seen as the central means through which one could understand transubstantiation. This tension was only added to by the fact that Descartes was not a theologian, but a lay scientist. It is here, in the distinction between philosopher or scientist and theologian that Descartes primarily distinguished himself from other voices of dissent with regards to the Eucharist. Descartes began by developing his secular metaphysics. His decision to address theology came only after he was prompted by his contemporaries to realize that his metaphysics had potent theological consequences. He thus differs from
Berengarius, for example, who was a theologian and whose attack on the Church’s Eucharistic theology was rooted purely in his religious conviction. In asserting his questioning of the Church’s long-held decision to employ Aristotelian-Thomist hylomorphism as the underpinnings to the sacrament of the Eucharist, Descartes started a new trend of thinking. Descartes’ death in 1650 came two years after the Peace of Westphalia,\textsuperscript{148} the treaty that ended the Thirty Years War and is often used to mark the end of the ‘Reformation Period’ in European history. His death also coincided with the continued booming of the Scientific Revolution that swept across Europe beginning in the mid-sixteenth century. While many of Descartes’ works were widely read and discussed, his writing on the Eucharist proved to be of particular interest among the erudite members of 17\textsuperscript{th} century French society. Cartesian Eucharistic theology continued to intrigue the critics he solicited during his life such as Antoine Arnauld, but following his death debate surrounding his writing attracted famous philosophers such as Dom Robert Desgabets and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. Even the Sorbonne, the French University with enormous power at the time, and the French crown in Louis XIV, involved themselves in the Cartesian debate as they came to the defense of the Aristotelian understanding of the Eucharist. In fact, in the decades following Descartes’ death, the theology examined in this chapter became hotly contested. Descartes had both re-opened and re-defined the Eucharistic debate, making it once again a fierce point of discussion—but now there were some twists. The Church’s doctrine had been officially defined and the continent found itself surrounded by new science and philosophy. The stage was set for this new debate and, even after his death, Descartes would be directly at the center.

Chapter 4

The Cartesian Legacy

In addition to outlining Descartes’ Eucharistic theology, this study has established the multifarious context in which Descartes wrote. The context included the official Church canons of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) and the Council of Trent (1551) as well as the general acceptance of both the doctrine of transubstantiation and the Aristotelian-Thomist hylomorphism that dated back to the late middle ages. The effects of the Reformation also contributed greatly to the context, first as transubstantiation rose to the forefront as one of the major defining issues of the feuds between Catholics and Protestants and also because the Counter-Reformation was a period of self-reflection for the Catholic Church, making Descartes’ era one where change was a real possibility for the Roman Church. Finally, the Scientific Revolution contributed to Descartes’ stage as philosophers and scientists introduced a myriad of new ideas including new conceptions of material and matter to seventeenth-century Europeans and, of course, to the seventeenth-century Catholic Church. Moreover, criticism of Aristotelianism in many fields of science was at the heart of the Scientific Revolution. Because Descartes’ criticism of the Church’s Eucharistic theology centered on the question of Aristotelian metaphysics, it is not surprising that Descartes’ Eucharistic theology rose to the center of the internal Catholic Eucharistic debate in the seventeenth century.

As has been described, this new science was the source of substantial tension between the worlds of philosophy and theology. Philosophy collided with religion as the Church was often hesitant to accept the ideas of philosophers such as René Descartes and, at the same
time, philosophers and theologians feuded internally over how best to explain the Eucharistic mystery using the new conceptions of material and matter. As this debate gained strength, Descartes became the focal point and the debate transformed into one of “Cartesianism versus anti-Cartesianism.” As such, with his timely critique of Aristotelianism, Descartes both re-defined and re-ignited the internal Catholic Eucharistic debate with his metaphysics. This chapter will discuss the Church and French community’s reactions to Descartes’ writing after his death as well as the Eucharistic theologies of several pivotal theologians and philosophers who took strong Cartesian or anti-Cartesian views: Antoine Arnauld, Dom Robert Desgabets, and Wilhelm Gottfried Leibniz. A close study of these key figures as well as the responses of the French crown and scholarly community will demonstrate the potency of Cartesianism in mid-seventeenth-century French society and the fact that Descartes, a layman who is to this day best known for his science and philosophy, categorically changed the debate surrounding one of the most elemental aspects of the Roman Catholic faith. Moreover, this chapter will demonstrate that because Cartesianism had substantial support within the 17th century French scholarly communities, had the Church accepted Cartesianism it would have been keeping with the mainstream of contemporary modern natural philosophy. At the same time, the presence of criticism from the theological community, such as from Father Le Moine, serves to re-iterate the reasons why the Church ultimately chose to reject Cartesianism.

Despite the profound influence the debate surrounding Cartesianism had on the Church’s Eucharistic doctrine, Descartes is not remembered in the same light as other voices of the Reformation such as Luther or Calvin because, unlike Lutheranism and Calvinism, debate surrounding Cartesianism remained among the erudite members of society and never served as the catalyst for a popular movement. One could say that the Catholic Church “lost”
its battle against the Protestant Reformers because, at the end of the Reformation era, the Church had been bitterly and irreversibly splintered. In contrast, the Church ultimately “won” the fight against Cartesianism, as the debate within the scholarly community surrounding the philosophical questions of the Eucharist faded with the decline of the Scientific Revolution and the Reformation. Nevertheless, the impact of Cartesianism was, irrefutably, a fundamental element of the development of the Church’s Eucharistic theology—one that should not be overlooked. The Church’s decision to remain steadfast in its ancient beliefs despite the almost universal rejection of Aristotelianism by the scholarly community of the seventeenth-century and, thus, to refuse to change its views on the sacrament of the Eucharist was itself a change for the Church. Aristotelianism had been the generally accepted “correct” mechanical philosophy before the Scientific Revolution. As such, the Church’s original decision to employ Aristotelianism to explain its most hallowed sacrament served to join the Church and the scientific community. However, when the Church refused to accept the new science of the seventeenth-century, a decision epitomized by the Church’s categorical rejection of Cartesianism, it isolated itself from the scientific world; this process of isolation continued into the following centuries served as a defining characteristic of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century Church.

René Descartes died in Stockholm, Sweden on February, 11, 1650.\textsuperscript{149} Sixteen years later, in 1666, a convention was held by the most prominent Cartesians in Paris.\textsuperscript{150} The fact that such a convention was held for the sole purpose of discussing and proliferating Cartesianism demonstrates the eminence of Cartesianism in France at the time. Cartesianism was mostly characterized as a movement of science and philosophy and it began gaining...
significant strength towards the end of Descartes’ life and immediately following his death. Some of the most well-known elements of Cartesian philosophy were subjective truth, dualism, and systematic doubt. Most of the Cartesians in France were prominent citizens, a fact that gave legitimacy to the Cartesian cause. However, within the group that could be considered “Cartesian,” there existed a varying degree of fidelity to Descartes’ principles. Some of its members were “Cartesian” for his metaphysics, some for his physics, and others for the religious implications of his science. Some were completely loyal to Descartes; others interpreted his works for themselves and accepted some, but not all, of Descartes’ writing. Regardless of their particular leanings, those who held a favorable view of Descartes faced hostility in France in the decades following his death. In terms of theology, the universities and the Jesuits became Cartesianism’s most potent adversaries.\(^{151}\)

The scholarly community of the French universities published a plethora of anti-Cartesian works in the 1660’s and 1670’s. Among the works were Father J.B Duhamel’s *De consensu veteris et novae philosophiae* (1663), Jesuit P. Rochon’s *Lettres d’un philosophe à un cartésien* (1672), and P.J.B de la Grange’s *Les Principes de la Philosophie contra les nouveaux philosophes* (1675). The Cartesian community, however, was not without rebuttal. It published works such as Father Emmanuel Maignan’s *Cursus philosophicus* (1653), Father Nicholas-Joseph Poisson’s *Commentaires ou Remarques sur la méthode de René Descartes* (1670), and Pierre Cally’s *Institutio philosophiae quam docet* (1674).\(^{152}\) These six works are merely a sampling of the many Cartesian and anti-Cartesian works that were published in the period, but the presence of such a variety of texts demonstrates the fact that Cartesianism had, in fact, become a pivotal issue within the French scholarly community.

\(^{151}\) Ibid., 70-71.
\(^{152}\) Ibid., 71.
It was not just the universities and scholarly community, however, who took action against Cartesianism. In 1663, Descartes’ works were placed on the Roman *Index librorum prohibitorum* pending correction (*donec corrigantur*)\(^{153}\) for reasons that were understood to be related to his Eucharistic theology.\(^{154}\) The fact that all of Descartes’ works were censored for this reason is fascinating, given the fact that Descartes wrote a dearth of texts discussing the Eucharist among his wide variety of other mainly secular texts. Not surprising, given his extensive support for Descartes’ work and, specifically, his Eucharistic theology, Arnauld was quick to defend Descartes against this condemnation by the Congregation of the Index. He wrote,

> The Censors at Rome have not cared well for the interests of Religion, since they have placed on their *Index* the works of M. Descartes…This, in effect, takes away from those who have lost their faith every human means of escaping from their pernicious prejudices against this important truth.\(^{155}\)

Moreover, on August 4, 1671, the Archbishop of Paris, François de Harlay de Champs, called a meeting of the elite members of the faculty of the University of Paris for the purpose of issuing the following decree of the King, Louis XIV.\(^{156}\)

> The king, having learned that certain opinions, that the faculty of theology had once censored and that the Parlement, had prohibited from teaching and from publishing, are now being disseminated, not only in the University, but also in the rest of this city and in certain parts of the kingdom, either by strangers, or also by people within, [and] wishing to prevent the course of this opinion that could bring some confusion in the explanation of our mysteries, pushed by his zeal and his usual piety, has commanded me to tell you about his intentions. The king exhorts you, Sir, to bring it about that no other doctrine than one conveyed in the rules and statutes of the University is taught in the

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153 “Reconciling Cartesian Metaphysics,” 239.
154 *Radical*, 40.
156 *Radical*, 29.
universities nor put into theses, and leaves you to your prudence and to your wise conduct to take the necessary path for this.\textsuperscript{157}

This decree made reference to certain “rules and statutes” which were the result of the controversy that came out a 1624 announcement that three individuals from the University of Paris were setting up a private defense of anti-Aristotelian theses, as well as the resulting insistence on the teaching of Aristotelianism in the French universities, likely a response to the anti-Aristotelian crusade that marked the Scientific Revolution.\textsuperscript{158} According to the Sorbonne, several of these theses were contrary to the faith. Among the most repugnant was a particular thesis that insisted that accidents were invariant with respect to substance, which, according to the university, ran counter to orthodox Eucharistic theology.\textsuperscript{159} Despite the fact that this decree never explicitly mentioned Descartes or Cartesianism, the two were its unambiguous targets.\textsuperscript{160} The connection between the decree and Cartesianism gained clarity in 1675 when faculty at the University of Angers issued a decree to censure professors with Cartesian sympathies.\textsuperscript{161} As such, the French government’s position on Cartesianism in the decades immediately following Descartes’ death was unequivocal—there was a clear and deliberate effort by the crown to quiet the increasingly popular Cartesians who had, in fact, gained marked strength outside the French universities in the 1650s and 1660s.\textsuperscript{162} The date of this decree, 1671, is not surprising. While Cartesianism was on the rise throughout the 1650’s and 1660’s, the universities were largely able to ignore the Cartesian problem until the 1660’s. It was in the 1660’s that the universities largely began their attack on Cartesianism.

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 29.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 29.
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., 29.
\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 30.
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., 30.
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., 31.
and the crown was not far behind.\textsuperscript{163} Louis’ 1671 decree also solidified Eucharistic theology as the central issue in the debate surrounding Cartesianism in France.

The fact that both the archbishop and even King Louis XIV himself chose to comment on the potentially pernicious impact of Cartesianism on the Eucharistic theology of the Roman Church is critical. The archbishop of Paris working so closely with Louis is a quintessential example of the French government and, in particular, of Gallicanism. The French kings had long ruled by “divine rite.” It was believed that the king was chosen by God and that he owed his allegiance to God, not to his subjects. Additionally, the French Church had posited itself as independent from Rome since the fourteenth century. This French Gallican Church saw the French monarchy as the defender of the unique power and status of the French Church.\textsuperscript{164} The seventeenth-century Gallican Church had two primary enemies— the Huguenots and the ultramontanes, those who advocated a militant Catholicism centered in Rome and, thus, denied the special status of the French crown.\textsuperscript{165}

What is clear is that in 17\textsuperscript{th} century France the Church and the French government were inextricably joined. It is, then, not surprising that the king and the archbishop spoke with a unified voice against Cartesianism. In the mid to late seventeenth-century Louis XIV was the most powerful monarch in Europe. His decision to weigh in on the issue of Cartesianism was a potent statement of the politico-religious power of the French monarch and a mark of his absolutist rule. In addition to his inherent religious authority by nature of his office, Louis took particular interest in eliminating religious minorities and heterodoxy during his reign. Heterodoxy was not only repugnant to the faith, it was also a threat to

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., 32.


\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., 69.
Louis’ mammoth political power. The crowning demonstration of Louis’ suppression of religious minorities came with his 1685 revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Louis’ classic statement of “une foi, une loi, un roi”\(^{166}\) that came with his revocation of the Edict epitomized the union of the state and Catholic Church in France.\(^{167}\) The timing of the revocation of this Edict in relationship to Louis’ actions to suppress Cartesianism is crucial. The close proximity of these events helps set the immediate context for seventeenth-century Cartesianism and Louis himself. Tensions between the Catholics and the French Huguenots remained high. Moreover, Cartesianism faced a powerful adversary in Louis XIV who saw it as his responsibility to suppress perceived heterodoxy—including Cartesianism. What is further clear from the condemnation of Cartesianism by the Congregation of the Index, the ordained King Louis XIV, and the archbishop of Paris is the fact that Cartesianism was rejected by the institution of the Catholic Church in France, not simply by specific theologians and philosophers.

The assertion that Louis’ 1671 decree was intended to silence Cartesianism was further propagated by a resolution from Louis enacted during the Sixteenth Assembly of the Oratory in 1678 which insisted that Oratory colleges “must depart in physics neither from the physics nor from the principles of physics of Aristotle commonly received in the Colleges in order to follow the new doctrine of M. Descartes, the teaching of which the king has prohibited for good reason.”\(^{168}\) The fact that the French government felt it necessary to officially sanction the teaching of Aristotelianism during an age where it was coming under fire for its inadequacies in many fields of science is fascinating. This demonstrates both the

\(^{166}\) One faith, one law, one king.
\(^{167}\) The World of Catholic Renewal, 69.
\(^{168}\) Radical, 30.
interconnection of the Church and the government at the time and also the fact that the Church remained steadfast in its support for Aristotelianism, despite the assertion of its shortcomings by the scientific community.

Also in 1678 *L’assemblée générale* of the French government, in the name of Louis XIV, insisted that substantial forms be taught using Aristotelianism. To accomplish this goal, the French General Assembly passed the following:

1. The present extension and exterior are not the essence of a material (substance)
2. That in each natural body there is a substantial form really distinguished from nature.
3. That there are real accidents, and they are absolutely inherent to their subjects, really distinguished from every other substance and who can exist supernaturally with another subject.
4. That the soul is really present and unified with the whole body and every part of the body.

Like Louis’ 1671 decree, this law did not explicitly cite Cartesianism as its target, though the implication was clear, particularly in article three. As was addressed in chapter three, Descartes was widely criticized by the Church for his view of the accidents and the fact that he asserted that they are not, in fact, “real” in the sense used to interpret the sacrament by the Church. It is also important to note that in the same year as this decree came a decree from...

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169 *Penseurs*, 72-73.
170 Ibid., 73

Original:

1. Que l’extension actuelle et l’extérieure n’est pas l’essence de la matière.
2. Qu’en chaque corps naturel il y a une forme substantielle réellement distinguée de la nature.
3. Qu’il y a des accidents réels et absolus inhérents à leurs sujet, réellement distingués de toute autre substance, et qui peuvent être surnaturellement sans aucun sujet.
4. Que l’âme est réellement présente et unie à tout le corps, et à toutes les parties du corps.
the crown prohibiting the theological teaching of Jansenius, known as Jansenism.\textsuperscript{171} Popular in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, Jansenism was a movement within Catholicism that was largely associated with Port Royal.\textsuperscript{172} However, despite the fact that Jansenists themselves considered their group Catholic, the Church officially condemned Jansenism as heretical in 1712. Importantly, Jansenism found a particular adversary in Louis XIV. Some of the central tenets of Jansenism were predestination, original sin, and human depravity, though Jansenism was also seen by some Catholics as a movement against excessive papal power.\textsuperscript{173}

A second wave of top-down suppression of Cartesianism in France began in 1691. On October 28 of that year, Archbishop Harlay presented the faculty of philosophy at the University of Paris with the following formulary from the King containing a list of concepts that were not allowed to be taught in schools:\textsuperscript{174}

1. One must rid oneself of all kinds of prejudices and doubt everything before being certain of any knowledge.
2. One must doubt whether there is a God until one has a clear and distinct knowledge of it.
3. We do not know whether God did not create us such that we are always deceived in the very way things appear the clearest.
4. As a philosopher, one must not develop fully the unfortunate consequences that an opinion might have for faith, even when the opinion appears incompatible with faith; notwithstanding this, one must stop at that opinion, if it is relevant.
5. The matter of bodies is nothing other than their extension and one cannot exist without the other.
6. One must reject all the reason the theologians have used until now (with Saint Thomas) to demonstrate the existence of God.
7. Faith, hope, and charity, and generally all the supernatural habits are nothing spiritual distinct from the soul, as the natural habits are nothing spiritual distinct from mind and will.

\textsuperscript{171} Radical, 69.
\textsuperscript{172} The World of Catholic Renewal, 74.
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid., 230.
\textsuperscript{174} Radical, 217.
8. All the actions of the infidels are sins.
9. The state of pure nature is impossible.
10. The invincible ignorance of natural right does not excuse sin.
11. One is free, providing that one acts with judgments and with full knowledge, even when one acts necessarily.

Louis seemed to have little interest in the technical details of either the 1671 decree or 1691 formulary, though he was concerned with disorder in the powerful French universities that had significant influence in both the secular and theological spheres. The fifth point on the formulary made reference to the omnipresent question of extension in the Eucharistic debate and asserted the Church’s Aristotelian-Thomist view of the real accidents, a direct attack on Cartesian Eucharistic theology. The rest of the formulary, however, had focuses other than the direct Eucharistic controversy. The first four points tackled the issue of the tension between philosophy and religion. As with the 1671 decree, the 1691 formulary never mentioned Descartes or Cartesianism, though the implication remained lucid and the tension between philosophy and religion was as clear here as ever.

According to Tad Schmaltz, the last four points made reference not to Cartesianism, but to the theological issues that served as the basis for the debates between the Jansenists and the Jesuits. The implication from the juxtaposition of condemnation of the method of using Cartesian philosophy as a means to understand theology and Jansenist theology was that there was a “slippery slope” that existed from Cartesianism to Jansenism. This formulary was not the only instance in which the connection between Cartesianism and Jansenism was made; in 1706 a member of the Sorbonne, the abbé Edme Pirot, wrote that, “Cartesianism is scarcely one step distant from Jansenism.” Even more significantly, like his colleagues at Port-

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175 Ibid., 219.
176 Ibid., 220.
177 Ibid., 220.
Royal, Descartes’ ardent supporter, Antoine Arnauld, was a self-professed Jansenist who, of course, maintained the orthodoxy of such beliefs despite assertions by his adversaries that his views crossed the delicate line between Catholicism and Calvinism in terms of the Eucharist.\(^{178}\) The linking of Cartesianism to Jansenism is clearly indicative of the tension surrounding Cartesianism, as those who were anti-Cartesian attempted to “[draw] attention to the heretical implications [Cartesianism] has for the doctrine of the Eucharist.”\(^{179}\) The assertion that the philosophy of Cartesianism caused such a slippery slope is also interesting because of the prevalence of the thinking of the Scientific Revolution at the time, which expounded the importance and efficacy of philosophy—even specifically that of Descartes.

Because Cartesianism was such a topic of heated debate within the French scholarly and religious communities, it is not surprising that individual theologians and philosophers also passionately entered the debate. Arnauld wrote a multitude of texts in support of Cartesianism, one of the most revealing being *Examen d’un écrit qui a pour titre: traite de l’essence du corps, et de l’union de l’âme avec le corps contre la philosophie de M. Descartes* (Examination of a document titled: treatise on the essence of the body and on the union of the soul with the body against the philosophy of Mr. Descartes) in 1680. The work, as the title implies, responded to an anti-Cartesian treatise written by Father Le Moine of Brittany. While the book was not published until 1780 in a larger collection titled *Œuvres de Messire Antoine Arnauld*, its contents unmistakably illuminates the interplay of the views of both an ardent Descartes supporter and a passionate adversary of Descartes.

Epitomizing the potent tension between philosophy and theology of the time, this work began with a defense by Arnauld of the use of philosophy to explain theology, one of

\(^{178}\) “Reconciling Cartesian Metaphysics,” 239.

\(^{179}\) *Radical*, 71.
the major points of contention during the period. Arnauld quoted the author of the original treatise, Father Le Moine, as having written that a long time ago a priest remarked that there is a great connection and close relationship between human philosophy and heresy. “In effect human philosophy is the mother of heresies, or the philosophy and the heresies are the daughters of the same mother, who knows of human reason blinded by sin, and who is now enlightened of the faith.”\textsuperscript{180} This citation clearly demonstrates the ubiquitous tension between religion and philosophy of this era as Father Le Moine directly equated human reason with heresy. As such, he put himself on the extreme end of the debate surrounding this tension—he was not only willing to stipulate between natural philosophy and religion but, moreover, he completely discarded the philosophy as almost evil. Arnauld’s response to this sweeping criticism of natural philosophy was to defend both the philosophy itself and his friend Descartes, to whom the criticism of Le Moine was directed. While Arnauld was supportive of Descartes’ philosophy as it applied to theology, he did not believe that theology necessarily needed to be justified by philosophy. He wrote, “Faith, far from engaging me in these philosophical discussions, compels me to avoid them as dangerous temptations, and moreover, is satisfied if I simply believe without philosophizing, by submitting myself entirely to everything that God asks me to believe.”\textsuperscript{181} Nevertheless, Arnauld wrote, “But all of that is nothing but a very poorly founded declamation from which we would be able to conclude nothing against the philosophy of Descartes except by a gross sophism.”\textsuperscript{182} Le

\textsuperscript{180} \textit{Examen}, 11. \\
Original: En effet la Philosophie humaine est la mère des hérésies, ou la Philosophie et les hérésies sont les filles d’une même mère, savoir de la raison humaine aveuglée par le péché, et qui n’est point éclairée [de la lumière] de la foi.  \\
\textsuperscript{181} \textit{Radical}, 54.  \\
\textsuperscript{182} \textit{Examen}, 11.
Moine continued, defending potential criticisms that some natural philosophy is in accordance with the teachings of the Church. He wrote,

The philosophy consists of several truths or probabilities mixed with several errors or uncertain guesses: the philosophy joins bad consequences with good principles. The philosophy defends and explains truths by false reasoning. If the philosophy sometimes comes across the truth, it is more by pleasant chance than by a certain method and the philosophy asserts this truth sooner my fantasy than my science: and the philosophy is more fertile in discourse than in doctrine.183

Arnauld responded to the assertion by Le Moine that human reason and philosophy only contain truth haphazardly and through luck—that philosophy does not come to the truth through a systematic method: “Philosophy is never at all content with probabilities and uncertain guesses or to establish nothing except on clear and certain principles. One must only read the first book of his principles or meditations to be persuaded of all that.”184 Once again, Arnauld defended not only philosophy, but also specifically Descartes. It is important to note again that Arnauld was a theologian, not a philosopher. As such, his decision to defend both philosophy and a lay philosopher is critical to understanding the complexity of this debate.

Original : Mais tout cela n’est qu’une déclamation très mal fondée, dont on ne sauroit rien conclure contra la Philosophie de M. Descartes que par un sophisme très grossier.

Original: Qu’elle consiste en quelques vérités ou vraisemblances mêlées avec plusieurs erreurs ou conjectures incertaines : Qu’elle joint de mauvaises conséquences à de bons principes. Qu’elle défend et explique les vérités par de faux raisonnement…Que si elle rencontre quelquefois la vérité, c’est plus par hasard heureux que par une méthode certain et qu’elle la soutient plutôt par fantaisie que par science : et qu’elle plus féconde en discours qu’en doctrine.

Original: Jamais Philosophie…ne s’est moins contenté de vraisemblances et de conjectures incertains…[ou] de ne rien établir que sur des principes clairs et certains. Il ne faut que lire le premier livre de ses Principes ou ses Méditations pour être persuade de tout cela.
Arnauld defended new philosophy in his response to Father Le Moine’s assertion that, on principle, new philosophy should not replace old. Father Le Moine wrote, "Philosophy does not recognize the right of antiquity and claims that all should stop with its new discoveries." That is, the new philosophers of the Scientific Revolution did not respect the work of their predecessors, which should have been assumed to be the true and correct philosophy. Arnauld asserted that the truth of philosophy should be evaluated on its merits, not based on when it was created. Moreover, he stated that the works of the most illustrious philosopher, Aristotle, should not necessarily be assumed to be the most efficacious just because he lived many centuries before the Scientific Revolution and because his philosophy had been generally accepted for centuries. He wrote, “It is above all ridiculous to want that I believe [the opinions of Aristotle] with respect to things I can see by my own philosophy because he lived two thousand years before me and it pleased others to give him the name of Prince of Philosophy.” Arnauld later pointed out the fact that as time goes on, it is increasingly likely that human reason and philosophy will discover truths. According to Arnauld, this is both because the collective thoughts of more men inevitably leads to more complete understanding and the fact that improvements in technology allow scientists and philosophers to better understand the world around them: “On the contrary, isn’t it obvious that human sciences perfect themselves with time? The invention of the microscope essentially gave us new eyes to see an infinity of works of God of which the Ancients had

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185 Ibid., 16. Original: La Philosophie ne reconnoît point le droit de l’Antiquité, et prétend que tout doit céder à ses nouvelles découvertes.
186 Ibid., 17. Original: Il est [sur tout] ridicule de vouloir que je l’en croie sur les choses que je puis voir par ma propre lumière, parce qu’il aura vécu deux mille ans avant moi, et qu’il aura plu a d’autres de lui donner le nom de Prince des Philosophes.
only the slightest suspicion.”187 While this section of Arnauld’s *Examen* dealt with whether ancient philosophy is inherently superior to that of the moderns, it is critical to step back and consider the implications of this debate in terms of the legacy of Cartesianism. Descartes’ entire defense of his Eucharistic theology was based in the fact that he asserted his philosophy could explain the mystery of transubstantiation better than that of Aristotle. As such, this question of whether new philosophy should be discarded simply because it is new is fundamental to the debate surrounding Cartesianism in the second half of the seventeenth century.

The second section of Arnauld’s *Examen* was essentially a defense of Descartes’ view of the accidents, which was outlined in chapter three. The third section of the *Examen* is much more interesting, as it rebutted Le Moine’s unique criticism of Descartes regarding glorious bodies. Le Moine wrote, “A glorious body possesses all of its substance and its material in an inviolable union without any division. It conserves unchangeably the arrangement and the order of its parts in the form of a human body.”188 However, according to Le Moine, while the glorious body is indistinguishable in these ways from other human bodies, “It is subjected neither to the material and sensible qualities of its nature, nor to those of other bodies. This would not be if it did not have to be itself without some exterior extension.”189 That is, the ‘glorious body’—the body of Christ—contains all of the elements

187 Ibid., 21-22.
Original: N’est-il pas visible au contraire, que les sciences humaines se perfectionnent par le temps… L’invention des microscopes nous a donné comme de nouveaux yeux, pour voir une infinité d’ouvrages de Dieu, dont les Anciens, n’ont [pas eu seulement le moindre soupçon].

188 Ibid., 66.

189 Ibid., 66.
of its essence in an indivisible union and that it retains all of these elements in the unchangeable form of a human body. However, unlike bodies that are not divine, this body is not subjected to the rules of nature. Arnauld wrote of this idea: “That is, in a word, that their ordinary state is to be reduced to mathematics.”

Moreover, Arnauld responded with particular vehemence against Le Moine’s conception of extension. He wrote,

> We never believed up to this hour that it was a union opposed to the exterior extension, and that that was intended to mean that they were bodies reduced to a [mathematical] point. Nevertheless, this author finds this explanation appealing. The manner in which he speaks of these material qualities is the most unheard of thing in the world.

Thus, according to Arnauld, it was Le Moine’s view of extension that was unorthodox, not Descartes’ as Le Moine asserted.

Arnauld then addressed Le Moine’s criticism of Descartes’ understanding of the spirit and the body. Le Moine wrote in his treatise that if there was anything new Descartes discovered, it was how to separate souls and bodies, not to unify them. He wrote, “That makes me think rather that he found the art of separating the soul from the body than the mystery of their natural union.”

Original: Il n’est pas assujetti aux qualités matérielles et sensibles de sa nature, ni a celles des autres corps. Ce qui ne seroit pas s’il ne pouvait être lui-même sans quelque extension extérieure.

Original: C’est-à-dire, en un mot, que leur état ordinaire est d’être réduit en un point mathématique.

Original: On n’avoit pas cru jusqu’à cette heure que ce fût une unité opposée à l’étendue extérieure, et que cela volût dire qu’ils eussent des corps réduits en un point. Néanmoins cet Auteur trouve cela si beau…La maniere dont il parle des qualités matérielles est la chose du monde le plus inouie.

Original: Cela me fait penser qu’il a trouvé plutôt l’art de séparer l’âme du corps que le mystère de leur union naturelle.
achievement of Descartes should be lauded, not denigrated. He asserted that if there was anything estimable about Descartes,

It is that he so well separated our soul from our body and so well established that these are two totally distinct substances, of which only one is material, and it is no longer difficult [to know] after that how two substances that are so different can be unified to make one man.\textsuperscript{194}

According to Arnauld, then, the fact that Descartes’ new metaphysics separated the body and soul and asserted that the soul was not a material substance is not something to be brushed aside and certainly not something to be criticized because it was precisely this new philosophy that allowed Arnauld and other theologians to conceptualize a very important element of their faith.

The Cartesian anti-Cartesian dichotomy is unambiguous from Arnauld’s \textit{Examen} as the work placed Arnauld on the defensive for Descartes against one of his critics. While Father Le Moine and Arnauld were both theologians, this debate was also prevalent within the philosophical community at the time—a debate in which Descartes found both powerful supporters and passionate enemies, making it clear that Descartes had risen to the center of the Eucharistic debate in the decades immediately following his death. The prevalence of both Cartesian supporters and adversaries, moreover, demonstrates the Church’s pivotal decision regarding natural philosophy in the late 17\textsuperscript{th} century. Because the new natural philosophy, manifested in Cartesianism, found significant support within the theological community, the Church could have justified a switch in its accepted natural philosophy from

\textsuperscript{194} Ibid., 87-88.
Original: C’est d’avoir si bien séparé notre âme d’avec notre corps, et d’avoir si bien établi que ce sont deux substances totalement distinctes, dont il n’y en a qu’une [de] matérielle, que l’on ne soit plus en peine après cela [que de sçavoir] comment deux substances si différentes peuvent être unies pour ne faire qu’un seul homme.
Aristotelianism to Cartesianism. At the same time, support for the conservative choice of continuing to employ Aristotelianism gave justification to the Church’s decision to reject the new philosophy.

While many philosophers aligned themselves on one side or the other of this polemical debate, one key philosopher, Dom Robert Desgabets (1610-1678) of the Benedictine order found himself somewhere in the middle. While he used many of Descartes’ key principles in his philosophy, he was not afraid to speak of his criticisms of Descartes and believed his ideas needed some adaptations before they could be universally accepted. The fact that historians look back at Desgabets as perhaps a hesitant supporter of Descartes serves to reinforce the idea that Cartesianism was at the center of this debate. Historians have chosen to compare Desgabets’ philosophy and, specifically, Eucharistic theology, to that of Descartes, indicating the centricity of Descartes’ views.

In 1671, the same year of Louis XIV’s anti-Cartesian decree, an anonymous fifteen-page tract later traced to Robert Desgabets titled Considérations sur l’état présent was disseminated in Paris. This text is likely the result of a 1663 promise by Desgabets to give in good faith an explanation of the manner in which the body of our Savior is present in the Sacrament of the Alter, according to the new principles and discoveries, and to show that far from being contrary to what faith, the tradition, and the Council of Trent teach us concerning the mystery, it does not oppose even the most strongly scholastic opinions and it is only a simple and necessary complement to them.

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195 Radical, 33.
196 Penseurs, 80.
197 Ibid., 80.
198 Radical, 32
199 Ibid., 40.
As was illuminated in the previous chapters of this study, when Descartes was framing his Eucharistic theology, he focused on his writing contradicting neither the Council of Trent, nor the Church’s tradition (with the noteworthy exception of Aristotelianism). What is interesting about this statement by Desgabets is that he adds to this “the new principles and discoveries”—a clear reference to Descartes’ work. This unequivocally shows that Descartes’ principles had risen to be among the most important considerations in the debate surrounding Eucharistic theology—Desgabets went as far as to equate Descartes’ principles with the canons of the Council of Trent and the traditions of the Church.

Like the writings of Descartes, the text Desgabets produced became extremely controversial within the Church. Jean Ferrier, the royal confessor, found the text to be heretical and passed it along to Archbishop Harlay for censure. The *Considérations* focused on the debate over precisely how Christ becomes present in the Eucharist. This question had three potential answers: transubstantiation, annihilation, or the continued existence of the bread and wine following the consecration. Desgabets’ central argument in his *Considérations* was against the view held by Scotus that the bread and wine are annihilated at the consecration. The “absolute annihilation” of Eucharistic material that would be necessary was impossible on Cartesian terms, a point of contention between Descartes and Arnauld. It is important that Desgabets focused here on the fact that annihilation was not viable using Cartesian metaphysics, as this once again demonstrates the immediacy of Cartesianism in the debate surrounding Eucharistic theology. The problem

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200 Ibid., 32.
201 Ibid., 33.
202 Ibid., 33.
203 Ibid., 47.
204 Ibid., 48.
with Desgabets work, in terms of the Church doctrine, came with his particular explanation of
the alternative to annihilation, transubstantiation. The official title of Desgabets’

*Considérations* was *Considérations sur l’état présente de la controverse touchant le Très
Saint-Sacrement de l’autel, où il est traité en peu mots de l’opinion qui enseigne que la
matière du pain est changé en celle du corps de Jésus-Christ par son union substantielle à
son âme et à sa personne divine.* As the extended title stated explicitly, “the matter of the
bread is changed into the body of Jesus Christ by its substantial union to His soul and to His
divine person.” This meant that “the bread is converted into Christ’s body when its matter is
united to Christ’s soul and to His divinity.” The problem this posed in terms of the
Church’s accepted Eucharistic theology was the fact that Desgabets stated that only Christ’s
soul and divinity become present during transubstantiation, rather than the entirety of his body
and soul. According to some theologians, this bore far too much resemblance to the
Calvinistic conception of the Eucharist that Christ is spiritually, but not physically present in
the Host and wine after the consecration. To build his argument, Desgabets relied on certain
Cartesian principles, thereby aligning Cartesianism with a text that some considered
heretical. The fact that the writing of a self-professed Cartesian, Desgabets, was compared
by some to Calvinism provided even more validation to Church leaders who sought to reject
Cartesianism in favor of Aristotelianism.

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205 Ibid., 33.
206 Ibid., 33.
207 Ibid., 33.
208 Ibid., 33.

Translation: Considerations about the present state of the controversy touching the very
sacred sacrament of the alter, where it deals in few words with the opinion that teachers that
the material of the bread is changed into that of the body of Jesus Christ by the substantial
union of his soul to his divine person.
In fact, Desgabets’ conception of the Eucharist was so controversial that he was ordered by the Benedictines to “no longer speak or write” on the subject.\textsuperscript{209} This censure came despite Desgabets’ efforts to explain his intentions, saying that the Host “is in ‘an extraordinary and miraculous state’ that allows it to be united to Christ’s soul. Since a body is a human body just in case it is united with a human soul…one can say that the bread becomes Christ’s body after consecration.”\textsuperscript{210} There is no direct evidence that King Louis XIV had read Desgabets’ \textit{Considérations} before his 1671 decree and, thus, historians cannot establish a direct cause and effect link between the text and the decree. Regardless, the 1671 publication of the text does demonstrate the fact that the idea of Cartesianism being associated with potentially heretical texts was strongly present at the time. This pressing presence and the distaste for and perhaps fear of Cartesianism did, undoubtedly, contribute to Louis’ decision to enforce the 1671 decree.\textsuperscript{211}

Desgabets’ \textit{Considérations}, however, was certainly not his only contribution to the omnipresent debate surrounding Cartesian Eucharistic theology. Despite his reservations regarding complete acceptance of Cartesianism, he became something of a disciple of Descartes who was determined to aid the spread of Cartesianism in France.\textsuperscript{212} Evidence of Desgabets’ defense of Cartesianism can be found as early as 1653 when he defended a letter Descartes had sent to Mesland regarding the Real Presence. In this defense he wrote that a Cartesian could assert that “the soul is made to be united by its essence to a body”\textsuperscript{213} and “can form a unit…resulting in a composite that one can call with reason the chief work of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{209} Ibid., 34.
  \item \textsuperscript{210} Ibid., 39.
  \item \textsuperscript{211} Ibid., 33.
  \item \textsuperscript{212} Ibid., 39.
  \item \textsuperscript{213} Ibid., 39.
\end{itemize}
omnipotence, having united together in a manner so admirable two things so disproportionately.”214 In this defense of Descartes’ idea of Real Presence, Desgabets lauded Descartes’ understanding of the union of the body and soul of Christ in the Eucharist, praise that was very similar to that of Arnauld in his *Examen*. Interestingly, despite their mutual support for Descartes, Desgabets was not backed by Arnauld. Arnauld wrote that a letter he received from Desgabets “[contained] an opinion that one must acknowledge to be at least contrary to all that has been taught by the Church for 600 years.”215 He added that such an opinion “[would give the Calvinists] only the greatest advantage against the Church.”216 In fact, Arnauld believed that “Desgabets’ attempt to construct a Eucharistic theology based on Cartesian principles was as misguided as the scholastic attempt to provide such a theology based on Aristotelian categories.”217 He saw both as “[passing] off as new articles of faith that which no Council has defined and which cannot be established either by Scripture or Tradition.”218

The fact that Arnauld was such an ardent supporter of Descartes yet condemned what he perceived as Calvinist tendencies in Desgabets demonstrates the intensity of the debate and the fact that it was the seemingly smallest of details that were the difference between perceived orthodoxy and heterodoxy. The point of contention between Arnauld and Desgabets was not whether Descartes’ philosophy needed to be altered to fit the Church’s teachings, but, rather, how exactly this should have been done.219 The theologians at Port-Royal, this time including Arnauld, rejected Desgabets’ Eucharistic theology because,

214 Ibid., 39.
215 Ibid., 41.
216 Ibid., 41.
217 Ibid., 63.
218 Ibid., 63.
219 Ibid., 67.
according to Pierre Nicole, the account of the Eucharist endorsed by Desgabets and the other Benedictines was in conflict with the idea that “we receive the Eucharist in the same body that Jesus has in the heavens.” Nicole and Blaise Pascal, another Port-Royalist, combined in their adamancy that “Real Presence requires the displacement of the matter of the Eucharistic elements with matter that is numerically identical with that which composes Christ’s body,” a clear difference from Desgabets’ Eucharistic theology. Desgabets’ resolute rejection of annihilation, moreover, went against the beliefs of Nicole and Arnauld that their omnipotent God could destroy anything He created. The subtle differences in the beliefs of Desgabets and Arnauld are expertly displayed by Tad Schmaltz in his *Radical Cartesianism.* His figure is recreated below with the differences in italics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Desgabets</th>
<th>Arnauld</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eucharistic species of bread</td>
<td>Eucharistic species of bread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consist in</td>
<td>consist in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modes of bread</td>
<td>Modes of bread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inhere in</td>
<td>inhere in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impenetrable quantity of bread</td>
<td>Impenetrable quantity of bread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>identical to</em></td>
<td><em>subsists apart from</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matter of bread</td>
<td>Matter of bread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>substantially united with</em></td>
<td><em>annihilated and replaced by</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christ’s soul to constitute</td>
<td>Penetrable extension of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christ’s body</td>
<td>Christ’s heavenly body</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Schmaltz’s figure clearly illuminates the fundamental differences between the Eucharistic theology of Desgabets and Arnauld, which shows why Arnauld joined his colleagues at Port-Royal in their decision not to support Desgabets. The most important difference to be noted in this figure is the distinction between Desgabets’ interpretations that the “matter of the bread

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220 Ibid., 46.
221 Ibid., 46.
222 Ibid., 47.
223 Ibid., 60.
[is] substantially united with Christ’s soul to constitute Christ’s body” and that of Arnauld which stated that the “matter of the bread [is] annihilated and replaced by penetrable extension of Christ’s body.” Once again, this difference was critical to Arnauld because he believed that Desgabets’ idea that only the soul of Christ informed the Eucharist would be seen as heretical because the Church believed that all of Christ—body and soul—were present in the Eucharist and that by the omnipotence of God the body was separated from its extension. The fact that Desgabets and Arnauld found themselves in such a conflict is, moreover, indicative of the re-ignition of the debate surrounding the philosophical underpinnings of the Eucharist that was caused by Descartes’ writing on the subject.

Desgabets’ contribution to this debate is further interesting because he, like Arnauld, defended the use of the philosophy to explain theology in a letter with clear, if inexplicit, references to Descartes. He wrote that he would try to demonstrate how

We can form a complete harmony and bring together well the sciences divine and human, which is without a doubt what there is that is the most delightful in the well-read world; it is not necessary nevertheless to imagine that the mystery there consists other things than an entrenchment of the whole mystery.224

This letter demonstrates not only Desgabets’ desire to explain how he could explain how to reconcile philosophy and theology, but also the omnipresence of the debate surrounding the ‘harmonizing’ of human and divine sciences within the learned world. He continued, writing that one should begin “with the consideration of the divine perfection, not only simply because God, being the being supremely perfect, he should be the first object of our thoughts,

224 Dom Robert Desgabets, Œuvres philosophiques inédites, ed. J. Beaude (Amsterdam: Quadatures, 1983), 2. Original: On peut former une harmonie complète et bien accordante des sciences divines et humaines, qui est sans doute ce qu’il y a de plus ravissant dans le monde lettré ; il ne faut pas néanmoins s’imaginer que le mystère qu’il y a en cela consiste en autre chose qu’au retrandement de tout mystère.
but mainly because this consideration is effectively the true source from which we should draw the most noble truths.”\textsuperscript{225} As such, Desgabets began his discussion of the harmony between philosophy and theology with a discussion of divine perfections from which, he said, on can draw the most noble truths. Desgabets then turned to the same debate Arnauld faced—that of whether new philosophy should automatically be assumed worse than old. He wrote,

\begin{quote}
It will be mostly here where it appeared that the oldest truths and the most common among men make a very new agreement that we hadn’t yet heard before our days, as much as we had reversed by the prejudices not uncommon and old what the most brilliant knowledge of reason made obvious to us.\textsuperscript{226}
\end{quote}

From this citation one can infer that Desgabets did in fact believe that a new philosophy should be used in conjunction with the old one and that this ‘new’ philosophy should include that of Descartes. Desgabets went on to discuss the creations of God, including substances, bodies, accidents, and angels.\textsuperscript{227} He then began to explain his conception of the union of natural science and the divine. He wrote,

\begin{quote}
As for the man, who is composed of body and soul, it is in a continual experience of the union of these two substances as much by the infinite impressions that it feels of its body and, by its means, things of its surroundings that act on it, that by voluntary movements that the soul imparts on its body and, by its means, on the environmental things it touches…The display of these truths that are so simple and so few, gives me the opportunity to advance here an admirable paradox that is that it is
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{225} Ibid., 2.

Original: Par la considération des perfections divines, non pas simplement parce que Dieu étant l’être souverainement parfait il doit être le premier objet de nos pensées, mais principalement parce que cette considération est effectivement la vraie source d’où l’on doit tirer les plus grandes vérités.

\textsuperscript{226} Ibid., 2.

Original: Ce sera principalement ici où il paraîtra que les vérités les plus anciennes et les plus communes parmi les hommes font un concert très nouveau et qu’on n’avait point encore entendu avant nos jours, d’autant qu’on avait renversés par des préjugés non moins communs et anciens ce que les plus brillantes lumières de la raison nous font sauter aux yeux.

\textsuperscript{227} Ibid., 3.
there that there is almost all that is necessary to get to the bottom of all the great truths.\textsuperscript{228}

As such, Desgabets believed he could justify the use of philosophy to explain the Church’s mystery of transubstantiation. What is important to remember, however, is that Desgabets’ desire to validate such a use of philosophy was motivated largely by his defense of Descartes. Desgabets was certainly not the only prominent philosopher to join this debate. Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646-1716) also played a key role despite the fact that he was only a toddler when Descartes died in 1650. Unlike Desgabets, Leibniz proved strongly anti-Cartesian. It is particularly interesting that Leibniz chose to assert himself as anti-Cartesian because, unlike many of his contemporaries who entered into this debate, his views could hardly be construed as orthodox with respect to the Catholic Church. He was, in fact, a German Protestant. However, Leibniz’s contribution to this debate is critical even though he was neither French nor Catholic. The fact that someone without a close tie to this debate weighed in on this issue further demonstrates the significance of the debate surrounding Cartesian Eucharistic theology in seventeenth-century France. In 1669 or 1670, Leibniz set out to write his \textit{Demonstrationes Catholicae} which surfaced in 1679. The text was to address a plethora of issues including transubstantiation.\textsuperscript{229}

\textsuperscript{228} Ibid., 3.

Original: Quant à l’homme, qui est un composé de corps et d’âme il est dans une expérience continuelle de l’union de ces deux substances, tant par les infinies impressions qu’il ressent de son corps et, par son moyen, des choses environnantes qui agissent sur lui, que par les mouvements volontiers que l’âme imprime à son corps et, par son moyen, aux choses environnantes qu’il touche. L’exposition de ces vérités qui sont si simples en en si petit nombre, me donne occasion d’avancer ici un admirable paradoxe qui est que c’est la presque tout ce qui est nécessaire pour entrer dans le fond de toutes les grandes vérités.

Having clearly delineated the philosophy he would be discussing, Leibniz began breaking transubstantiation down into pieces. First, “The theory that [Leibniz] proposed laconically to Arnauld and was supposed to speak about the drawbacks of the Cartesian doctrine, rests on a different notion of substances.” Rather than accepting Aristotelian or Cartesian understandings of substance, Leibniz wrote that, “Substance is being which subsists in itself.” He expanded, writing that “Being which subsists in itself is that which has a principle of action within itself.” This meant that

Taken as an individual, being which subsists in itself, or substance (either one), is a suppositum. In fact, the Scholastics customarily define a suppositum as a substantial individual. Now actions pertain to supposita. Thus, a suppositum has within itself a principle of action, or it acts. Therefore being which subsists in itself has a principle of action within it.

That is, for Leibniz the important defining characteristic of a substance was that it had a principle of action within itself. This definition of substance clearly differed greatly from that of Descartes, and Leibniz was adamant that his explanation of substance was superior to the one provided by Cartesian metaphysics. Leibniz then explained that “No body has a principle of motion within itself apart from a concurrent mind.” Because Leibniz defined substance as that which has a principle of motion within itself, one must conclude that substance does not exist apart from a concurrent mind. Leibniz added that that which does not meet the requirement of having a principle of motion within itself, or being substance, is appearance or accident and that “substance is union with mind. Thus the substance of the human body is

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230 Problems, 288. 
Original: La théorie qu’il [a] propos[é] laconiquement à Arnauld et qui devrait parler aux inconvénients de la doctrine cartésienne, repose sur une autre notion des substances. 
231 Philosophical Papers, 115.  
232 Ibid., 115.  
233 Ibid., 115.  
234 Ibid., 116.
union with the human mind, and the substance of the bodies which lack reason is union with the universal mind, or God.”235 Leibniz defined transubstantiation, then as being when “its union with the concurring mind is changed.”236 One critical detail of Leibniz’s understanding of substance is that for him the Eucharistic Host is not the same as an average substance. Rather, “The bread is not a real substance, but an aggregate, a ‘substantialized’ result of innumerable monads because of an added union that is substantial and that produces a ens novem, more exactly that is itself this new product by the monads.”237 Leibniz’s assertion that the bread is not a real substance differs deeply from the philosophy of Descartes. Moreover, while Descartes saw substance as the essential elements of a thing and Aristotle as its essence, Leibniz strongly disagreed. He wrote, “It seems too that what makes the essence of an entity through aggregation is only a state of being of its constituent entities.”238 He followed with an example: “What makes the essence of an army is only a state of being of the constituent men. This state of being therefore presupposes a substance, whose essence is not a state of being of another substance.”239 This basic awareness of Leibniz’s conception of substance and, thus, what he understands to be involved in transubstantiation is crucial to elucidating the rest of his Eucharistic theology.

Not surprisingly, one of the main points of contention between Leibniz and Descartes with respect to the Eucharist focused on the accidents. Leibniz set up his philosophy of the accidents by asserting that within the process of transubstantiation, only the substantial forms

235 Ibid., 116.
236 Ibid., 116.
237 Problems, 295.
Original: Le pain n’est pas une vraie substance, mais un agrégat, un ‘substantié’ résultant de monades innombrables grâce à une union surajoutée qui est substantielle et qui produit un ens novum, plus exactement qui est elle-même cet être nouveau produit par les monades.
239 Ibid., 106.
are changed. He wrote, “A body which is...transubstantiated is changed in no way except in
the substantial form or idea of the concurring mind. That in which nothing is changed except
the concurrent mind can retain all its qualities or accidents or, if you prefer, species.”240
Thus, Leibniz concluded that “all accidents or species are preserved in the transubstantiated
bread and wine; extension, firmness, color, odor, etc., can remain.”241 As such, Leibniz
asserted his view of ‘real accidents’—the idea that they adhere to the union and are
undamaged. Clearly, Leibniz and Descartes and, then, Arnauld, disagreed strongly on the
question of the real accidents. This was, of course, a major disagreement because the real
accidents had been such a powerful point of contention between Descartes and his Catholic
critics. Moreover, Leibniz was a prominent and respected philosopher of his era. The fact
that he juxtaposed his Eucharistic theology directly with that of Descartes demonstrates the
importance of Cartesianism and the fact that for one to be respected for his Eucharistic
theology within the scholarly community of 17th century France, it needed to not only be
compared with the ancient understanding of the Church, but also with Cartesianism.

Leibniz then addressed the issue of how Christ’s body and blood can be present in so
many locations simultaneously—in all of the Hosts and sips of consecrated wine in all of the
locations of masses. This was the counterpart to Descartes’ explanation of extension and the
fact that all of Christ’s physical body did not have to be present for the entirety of his body
and soul to be really present in the Eucharist. Because Leibniz’s view of substance asserted
that a body cannot have a principle of motion apart from a concurrent mind,242 he began his
explanation of multi-location by stating that, “Mind can think many things together, therefore

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240 *Philosophical Papers*, 226.
241 Ibid., 116.
242 Ibid., 116.
mind can by its action be in many places at once.”

If the mind can then allow for substances in many places, “the mind of Christ can impart operation, action, or subsistence both of the glorious body of Christ and to the species of the consecrated bread and wine, at the same time, and in varying cases in varying places on the earth.” Leibniz’s explanation of how Christ can be present in all the necessary locations at once is unequivocally profoundly different than that of Descartes and these differences are rooted in their understandings of substance.

In addition to this philosophical delineating of Leibniz’s conception of transubstantiation, he also discussed the issue in his correspondence. First, in a letter to Des Bosses dated February 5, 1712, he explained the issue through monads. He first asserted that corporal substance cannot be thought of simply as a collection of monads. He wrote,

If a corporeal substance is something real in addition to monads…it will have to be said that corporeal substance consists in a kind of union or rather, in a real unifier superadded to the monads by God and that out of the union of the passive power of the monads there arises primary matter or the impulsion to extension and antitypy or to diffusion and resistance. From the union of the monadic entelechies, however, there arises a substantial form.

Leibniz continued by emphasizing the importance of this union, “But whatever can arise and be extinguished in this way is also destroyed by cessation of the union, unless it is conserved miraculously by God.” This reference to the conservation of the substantial form being lost when the union ceases unless it is saved by the omnipotence of God is critical as it is here that in Leibniz’s philosophy, as in Descartes’ one sees a reliance on the divine and, as such, one once again sees the tenuous juxtaposition of science and religion. He added that the soul,

\[243\] Ibid., 117.
\[244\] Ibid., 117.
\[245\] Ibid., 600.
\[246\] Ibid., 600.
which is indivisible, cannot be considered a substantial form.²⁴⁷ He went on to explain that the substantial form is in constant flux, just like matter, because no part of the matter stays in the same location for more than just a moment.²⁴⁸ The soul, however, “remains the same in all of its changes”²⁴⁹ and the subject remains the same. This concept, however, is not true of corporeal substances which, to Leibniz, meant that he must assert their existence on faith. He explained how transubstantiation works with corporeal substances, writing that, “Substance consists in that unifying reality which adds something absolute and hence substantial, even though fluid, to the things to be united. It is in the change of this being that your transubstantiation would have to be located.”²⁵⁰ That is, transubstantiation would have to occur at the moment of the unification because it is there that corporeal substance comes into being.

Interestingly, the powerfully anti-Cartesian Leibniz was in regular correspondence with Antoine Arnauld beginning in 1671 and, like Descartes, he received criticism from the Port-Royalist regarding his philosophy. Also like Descartes, Leibniz solicited critiques from Arnauld for the manuscript of his Discourse on Metaphysics.²⁵¹ Because Leibniz took such an interest in the ideas of Arnauld, the Leibniz-Arnauld correspondence runs the gamut of Leibniz’s metaphysics. Naturally, however, much of their discussion can be, and was, applied to the Eucharistic debate. For example, in 1686 the two engaged the question of the multi-location of Christ. In his letters to Arnauld, Leibniz provided an explanation parallel to that which was found in his other writings, but used different examples and logic so as to explain

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 600.
²⁴⁸ Ibid., 600.
²⁴⁹ Ibid., 600.
²⁵⁰ Ibid., 600.
his view in a different way. Arnauld who, of course, sought to defend Cartesianism, began the discussion by asking “how there can be more than one Adam, is Adam is individualized by his complete concept.”252 Arnauld wrote on May 13, 1686, “I do not know how by taking Adam as the example of a singular nature one can conceive of many possible Adams. It is as though I were to conceive of many possible varieties of myself, which is certainly inconceivable.”253 He went on to explain his logic, writing,

For I cannot think of myself without considering myself as a singular nature, so distinct from any other existing or possible that I can as little conceive of different varieties of myself as of a circle whose diameters are not all of equal length. The reason is that these different varieties of myself would all be distinct from another, otherwise, there would not be many of them. Thus one of these varieties of myself would necessarily not be me: which is manifestly a contradiction.254

Arnauld’s logic here is fascinating, as he was using concrete mathematics to explain his understanding of himself and other humans, which, of course, was applied to theology, clearly demonstrating the overlap of the spheres of natural philosophy and religion. Leibniz responded to Arnauld on July 14 of the same year that in order to conceive of several Adams one must think of Adam abstractly. Arnauld further pressed Leibniz by suggesting that humans cannot see the world the way God does, which he asserted Leibniz was trying to do with his concept of individualized substance. “Divine understanding is the rule of the truth of things, as they are in themselves, but so long as we are in this life it does not seem to me that it can be the rule as far as we are concerned.”255 Leibniz responded, claiming that while he agreed that humans can not conceive of things in the same manner as God, it was enough to know that God’s conception existed. “I acknowledge that there are many things in divine

252 Ibid., xxi.
253 Ibid., 30.
254 Ibid., 30.
255 Ibid., 30.
knowledge that we cannot understand, but it seems to me that one need not delve into them to resolve our problem.”\textsuperscript{256} This section of the Leibniz-Arnauld correspondence employs a great deal of complex philosophy. It is important not to lose sight of the question at hand, the question that Leibniz, like Descartes, sought to resolve using his metaphysics—how can Christ be present in multiple locations. For Leibniz, the answer lay in an abstract understanding of individualized substances, an understanding that needed to be left to God. What is also important to remember is that in this series of complicated philosophy Leibniz sought to counter Descartes’ assertions regarding what should be the accepted understanding of the mystery of the Eucharist, further demonstrating the fact that the writing of Descartes sparked a great deal of discussion about the Eucharist and how it could be explained philosophically within the 17\textsuperscript{th} century French scholarly community.

This chapter has demonstrated the profound impact Cartesianism had on the philosophical-theological community of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century. After Descartes’ death, his writing found both passionate supporters and opponents both in France and elsewhere in Europe. The French government and the powerful Sorbonne, beginning in the 1660s, realized that the Cartesianism they perceived as dangerous largely because of its implications in terms of Eucharistic theology, was on the rise and needed to be contained. As such, a series of laws were passed intended to silence the Cartesian voices both within the scholarly community and outside the universities. Despite these laws, Descartes’ supporters were far from silent. Antoine Arnauld’s \textit{Examen} provides the perfect example of the Cartesian anti-Cartesian dichotomy as the work provided the objections of Antoine Arnauld, a passionate supporter of Descartes, to Father Le Moine, a zealous promoter not only of anti-Cartesianism, but of the

\textsuperscript{256} Ibid., 59.
superiority of the Church and ancient philosophy over the works of modern philosophy. The support of Le Moine for ancient philosophy demonstrates the apprehension present within the theological community surrounding the criticism of Aristotelianism by many Scientific Revolution thinkers. This text illuminates for the historian the intensity of the debate surrounding Descartes’ work and also the immediacy of the tension between philosophy and religion of the era. Within the polemical Cartesian-anti-Cartesian spectrum, Dom Roberts Desgabets found himself somewhere in the middle—he was not afraid to point out the flaws of Descartes though he generally agreed with his writing and chose to attach himself to the label of Cartesianism. Like Descartes, Desgabets came under fire from the French authorities for his view of the Eucharist that was accused of having Calvinist leanings. Moreover, Desgabets’ connection to the legacy is clear as his 1671 *Considérations* is believed to have helped motivated Louis XIV to make his decree against Cartesianism. Even in the unlikely event that this direct link were proven faulty, the fact that the debate surrounding Cartesianism was both ubiquitous and divisive in mid-seventeenth century France is incontestable. The intricacies, nuances, and passion of this debate are further demonstrated by the fact that Antoine Arnauld joined his Port-Royal colleagues in their decision not to support Desgabets, a self-proclaimed Cartesian. The importance of this debate is moreover confirmed by the sheer prestige of Leibniz. The fact that such a prominent philosopher at the time was so deeply involved in the Cartesian Eucharistic debate demonstrates its magnitude. Leibniz contested Descartes on nearly every fundamental issue of Eucharistic transubstantiation including the meaning of substance and the existence of the real accidents.

What is clear from the fierce philosophical-theological debate that emerged in France in the 1660’s surrounding the Eucharist and Cartesianism is that Descartes had unintentionally
re-ignited an age old debate—but this time with a twist; Aristotelianism was not only being challenged by Descartes, but by many thinkers of the Scientific Revolution. As has been established, members of the Catholic Church had been debating the issue of the philosophical underpinnings of the sacrament of the Eucharist since the Middle Ages. In that sense, Descartes’ criticism was not unique. However, the timing of Descartes’ criticism juxtaposed with his specific views caused his contribution to the debate to change it forever. Descartes lived in an era where the Church found itself on the defensive from both the Reformation and the Scientific Revolution. Both of these events likely caused Descartes’ writings on the Eucharist to receive more attention than the critics who came before him. These same events also opened the eyes of both the Church and philosophers to the possibility of new solutions to old questions. Descartes proposed that the Aristotelian-Thomist hylomorphism be replaced with his own metaphysics. The timing of such a proposition was perfect as Aristotelianism was already being fiercely contested in other fields by thinkers of the Scientific Revolution, and the debate surrounding his suggestion exploded. The question of what the Church should do about the lingering internal questions about the philosophy behind the Eucharist was not answered by the time Descartes died in 1650 and it continued to fuel a hot debate for decades. Throughout this ensuing debate, Descartes and his writing were the focal point. Every theologian and philosopher who wanted to propound a theory regarding the Eucharist was forced to classify himself either as Cartesian or anti-Cartesian and to work to integrate his own thoughts with those of René Descartes. As such, the writings of a lay philosopher forever changed a debate internal to the Roman faith that dated back to the Middle Ages.

The Church never acquiesced to Cartesianism—or any other philosophy other than hylomorphism. Regardless of the lack of change, the Church’s forced consideration, and
ultimate rejection of Cartesianism was undeniably one of the most formative events in the
development of its Eucharistic theology. Moreover, the Church’s rejection of the ‘new’
science and natural philosophy of the Scientific Revolution and, specifically, of Descartes, set
a critical precedent for the Church, making future rejection of science more probable and,
likely, easier. Moreover, the fact that the Church chose to reject Cartesianism and all other
new philosophies that had risen to the forefront during the Scientific Revolution was, in and
of itself, a significant choice for the Church. When the Church originally chose to employ
Aristotelianism to explain the sacrament of the Eucharist, Aristotelianism was the universally
accepted understanding of mechanics and, essentially, all of science. The Church, then, had
little choice but to use Aristotelianism to explain the sacrament. However, with
Aristotelianism having been rejected by the scientific community in the late seventeenth
century, the Church’s decision to continue to employ the Aristotelian-Thomist hylomorphism
demonstrates a decision by the Church to break away from contemporary modern science.
While the Church had previously been intertwined with nearly every other aspect of life, this
break from science was a significant factor in the Church’s becoming isolated, something that
would mark the institution during the Enlightenment.
Conclusion

René Descartes is famous for his contributions to philosophy and science. Students all over the world learn about the Cartesian Coordinate Plane in geometry courses and librarians store Descartes’ writings in the Philosophy section of their stacks, not in their divinity schools. Descartes’ philosophy, moreover, is perhaps most well-known for his line “I think therefore I am,” not his metaphysics, even though his mechanical philosophy, along with the other mechanists of his era, was an important element of the revelations of the Scientific Revolution. One could read countless overviews of the Reformation and even histories of Catholic theology and find not a single mention of the natural philosopher. Nevertheless, the impact of Cartesianism on the internal Catholic Eucharistic debate was profound. Descartes re-ignited a debate that dated back to the Middle Ages. He re-ignited it at a time when the world he lived in was perhaps at a “critical mass” of tension between philosophy and religion—a world that was already questioning the Aristotelianism he pitted his own mechanical philosophy against. This was also a world in which the Catholic Church, recovering and rebuilding from the Reformation, found itself at a crossroads where change was, perhaps more than ever, a real possibility for the institution.

Chapter one established the Church’s long development of the doctrine of transubstantiation, demonstrating the importance of the doctrine within the faith even before it was officially sanctioned by the Church. It further elucidated the Church’s acceptance of Aristotelian-Thomist hylomorphism as the mechanical philosophy used to explain its most sacred sacrament, the sacrament of the Eucharist. As was explained, this decision to employ hylomorphism was not surprising, given that Aristotelianism was the accepted “correct” mechanical philosophy of the time. As such, the pre-Trent Church placed itself in the
mainstream of contemporary modern science. This is important, as this meant that at the time even the most mysterious sacrament of the Church could be explained using accepted natural philosophy. This chapter further pointed out that the Council of Trent, which, among many other things, officially defined the sacrament of the Eucharist in response to the Reformation that was splintering Christendom, did not include hylomorphism in its canons, meaning that despite its essentially universal acceptance at the time, the Church chose to leave the philosophical explanation out of the official doctrine.

While chapter one set up the theological context of this study, chapter two addressed the new post-Trent context of Descartes’ writings—the potent collision of the Reformation and the Scientific Revolution. While dissent concerning the Eucharist existed prior to the Reformation, it was not nearly as pernicious as that which came with the reform because it did not threaten to fundamentally change the Eucharistic doctrine, but, rather, to more effectively define it. Moreover, with the advent of the Reformation came immeasurable religious tension in France as the bloody and violent Wars of Religion pitted the French Huguenots against the Catholics. Despite a tenuous peace in the Edict of Nantes, sixteenth and seventeenth century France was marked by constant fear of a relapse into war. On a more individual level, the intense intolerance of the era meant that dissenters from the Catholic faith risked censure and punishment, something Descartes had to be acutely aware of when his writing turned to the Eucharist. At the same time as the Protestant splinter religions were challenging the authority of the Catholic Church, the thinkers of the Scientific Revolution were, among other things, challenging the authority of Aristotelian mechanical philosophy. Aristotelianism was rejected in nearly every field of science, leaving the Church with a serious question—would it continue to rely on the Aristotelianism that was quickly losing support to explain its most
hallowed mystery, or would it follow the trend of contemporary science and accept a new mechanical philosophy?

Chapter three of this study outlined one of the primary mechanical philosophies that the Church could have chosen to accept, Cartesianism. A self-professed Catholic, Descartes originally set out to write only secular philosophical works. Following the criticism from his contemporaries pointing out the theological implications of his metaphysics, particularly with respect to the sacrament of the Eucharist, Descartes eventually decided to specifically address how his metaphysics could be used to more efficaciously explain the mechanics of the doctrine of transubstantiation. Descartes addressed all of the key issues regarding the philosophical underpinnings of the sacrament, including substance, accident, extension, and mechanism of change. The specifics of Descartes’ Eucharistic theology are critical, as the Church’s decision to accept or reject the new mechanical philosophy was, of course, based on the intricate details of Descartes’ metaphysics.

The fourth chapter of this work addressed French Cartesianism in the second half of the seventeenth century. Cartesianism became the focal point of the Eucharistic debate in France as philosophers and theologians of the era took polemical stances on the issue and the debate became one of “Cartesianism vs anti-Cartesianism.” Both the French crown and the Sorbonne attempted to systematically suppress Cartesianism both in the universities and French society in general. Within the theological community, Antoine Arnauld continued to be one of the primary voices of support for Cartesianism, as was epitomized by his *Examen*, which advocated for the philosophy of Descartes against Father Le Moine, an ardent anti-Cartesian. Dom Robert Desgabets, a self-proclaimed Cartesian received criticism from Port-Royal, and even from Descartes’ zealous supporter, Arnauld. Desgabets’ Eucharistic
theology was frequently compared to that of Jean Calvin, tying Cartesianism to heresy in the minds of some. Influential philosopher and German Protestant Wilhelm Gottfried Leibniz’s decision to weigh in on the subject demonstrates the perceived importance of the debate surrounding Cartesianism and the Eucharist within the larger European scholarly community. The centricity of the Cartesian-anti-Cartesian dichotomy with respect to the Eucharist and the fact that substantial support was present on both sides of the issue demonstrates the significant choice the Church had to make. Had the ecclesiastical hierarchy decided that it wanted to continue the trend of joining itself with contemporary modern mechanical philosophy, support for Cartesianism, and the rejection of Aristotelianism in general, existed within the philosophical-theological community. At the same time, Church conservatives who favored a continued reliance on Aristotelianism found justification in the same community.

The Roman Church’s decision to continue to employ the Aristotelian-Thomist hylomorphism it had depended upon since long before the Council of Trent was anything but a simple continuation of the past. Descartes’ metaphysics, coming at such a tumultuous time for the Church, faced with the twin challenges of the Reformation and the Scientific Revolution, caused the Catholic Church to, once again, deeply consider its Eucharistic theology and, this time, the possibility of re-defining the philosophical underpinnings of the sacrament. The Church’s ultimate decision to reject the new mechanical philosophy that had so dramatically impacted European society in the seventeenth-century demonstrates a conscious break on the part of the Church from contemporary modern natural philosophy. This was not simply an erudite concept; the Church’s decision to continue to rely on an archaic and almost universally dismissed mechanical philosophy meant that its most sacred sacrament could no longer be explained using contemporary modern science. In fact, this
changed the nature of the faith. While the Church had, of course, always emphasized faith and believed in miracles, prior to the Scientific Revolution the Church could explain many of its mysteries using science, including transubstantiation. The fact that the Church could no longer do this after the universal rejection of Aristotelianism outside the Church meant that Catholics had to take even more beliefs of the Church on faith alone. That is, as elements of Church doctrine became less explicable on natural philosophical terms, believers were forced to believe even more miracles that could no longer be rationally explained by science. Largely for this reason, this break from the mainstream contributed to the Church’s movement away from its previous state of being completely intertwined in essentially all elements of European life and, instead, moved the Church towards the isolation that characterized the institution during the Enlightenment.
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