

ST THOMAS AND THE EUCHARISTIC CONVERSION

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It is hardly possible to read the encyclical *Fides et ratio* without being struck by its insistence upon the need for philosophy, and especially metaphysics, in Christian theology. Among the many reasons cited for this need, one stands out as fundamental.

The word of God refers constantly to things which transcend human experience and even human thought; but this "mystery" could not be revealed, nor could theology render it in some way intelligible, were human knowledge limited strictly to the world of sense experience. Metaphysics thus plays an essential role of mediation in theological research. (John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, §83)

The following study concerns a particular case of this sort of mediating role of metaphysics in theology. It is a small but dominant element in St Thomas Aquinas's doctrine of the Eucharist: his account of the nature of the sacramental conversion, or what is traditionally called transubstantiation.

What has suggested this study to me is a recent article by Germain Grisez on Jesus' substantial presence in the Eucharist.⁽¹⁾ Grisez takes issue with St. Thomas's doctrine. Not only his theme, but also his attacks on Thomas, have much to do with "metaphysical mediation."

page 529

page 530

Grisez is not accusing Thomas of teaching things contrary to the faith (113). Rather, he is delivering judgment from the standpoint proper to the theologian, that of "faith seeking understanding." His charge is that a number of Thomas's central positions on Christ's presence in the Eucharist are simply unintelligible.

Of these positions, all but one have to do with the accidents found in the sacrament (either those of the bread and wine, or Jesus' own) and their relation to the substance of Jesus' body and blood. The other position concerns transubstantiation.

Grisez's objections are all serious and worth pondering, even if none is actually fatal to Thomas's account.⁽²⁾ The strongest, I think, is the one about transubstantiation.⁽³⁾ With a view to better understanding Thomas, I also find it the most fruitful to engage. As I hope we shall see, not least among the results is an appreciation of the truly theological nature of the account.

I. The Objection

The purpose of the doctrine of transubstantiation is to specify the kind of change that takes place when the sacrament of the Eucharist is performed. Before the priest utters the words of the consecration--"This is my body," "This is the cup of my blood"--the host and the contents of the chalice are bread and wine. Afterwards, they are the body and blood of Christ. As Thomas sees it, this change must consist in the conversion of the substance of the bread into the substance of Christ's body, and the

conversion of the substance of the wine into the substance of his blood (*STh* III, q. 75, a. 4). Grisez recognizes that this is in accordance with conciliar teaching both before and after Thomas (111-12), and so far he has no objection.

In Thomas's account, however, the sacramental conversion has something unique about it. In contrast with all other types of conversion, this one has no "subject," in the proper sense of the term. There is no underlying substrate that undergoes it, no material component that belongs first to one term of the conversion and then to the other. This means that nothing in the substance of the bread, not even its matter, is carried over to the body of Christ.⁽⁴⁾ The whole substance of the bread passes away, leaving the substance of Christ's body in its stead. According to Thomas, it is in view of this unique feature that the sacramental conversion is given the special name "transubstantiation" (*STh* III, q. 75, a. 4). He judges that such a change exceeds the capacity of any created agency. It can happen only through the power of God.

Of course this is in God's power only if it is something possible in itself, something conceivable or intelligible. What Grisez finds unintelligible is a conversion in which the first term contributes nothing of itself to the reality of the second. "The very idea of converting A into B seems to me to imply that something of A contributes to the reality of B" (119).

Grisez assures us that he is not simply rejecting the notion of a conversion of a "whole" substance into another substance. He thinks it can be meaningful to speak of such a conversion. But he has his own way of understanding it. He takes it to mean a "substantial change without residue" (123). In such a change, nothing having the nature of the first substance remains. The matter of the first substance, however, does remain. It takes on the nature of the second substance. The change is a transformation (*ibid.*). Yet the "whole" first substance is changed, in the sense that no portion of it stays untransformed. All of its

material is integrated into the second substance. None of the first substance is left. On this account, the Eucharist is not the only real example of such a conversion. For instance, when the corpse of Lazarus was brought back to life, Grisez says, "it is surely meaningful, and it seems correct, to say that the corpse's whole substance became Lazarus's again-living self. All the corpse's material was reconstituted into Lazarus's living body, leaving nothing behind" (118).

In Thomas's conception, the matter of the first substance is not incorporated into the second substance. It is simply eliminated. The conversion is not a mere transformation. It is a sheer succession from one whole substance to another. Grisez does not think that such a succession can deserve to be called a conversion. The terms of a conversion must have a common element. Thomas is emptying the word "conversion" of its meaning.

Aquinas holds that one can rightly say that the body of Christ comes from the bread and that the substance of the bread is converted into Christ's body. But in saying these things, one can only mean, on his view, that the bread was the antecedent for Jesus' coming to be in the sacrament by a process in which the antecedent contributes nothing whatever to what follows from it. (118-19)

One might wonder why Thomas even employs such language.

Of course, even on Aquinas's view, the bread and wine are necessary antecedents both because Jesus used them when he instituted the sacrament and because they leave behind accidents that serve as the sacramental sign under which Jesus is present and in which he is contained. But those requirements could have been met by saying that the bread and the wine are annihilated and replaced by Jesus' body and blood. And this way of putting matters might seem a more accurate account of what Aquinas thinks is happening: first one reality is there and then it no longer exists, its place being taken by a second reality that has nothing whatever in common with the first. (119)

Grisez explains why Thomas insists on speaking of a conversion.

Aquinas, however, rejects any account involving annihilation. He thinks such an account would require that Jesus replace the bread and wine by moving from

page 533

heaven into the elements, with the result that he would be in as many different places as there are consecrated species--something Aquinas considers impossible. (119)

This is the decisive point for Thomas: the body of Christ cannot begin to exist in the sacrament by any change in the body itself (*STh* III, q. 75, a. 2). It must do so by a change undergone by something else. The bread must be changed into it. So he adopts the language of conversion. The bread is converted into the body of Christ, by the power of God.

Grisez's charge is that if the bread and the body of Christ have nothing in common, this language is meaningless. Evidently he judges that if the bread does not contribute anything, then as far as bringing about the body of Christ is concerned, it is superfluous. It is no better than nothing. It may as well be annihilated.

Grisez notes that Thomas himself perceives a need to identify some sort of subject for the sacramental conversion. Thomas observes that the bread and the body of Christ are not things that exist in a subject. Hence there can be no subject underlying the change from one to the other. "So," he says, "since this substantial conversion implies a certain order of the substances, one of which is converted into the other, it exists as in a subject in both substances, in the way that order and number do."⁽⁵⁾ Grisez sees this as a rather desperate attempt to avoid the kind of problem that he is raising. He counters:

That explanation confuses logic with reality. Logically, the concepts of bread and of Jesus' body can serve together as the subject of *conversion*, functioning as a two-term relational predicate (just as those concepts can serve together as the subjects of ordering and numbering predicates). But if, as Aquinas maintains, there is no real continuity between the bread and Jesus' body, the two substances share nothing that could make them be together the subject of anything real. Yet transubstantiation is a real conversion. (120)

The issue, then, is whether the very notion of "a conversion" can be saved in Thomas's conception of transubstantiation. If not,

page 534

then the conception must be judged unintelligible. "And since the unintelligible is impossible, not even God can do it" (119).

II. The Conversion of a Whole Substance

Before examining Thomas's conception, we should say something about Grisez's own way of understanding a conversion of one whole substance into another. As he reminds us (112), the Council of Trent's Decree on the Eucharist uses this language.⁽⁶⁾ But I find it quite implausible that the council could have meant it in his way, or even in a way compatible with his.⁽⁷⁾

Grisez gives the term "whole" a quantitative sense. It refers to "every bit" of the substance. A whole substance is converted when no portion of it is left behind or nothing with its nature remains. All of its matter takes on the nature of another substance. The "whole" corpse of Lazarus was converted into living Lazarus in this sense: no part of the corpse stayed dead.

This way of distinguishing between the conversion of a "whole" substance and the conversion of only a part or portion of a substance is certainly intelligible. It can also have useful applications. For instance, we might point out that in digestion, normally only a portion of the food is converted

into a living body. Another portion is left over and expelled as residue.

But can this possibly be what Trent means in speaking of the conversion of the "whole" substance of the bread and wine into

page 535

the substance of Christ's body and blood? What would its point be? It would serve to prevent us from thinking that only a portion of the bread in the consecrated host has been converted into the body of Christ, while another portion has remained bread. But who would think that? Some of the bread is converted, and some is not? This is not at all the doctrine of "impanation," according to which the body of Christ comes to exist in the host together with the bread. On that doctrine, none of the bread is converted. The Council of Trent was certainly concerned to rule out impanation. But if someone grants that the consecration does convert at least a part of the bread into the body of Christ, why would he or she think that another part has to remain unconverted? Has anyone ever held such a view?

On the other hand, at least one theologian prior to Trent did hold a view remarkably similar to Grisez's. Early in the 14th century, the Dominican theologian Durand of Saint Pourçain objected strongly to Aquinas's account of transubstantiation.⁽⁸⁾ He held that a conversion in which no component of the first term remains "is not intelligible."⁽⁹⁾ On his view, one thing is convertible into another only if they have matter in common. The very notion of a conversion implies an underlying subject. The subject would be what makes the difference between the conversion of the bread and its annihilation.⁽¹⁰⁾ Durand also proposed an alternative much like Grisez's. He suggested that the sacramental conversion resembles the conversion of food into that which is fed. It would be a kind of transformation. The matter of the bread would lose the nature of bread and take on a share in the nature of the body of Christ.⁽¹¹⁾

Of course Durand did not think that any portion of the bread was left unconverted. Yet he did not at all seek to describe transubstantiation as a "conversion of a whole substance." On the contrary, taking that expression in Thomas's sense, he argued

page 536

directly against its application to the Eucharist. He simply did not feel bound to speak of transubstantiation as a conversion of a whole substance. While acknowledging that this was what was commonly said and taught, he insisted that it was licit to take an opposing view, because the teaching of the Church left the question open.⁽¹²⁾ When Durand was writing, in fact, the Church had not yet defined transubstantiation as a conversion of a "whole" substance.

Durand's position did not go unnoticed. Two centuries later, Cardinal Cajetan, in his commentary on the *Summa Theologiae* (at III, q. 75, a. 4), spent a good deal of effort on its refutation.⁽¹³⁾ Cajetan's commentary was written thirty or forty years before the Tridentine Decree on the Eucharist.

In the background of the decree, then, we find that the description of transubstantiation as a "conversion of a whole substance" was a matter of some dispute. We also find that both sides understood the description as Thomas did. No one took it to refer merely to "all of the bread in the host." It referred to the whole substance *of* all of the bread, that is, to everything entering into the constitution of the bread's substance. The decree's intended meaning must therefore be at least very close to Thomas's. It would then have a clear point: to exclude a position like Durand's (or Grisez's). It would mark the difference between transubstantiation and mere substantial transformations. It would mean a substantial conversion that completely eliminates one substance, leaving a wholly distinct substance in its stead.⁽¹⁴⁾

III. The "Subject" of the Conversion

I now turn to the main issue: whether such a succession of substances can be understood to consist in a conversion of one into the other. The lack of an underlying subject does raise a serious question about the possibility of such a conversion. Before attempting to formulate the question with precision, it is necessary to correct two points in Grisez's report of Thomas's account of the conversion.

The first point concerns the subject of the sacramental conversion. As we saw, Thomas says that the two substances themselves somehow serve as the conversion's subject. Grisez thinks he is confusing logic with reality. I see no such confusion.

The text in question is a reply to an objection against the possibility of the conversion of bread into the body of Christ. The objection and reply are as follows.

[Objection] Every conversion is a certain change. But in every change there must be a subject that is first in potency and then in act. For as it says in *Physics* III, motion is the act of something existing in potency. But no subject of the substance of the bread and the body of Christ can be assigned, because, as it says in the *Categories*, it pertains to the notion [*ratio*] of a substance not to exist in a subject. So it cannot be that the whole substance of the bread is converted into the body of Christ. . . .

[Reply] The objection concerns formal change, because it is proper to form to exist in matter or in a subject. But the objection does not apply to the conversion of a whole substance. So, since this substantial conversion implies an order of substances, of which one is converted into another, it exists as in a subject in both substances, in the way that order and number do. (*STh* III, q. 75, a. 4, obj. 1 & ad 1)

It is clear that Thomas is not first simply denying that the conversion has a subject and then simply positing one. He is denying that it has a subject in the proper sense: a material substrate, something that is in potency to it. What he goes on to posit is only something that the conversion exists in "as" in a

subject (*sicut in subiecto*). The conversion has a subject only in some qualified sense. In the next article, in fact, Thomas refers back to this one and says explicitly that the conversion does not properly have a subject (*STh* III, q. 75, a. 5, ad 4).

However, Thomas's procedure does raise a question. Excluding a material substrate, and so answering the objection, only seems to require invoking the distinction (drawn in the body of the same article) between a "formal" change, or a transformation, and a conversion of a whole substance, a transubstantiation. Having invoked this distinction, why does he go on, seemingly out of his way or even at cross-purposes, to argue in favor of some sort of subject?

I do not think he is trying desperately to answer an objection like Grisez's. Nor is he even really going out of his way. Instead, he is simply attending to something else mentioned in the objection. This is that it pertains to the notion of a substance not to exist in a subject. To have no subject at all is proper to substances. If the sacramental conversion's nature were such that it could not have a subject in *any* sense, then the conversion itself would be a substance!⁽¹⁵⁾ It must have some sort of subject, even if not in the unqualified or proper sense.

How then should we understand the conversion's subject? Thomas seems to follow the rule given at the start of the reply: "it is proper to form to exist in matter or in a subject." He treats the conversion as a sort of form. One thing is converted into another. We analyze the concrete fact in

abstract terms and speak of "the conversion." We treat it in the manner of a form. The conversion is "of one thing into another." It involves order ("into") and number (the two things). These are kinds of form. Their subject is constituted by the terms of the order and the units of the number. So the conversion's terms, the two substances, are a sort of subject for it.

page 539

Thomas denies that this is a subject in the unqualified or proper sense. I would suggest that his reason is that it is not even an unqualifiedly "real" subject. In a way it is only a logical one.⁽¹⁶⁾

The conversion is a kind of succession, which is a type of relation.⁽¹⁷⁾ The two substances are the subject of this relation. Now, insofar as things are in succession, they are not simultaneous. When one is, the other is not.⁽¹⁸⁾ They do not exist together. Nor then can they form a real unity. Of course, each of them, in itself, is something real. But their unity, as a subject of this relation, exists only in the apprehension of reason. Hence they only constitute a logical subject, a subject of predication. They are not a subject in the proper sense, because they do not provide real matter or potency for some form or act.⁽¹⁹⁾

Thomas is not confusing logic and reality; in fact, he is being especially careful to distinguish them. At the same time, it should be observed that what I am calling the merely "logical" status of the subject of the conversion has nothing at all to do with the absence of material continuity. It is simply a result of the nonsimultaneity of the terms of the conversion. Even in an or-

page 540

dinary change, where there is material continuity, the *terms* of the change do not exist simultaneously. There is a relation of succession between them, and they are a "subject" of this relation only in a qualified sense. To be sure, such a change does have a proper subject, a real substrate. But that subject is only a component of the terms, not the terms themselves.

Moreover, the fact that the substances are only a logical subject of the succession does not at all prevent it from being a real succession. On the contrary, if the terms were functioning together as a real subject, then they would not be in real succession. They would be existing simultaneously.⁽²⁰⁾

So when Thomas posits a sort of subject for the conversion, he is not trying to make up somehow for the lack of material continuity, and he is not confused. And whether or not he is justified in calling the substantial succession a conversion, there are hardly grounds for saying that on his account, the bread and the body of Christ cannot be "the subject of anything real."

IV. A Real Change under the Accidents

The second point that needs to be corrected in Grisez's report of Thomas's account of the sacramental conversion is a lacuna. Grisez makes no mention of the role of the sacramental species, the accidents of the bread and wine. He does note that for Thomas the species serve as the sacramental sign under which Jesus is present and in which he is contained (119). But he is silent about the fact that the species are also indispensable to the conversion itself. They function, so to speak, as the hinge upon which it turns.

page 541

It is not sufficient, in order to understand the succession of substances as a conversion, to consider the accidents. But for Thomas, it is certainly necessary. A conversion is a certain kind of change. The accidents are needed in order make it possible to speak of any genuine sort of

change in the succession from the bread to the body of Christ,⁽²¹⁾ for they are the only thing that remains intact throughout the succession.

Thomas insists that there can be a real change (*mutatio*) only where something remains the same throughout. "It pertains to the very notion of a change that something one and the same be now disposed otherwise than before" (*STh* I, q. 45, a. 2, ad 2). If one thing ceases and another begins, that might suffice to speak of some sort of order of succession between them; but there is not a genuine change unless there is a constant third item that is diversified through the succession. This is why the creation of the world was not a change (*ibid.*). There was no third thing that first had non-being and then being. In contrast with creation, Thomas says, transubstantiation agrees with natural change (*transmutatio*) in this, that "in both, something one and the same remains. . . . But in different ways; for in a natural change the same matter or subject remains, while in this sacrament the same accidents remain" (*STh* III, q. 75, a. 8).

Thomas is very clear about the fact that the accidents of the bread are not a real subject or matter for the sacramental change. Still, he grants that insofar as they remain throughout, they do bear a resemblance to a subject of change (*STh* III, q. 75, a. 5, ad 4). They are like a subject precisely in their being "disposed now otherwise than before." Before the consecration, the sacramental species contained bread; now they contain the body of Christ. We can even say that they "undergo" a change, a change in "contents."

The term "undergo" here does not signify the role of a true and proper subject of change. The species's relation to the

page 542

"contents" is not that of matter to form or potency to act. But it would be a mistake, I believe, to think that the Eucharistic change is the only one in which what is said to "undergo" the change is not a subject of it in the proper sense. Consider these examples: a house undergoes a change in occupants; a car changes owners; a dancer changes partners. In each case, that which is spoken of as the change's subject--the room, the car, the dancer--is not a proper subject of the change. It is not related to the objects defining the change--the occupants, the owners, the partners--as matter to form or potency to act. It is only something that is "disposed now otherwise than before." Yet these are all real changes.⁽²²⁾

This consideration indicates that just as the lack of material continuity does not exclude a real succession from the bread to the body of Christ, neither does it exclude a real change. The continuity of the accidents suffices to display the succession as some sort of real change, whether or not it is a "conversion." The question of the conversion concerns the nature of the relation between the two substances. But even if the accidents were simply "emptied" of contents--even if the substance of the bread were annihilated, and nothing at all took its place--one would surely have to regard that as a real change.

If anything, the lack of material continuity seems to make for an especially "real" change. Even where there is material continuity, there is change only if there is also discontinuity. Continuity is the very opposite of change. There is real change only if there is real diversity between the terms. And a change would seem to be more "real," just insofar as the discontinuity or diversity between its terms is greater.

page 543

It is not nonsense to speak of changes as more or less real. The term "change" is not univocal. Change is found in various categories or genera of being, which are not univocally beings. Aristotle distinguishes four basic kinds of real change: in place, in size, in quality, and in substance. These are all true and proper changes. They all yield some real diversity in the thing

changed. But the diversities are not on an equal level, because a thing's place, size, quality, and substance do not pertain equally to its identity or sameness. All changes yield some diversity in a thing, but the result may be more or less truly a diverse thing.

Thus, a change in place diversifies the thing changed only according to an extrinsic condition, that of its surroundings. In itself the thing is just the same. By contrast, a change in size or quality diversifies something intrinsic to it. The diversity is in something that is more truly its own. And in a substantial change--a generation or a corruption--the very nature of the thing is changed. This means that the result is without qualification a diverse thing. When an animal grows, what results is still the same individual. But when the animal dies, the individual that was the animal no longer exists. What remains is only a part or component, the matter. Substantial change is called a change in a much more absolute sense than the others are.⁽²³⁾

In transubstantiation, as Thomas conceives it, the substantial diversity is both in kind and in matter.⁽²⁴⁾ The substance of one thing yields entirely to that of another. Only its accidents remain. This is not a physical kind of change, as Aristotle's kinds are. But if Thomas's conception is true, then transubstantiation would seem to be in a way the most real change of all.

page 544

So there is a real succession and a real change here. But is there a conversion?

V. The True Problem about the Conversion

Grisez never pinpoints what it is about the notion of a conversion that makes an enduring material component appear necessary. I think that there is indeed something, though in the final analysis the necessity is only apparent.

Even granting the foregoing corrections to his report of Thomas, Grisez could still argue that if material continuity is denied, then the only way to conceive the sacramental change is as the annihilation of the bread and its replacement by Jesus' body. A conversion would be out of the question. On the annihilation account, the change in the contents of the sacramental species would only be a result. Underlying it would be two changes, simultaneous but distinct: a change in the bread--its ceasing to exist--and some change in the body of Christ through which it begins to exist there where the bread was.⁽²⁵⁾ By contrast, on the conversion account, there is only one change, the change in the bread. The body of Christ would be the term of that very change. As Thomas puts it, this succession can be called a conversion because it agrees with natural change not only in the fact that something one and the same remains, but also in the fact that one term "passes away into the other" (*transit in alterum*).⁽²⁶⁾ The bread passes away, not into nothing, but into the

page 545

body of Christ. The coming to be of Christ's body in the host starts from the bread.

This is what the lack of material continuity seems to exclude. To say that one thing is converted into another is to say that the one is a principle of the other's coming to be. Nor is it merely an indirect principle. It is not just something that must be gotten out of the way, like the first dance-partner. On the contrary, if it were not there first, then the second term could not come to be, since the second's coming to be starts precisely "from" it. Thus, Thomas says that God uses bread "in order to make thence" (*ut faciat inde*) the body of Christ (*STh* III, q. 75, a. 2, ad 1). Yet this seems to imply that the first term provides some potency for the second, something that "can be" the second and "becomes" it. This in turn would mean that there is continuity between the terms, since the potency would survive the change. It would be carried over in the passage from one term to the other. But as Grisez notes (118), Thomas denies that bread properly "becomes" the body of Christ (*STh* III, q. 75, a. 8). In the same place, he also denies that bread properly "can be"

or "will be" the body of Christ.⁽²⁷⁾

Hence the question is, in what sense does bread serve as that from which the bringing about of the body of Christ begins, if it does not contribute anything to Christ's body? If nothing in the bread functions as matter or potency for the body of Christ, what can it mean to say that the coming to be of the body of Christ in the sacrament starts from the bread? How can the change by which Jesus' body exists in the host be a change in the bread alone?

VI. The Convertibility of the Bread (A): A Common Nature of Being

The key text in Thomas is one that Grisez does not consider. It is a brief and difficult text, and its bearing on the problem, as

page 546

I have understood it, is in some respects only implicit. But when taken together with other parts of Thomas's doctrine of the Eucharist, I believe it provides the answer.

The text is a reply to another objection against the possibility of the conversion (*STh* III, q. 75, a. 4, ad 3). The body of the article concerns the question "whether bread can be converted into the body of Christ." Thomas of course answers affirmatively. At the same time, he makes it clear from the start that he does not mean to ascribe to bread any natural capacity or potential by which it "can be" converted into the body of Christ.⁽²⁸⁾ Instead, citing Ambrose, Thomas insists that this conversion is "not like natural conversions." It is "altogether supernatural," effected by the sole power of God. A "natural" conversion, one that occurs "according to the laws of nature" and by the natural power of a created agent, is always a "formal" conversion. It always consists in a succession of forms in one and the same subject. This is because an agent acts only insofar as it exists in act, and every created agent is in act according to a determinate genus and species. What its action can bear upon is therefore only some determinate act. The determination of a thing in its actual being is through its form. So a created agent can only effect a variation of form (in a presupposed subject).⁽²⁹⁾ But God is an infinite

page 547

actuality. His action extends to the "whole nature of being." Hence he can effect a "conversion of a whole being." By this Thomas evidently means a variation not only in form but also in the indeterminate subject, the matter or potency, that a being's form presupposes and reduces to a determinate act.⁽³⁰⁾ This is a conversion of the whole substance of a thing into that of another, a transubstantiation.

All of the article's objections have to do with what is special or not "natural" about this conversion, namely, its lack of an underlying subject. The first objection is the one we examined earlier. It simply assumes that every change has a subject. The second objection proceeds as though the sacramental conversion did have a subject, the matter of the bread. But the third objection is more interesting for us. It goes deeper, offering a reason why a conversion of one thing into another seems to need an underlying subject.

The reason is laid down at the very start of the objection: "of things that are divided *secundum se*, one never becomes another." This principle is explained through the example of two colors. The color white never becomes the color black. Instead, as Aristotle says in the first book of the *Physics*, a subject of white becomes a subject of black. A white body becomes a black body. The reason why white does not become black is that they are contraries. They are principles of a formal difference (the difference between a white body and a black body). Difference is a kind of division; and as the very principles of a division, the objection says, contrary forms must be divided from each other *secundum se*, just on account of themselves.

The objection then reminds us that there is also such a thing as material division or division in subject. The principles of a material division between two bodies, their "principles of individuation," are their diverse

page 548

signate matters. (Signate matter is matter singled out as "this" matter by way of quantitative dimensions.) So two signate matters, as principles of a division, are also divided from each other *secundum se*. Hence one signate matter cannot become another. Consequently, the signate matter of the bread, this matter of bread, cannot become this matter by which the body of Christ is individuated. And whereas forms have a subject, making it possible for the subject of one form to become the subject of another, matter has no subject. Therefore, the conversion of the substance of this bread into the substance of the body of Christ is impossible.

Clearly we should be interested in this objection. The issue is precisely the "lack of continuity." The claim is that even though the terms of any conversion are divided from each other and exist only in succession, the terms themselves cannot be the very principles of the division. They cannot be divided *secundum se* or just by reason of themselves. Although they are mutually exclusive, they cannot be so in every respect. There must be something in one that is compatible with what distinguishes the other from it. In addition to the principles in them by which they are divided from each other, there must also be some principle common to them. The division can only be by reason of their forms. There must also be an undivided subject.

Thomas's reply is difficult. Here is the Latin, followed by my translation.

Dicendum quod virtute agentis finiti non potest forma in formam mutari, nec materia in materiam. Sed virtute agentis infiniti, quod habet actionem in totum ens, potest talis conversio fieri, quia utrique formae et utrique materiae est communis natura entis; et id quod entitatis est in una potest auctor entis convertere ad id quod est entitatis in altera, sublato eo per quod ab illa distinguebatur.

By the power of a finite agent, form cannot be changed into form, nor matter into matter. But by the power of an infinite agent, which has action bearing on all being, such a conversion can come about, because there is a nature of being common to the two forms and to the two matters; and the author of being can convert what there is of entity in one to what there is of entity in the other, with the elimination of that by which the one was distinguished from the other.

page 549

My object in the rest of this section and the next will be to interpret this reply. (In section 8, I shall try to show how it leads to a satisfactory resolution of the Grisez issue.)

The first sentence of the reply reminds us that we are not dealing with a natural conversion. A finite or created agent cannot change form into form, or matter into matter, for the same reason that it cannot produce a whole being out of nothing (see *STh* I, q. 45, a. 5). It can produce a new substance only out of pre-existing matter, that is, by transforming a pre-existing substance. It cannot produce new matter at all. Nor is it the immediate source from which a new substantial form proceeds (see *STh* I, q. 65, a. 4). Instead, under its influence, a new form is educed from the potency of the matter. The emergence of the new form eliminates the previous one. The created agent does cause a change in form, but since it is not the immediate source of the form, its action does not consist in a direct conversion of one form into another.

The rest of the reply is our main concern. Its interpretation is not easy. On first reading, it might seem to boil down to the mere claim that God, as "author of being," can convert any created being into any other.⁽³¹⁾ The passage could even be rendered in a way more favorable to such a reading. Instead of "there is a nature of being common to the two forms and to the two matters," one might read "the nature of being is common to the two forms and to the two matters." In my

opinion, however, Thomas is not speaking here about a *single* nature common to all created beings (i.e., about what is called *ens commune*). Instead, he is speaking about a certain nature of being common to the two forms, and a somewhat distinct nature common to the two signate matters. I say this in view of the role that he is assigning to the common nature. He is making it account for the possibility of God's converting one form into another and one signate matter into another. *Ens commune* would not immediately account for this possibility, because, for Thomas, the terms of a conversion must

page 550

be in the same genus. That is, they must have something univocal in common.⁽³²⁾

There is at least one text in which Thomas asserts this requirement explicitly. It is found in his earliest treatment of the Eucharist, that of the commentary on the *Sentences*. He is addressing the question whether the substantial form of the bread remains after the conversion.

In any conversion whatsoever, the terminus *a quo* is in the same genus as the terminus *ad quem*. But that in which this conversion terminates is neither form alone nor matter alone, but a substance existing in act. . . . Hence . . . that which is converted into the body of Christ must also be a composite substance, not just the matter of the bread. And so the form of the bread does not remain. (IV *Sent.*, d. 11, q. 1, a. 1, qa. 3)⁽³³⁾

Note that he is using the term "genus" here very strictly, to mean something that is common in a univocal way. Matter, form, and composite all pertain somehow to the category of substance, but they do not do so univocally. Matter is substantial potency; form,

page 551

substantial act; and both are substantial parts, whereas the composite is the substantial whole.

As far as I know, the principle that the terms of any conversion are in the same genus is not made explicit in the *Summa Theologiae*. But its presence there can hardly be denied. For instance, it evidently figures again in the argument against the continuation of the bread's form.

If the substantial form of the bread remained, nothing of the bread would be converted into the body of Christ except the matter alone. And so it would follow that it would not be converted into the whole body of Christ, but only into its matter. But this is contrary to the form of the sacrament, which says, "This is my body." (*STh* III, q. 75, a. 6)

Why can the matter of the bread be converted only into the matter of the body of Christ, and not also into its form? Surely it is because matter and form share in nothing univocal. What is converted into the form of the body of Christ must be a form.

An objection in the same article involves a similar point. It says that not even the form of the bread can be converted into that of the body of Christ, because the form of Christ's body is a soul. The objection is evidently that the two forms are not univocal. Thomas replies:

A soul is a form of a body giving to it its whole order of perfect existence, i.e., corporeal existence, and animated existence, and so forth. Therefore the form of the bread is converted into the form of the body of Christ insofar as the latter gives corporeal existence, not insofar as it gives existence animated by such a soul. (*STh* III, q. 75, a. 6, ad 2)⁽³⁴⁾

The form of the bread is convertible into the form of the body of Christ precisely insofar as a common univocal feature can be considered in them, that of a "giver of corporeal existence."

So it seems clear that in *STh* q. 75, a. 4, ad 3, Thomas is not claiming that God can convert any given being into any other

whatsoever.⁽³⁵⁾ Of course God can perform any possible conversion. But matter is only convertible into matter, and form into form.⁽³⁶⁾ The terms of a conversion must be beings in the same sense.

VII. The Convertibility of the Bread (B): An Analogy with Transformation

Thomas does not say why there must be something univocal in the terms of a conversion. Yet it is not difficult to suggest a reason: namely, the very way in which the terms must be distinguished from each other, as terms of a conversion, that is, extremes of a change. The extremes of a change do not and cannot exist together. They are opposed, incompatible.⁽³⁷⁾ There is contrast between them.⁽³⁸⁾ The contrast explains why the presence of one entails the absence of the other. But if there is contrast between them, and if, as is the case in any true conversion, one term is not simply the negation or the privation of the other but

rather something positive, then there is also something univocal in them.⁽³⁹⁾ Contrary natures belong to the same genus.⁽⁴⁰⁾

If this is what Thomas has in mind, then in observing that the terms have a common nature of being he would be taking his cue precisely from the objection. The objection starts with an analysis of the relation between contrary forms. It then applies this analysis to the relation between diverse signate matters, justifying the application by the fact that signate matters resemble contrary forms in functioning as principles of a division.

Thomas is not denying that they are principles of a division. But he wants us to notice that the division between them in fact goes hand in hand with their sharing in a common nature. This amounts to a refutation of the objection's analysis of the division. Contrary forms, such as white and black, are indeed opposed to and divided from each other; and they are principles of the difference between the things containing them (a white body and a black body). But they are not quite divided *secundum se*. That is, they are not *immediately* opposed to each other, as though they agreed only in subject and not in anything in their own natures. They are both colors. They are divided by reason of that which distinguishes one from the other in the common genus of color, that is, by reason of their *differentiae*.⁽⁴¹⁾ In the same way,

the forms and the matters of the bread and the body of Christ are divided by reason of what distinguishes one from the other in the nature of being that they have in common.⁽⁴²⁾ There is, after all, something in the first term of the conversion that is compatible with what is proper to the second term.

So whereas Grisez at one point says that on Thomas's account, the bread and the body of Christ have "nothing whatever in common" (119), Thomas is making a special effort to show us that they do have something. He is granting, or even insisting, that the terms of a conversion always have something in common. What he is denying is that they must always have a common subject. A subject is needed when the agent of the conversion is one whose action extends only to a determinate form of being. But when the agent has action extending to all being, it can perform a conversion between any two things that share a common nature of being—even two signate matters, which have no common subject.

The common nature of being, which Thomas goes on to designate abstractly as *entitas*, is not some sort of "metaphysical substrate." Thomas is not trying to insinuate a proper subject for the conversion here, any more than he was in the reply to the first objection. *Entitas* is only a common *ratio*.⁽⁴³⁾ The terms of the

page 555

conversion are separate beings, and the *entitas* in one is divided, in subject, from the *entitas* in the other. The *entitas* in them is the same in *ratio*, but it is not numerically the same. If it were, then the terms would be the very same being, a single individual. The point is simply that they are not separated or divided according to the very *ratio entis* in them. They are divided only according to their distinguishing *rationes*.

Yet Thomas does see the community in *entitas* as setting up something *like* a common subject. The resemblance enables him to construct a kind of analogy or parallel between the sacramental conversion and natural conversions.⁽⁴⁴⁾ It is displayed in the rather labored formulation, "the author of being can convert what there is of entity in one to what there is of entity in the other, removing that by which the one was distinguished from the other." As Cajetan says, Thomas is here seeking to "lead us by the hand" from our understanding of natural conversions toward some way of conceiving this supernatural conversion.⁽⁴⁵⁾

The objection had said that the subject of white (which is a body) becomes the subject of black. In Thomas's formulation, "what there is of entity" corresponds to "the subject" (we might say "what there is of corporeity"), and "that by which the one was distinguished from the other" corresponds to "white." The basis of the parallel is the indefiniteness or indeterminacy of "what there is of entity" vis-à-vis the distinguishing item. A subject is related to the forms existing successively in it as some-thing indeterminate to determinants that diversify it.⁽⁴⁶⁾

page 556

The reply does not spell out the analogy with natural conversions any further. The identification of a common nature suffices to overcome the division and so to resolve the objection. However, there is a later text in the treatise on the Eucharist where Thomas again draws attention to a common *ratio* belonging to the terms of the conversion. The focus is slightly shifted; this time it is on the nature of being common to the whole terms, that is, the nature of substance and the common set of accidents that they are successively under. But we see here how far the analogy between transubstantiation and natural conversions extends. There is even something resembling a numerically identical subject in the terms of the sacramental conversion.

The text is a discussion of the truth of the sacramental formula by which the conversion is effected, the words "This is my body" (*STh* III, q. 78, a. 5). Thomas says that the formula expresses a conception having practical force, effecting what it signifies. He then asks what the pronoun "this" is supposed to stand for. It cannot stand precisely for Jesus' body, since then the words would mean simply, "This my body is my body." That is true even before the utterance of the words, and so they would not effect what they signify. Nor can "this" stand precisely for the bread, since then the words would not be true; the bread is not Christ's body. So instead, he says, what the pronoun stands for is "that which is contained under these species, in general"; or more precisely, "'the substance contained under the accidents,' which previously was bread, and afterwards is the body of Christ" (*ibid.*, ad 2).

In this last passage, Thomas is presenting the referent of the singular pronoun "this" in the sacramental formula as somewhat like a single subject that is first one term and then the other.⁽⁴⁷⁾ We have seen that he regards the accidents of the bread as in some way like a subject of change, insofar as they are something that is

one and the same, disposed now otherwise than before. But "this" does not signify the accidents. Its signification is mediated by the accidents, but what it signifies is what the accidents contain-- *whatever* it is under the accidents that has the nature of a substance. In a way this is even more like a subject of change than the accidents are, because it is substantial.⁽⁴⁸⁾ In another way, of course, it is less like a subject than the accidents are, because the substance under the accidents is now one, now another. It is not unqualifiedly "one and the same" throughout. Yet it still resembles a subject, because there is a qualified sense in which it is one and the same: it is under the same accidents. The association with the accidents makes it a singular object of signification, the referent of "this."⁽⁴⁹⁾

Thomas holds that the conversion takes place in an instant, at the end of the pronouncement of the words of the consecration (*STh* III, q. 75, a. 7). But the pronoun "this," which is uttered at the beginning, retains the very same meaning throughout. What it signifies is like an enduring subject. Relative to it, what is proper to the bread and what is proper to the body of Christ are like contrary forms. The substance under the accidents cannot be

both bread and Christ's body at once.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Being the bread and being the body of Christ are, to use Thomas's language, opposed "qualities" or "determinate forms."⁽⁵¹⁾ Each is a "determination of a proper nature" (*ibid.*, ad 1), applied successively to the "substance in general" signified by "this."

Thomas is actually rather explicit about the resemblance between "the substance under the accidents" and a subject. As we have seen, he denies that the bread can properly be said to "become" the body of Christ (*STh* III, q. 75, a. 8).⁽⁵²⁾ This would mean that at the end of the conversion, the bread (or at least a part of it) *is* the body of Christ (or at least a part of it).⁽⁵³⁾ Verbs such as "becomes," "is," "will be," and so forth are not properly used here. But he also adds an important qualification to this denial. Because a singular item does remain throughout the conversion--the accidents--such expressions can be admitted "according to a certain likeness." They are acceptable if the term "bread" is taken to signify, not the substance of the bread, but "in

a general way, that which is contained under the species of bread, under which is first contained the substance of the bread, and afterwards the body of Christ." In the parallel *Sentences* text, Thomas uses this analysis to account for a passage from St Ambrose: "that which was bread before the consecration is now the body of Christ after the consecration, because the utterance of Christ changes the creature."⁽⁵⁴⁾ In this passage, "that which" functions like a subject.

VIII. The Convertibility of the Bread (C): Matter for the Sacramental Action

What we must now ask is whether the common nature of being, or the "substance under the accidents," can provide a resolution of the issue raised by Grisez. As I have understood it, this issue is not quite the same as the problem that Thomas resolves by appeal to common *entitas*. The latter problem was whether there is anything in the bread that is even compatible with the body of Christ. Our question is whether the bread can be understood to be, or at least to contain, a genuine principle from which the body of Christ comes to be in the sacrament. Can "the substance under the accidents" be considered such a principle? There are reasons to doubt it.

We must not lose sight of the fact that "the substance under these accidents" does not designate a true and proper subject of change. It only resembles a subject. For one thing, as we have seen,

the *entitas* or the substantiality of the bread is not numerically one with that of the body of Christ. They are diverse instances of a common *ratio*. The singularity of "this" is entirely a function of the accidents, and the accidents are not constituents of the substances.

Moreover, the distinction between a being's common *entitas* and its proper *ratio* does not answer to a real distinction of

page 560

components in it. Every being is immediately both its own proper self and a being.⁽⁵⁵⁾ "What there is of entity" in a thing is not a genuine "recipient" of what distinguishes that thing from others. It is whatever there is in the thing that has the nature of a being. It is the thing itself, considered in a merely indeterminate way.⁽⁵⁶⁾ This is especially clear if the thing in question is one of the ultimate components of a substance, its matter or its form. Neither of these is in turn composed of yet another matter and another form. There are only distinct *rationes* in them, the common *ratio* of matter or form and the *ratio* proper to *this* matter or *such* form. The distinction between the matter considered indeterminate, as matter, and the same matter considered determinately, as *this* matter, is a merely logical distinction. So is the distinction between a substance considered merely as "whatever substance is under these accidents" and the same substance considered in its proper nature. The distinction between "this substance" and bread, or between "this substance" and Christ's body, does not reflect a real distinction between a substrate and its form. It is only a distinction in meaning. "This substance" is not functioning as a proper subject of change.

Now, the logical distinction does suffice to show that there is no contradiction in saying the following: "the substance under these accidents, which was bread, is now the body of Christ." The transition from "the substance under these accidents is bread" to "the substance under these accidents is the body of Christ" is not logically or absolutely impossible.⁽⁵⁷⁾ God can bring about what-

page 561

ever involves no contradiction. So he can make "this substance" be the body of Christ. And in fact what "this substance" signifies is not annihilated in the transition, but preserved.

But assuming that there is no temporal gap between the existence of the bread and the existence of Christ's body under the accidents, "this substance" would be preserved even if the bread were annihilated. Nothing from the bread is needed in order for Christ's body to be "this substance." The possibility that "this substance" be now bread, now the body of Christ, is *only* a logical or absolute possibility, not a natural one. It does not rest on any underlying potency or matter. It rests on a mere indeterminacy of signification or *ratio*. The bread contains an indeterminate *ratio* that is compatible with the determinate *ratio* signified by "the body of Christ." So why can we not say that, by sheer divine fiat, the bread ceases to exist, and the body of Christ simultaneously takes on the role of the substance under the accidents?⁽⁵⁸⁾ Why must we say that the existence of the body of Christ in the sacrament is the very term of the change in the bread, or in other words, that the bread is converted into the body of Christ? How does a logical distinction make possible a real conversion?

We can see the answer, I believe, if we pay closer attention to an obvious feature of the sacramental conversion: the very fact that it is sacramental. Although it is an event that only the power of God is adequate to effect, it is not effected by God alone. Unlike creation, it is effected through created instruments. Hence it is in some way conditioned by those instruments and proportioned to their mode of operating. And the sacramental mode is rather special.

The created instruments in the sacraments function as signs. But they are special signs: they

effect what they signify, and they effect it through signifying it. The Eucharistic action is performed by the utterance of Christ's human words, "This is my body." The

page 562

utterance of these words, in the due circumstances, *is* the action. The consecration makes the host to be the body of Christ through signifying it to be the body of Christ. "The power to convert that exists in the formulae of these sacraments follows upon their signification" (*STh* III, q. 78, a. 4, ad 3).

This power is of course only instrumental. The principal power behind the conversion is God's own. But the action is truly sacramental, and it has its own mode. Thomas contrasts it with creation (*STh* III, q. 78, a. 2, ad 2). Creation is in the mode of a command, a sheer fiat. The consecration is in the indicative mood and the present tense. This, Thomas says, is precisely because it is sacramental. It simply signifies or declares the existence of its effect.

Normally, the truth of a declarative sentence in the present tense depends upon the reality of what it is about. But with the truth of the Word of God, it is the other way round. Whatever the eternal Word of God says to be the case is the case, just because he says so. Divine truth is the cause of the reality, the *entitas*, expressed in it (*STh* I, q. 16, a. 6). In the sacraments, human enunciations share in this power of the Word of God. The consecration effects what it signifies because its signification is true, and because its truth is that of the Word of God (*STh* III, q. 78, a. 5).

Since its power follows upon its signification, the con-secration's mode of action also corresponds to the mode of its signification. Although it shares in the power of the truth of the Word of God, it is still an utterance in the human mode: a composite, discursive statement. Hence, even though the effect takes place in an instant, there is a process in the action by which it is brought about.⁽⁵⁹⁾ The process begins with the utterance of the word "this." At that moment, what underlies the object signified by "this" is bread. If the substance of the bread were not there,

page 563

"this" would be meaningless. There would be no substance under the accidents. The action would not get off the ground. "This" would be a false start. The action starts from the bread, *qua* "this," and terminates in the body of Christ, "my body."

This is how we can make sense of saying that even though the bread provides no material for the body of Christ, the bringing about of the body of Christ in the host starts from the bread. It means that the action by which the existence of the body of Christ in the host is brought about is an action upon the bread. The bread is not just gotten out of the way. Although it provides no potency for the body of Christ, it does provide something needed for the sacramental action that effects the body of Christ. It is a direct principle of the coming to be of Christ's body under the accidents.⁽⁶⁰⁾ By sharing in the nature of corporeal substance, the bread contains something in terms of which the body of Christ can be understood and signified; and the sacramental action effects the body of Christ through signifying it. The bread is required in order for there to be what the action presupposes: a substance under the accidents, signifiable by "this." It does not provide matter out of which Christ's body is formed, but it does provide *materia circa quam*, an object of action. It provides that to which the *ratio* of Christ's body is applied. This application is a predication, but it is also an action. Its result is the very existence of the body of Christ under the accidents of the bread.

IX. Understanding Transubstantiation

The foregoing discussion makes no pretense of fully explaining transubstantiation. It does not display the nature of the power by which the change is accomplished. It only shows that it can make sense to speak of the conversion of one whole substance into another. The analogy between "the substance under the accidents" and the subject of a transformation saves the language of conversion. But fully explaining the event would require understanding the form and power of the truth of the Word of God. It would be like fully explaining creation.

Thomas in fact judges that the sacramental conversion is in some ways even harder to understand than creation (*STh* III, q. 75, a. 8, ad 3). Part of what makes it so hard is that it does not reflect any agent's "common" way of acting. This does not just mean that it lies outside our ordinary experience; so does creation. It means that there is no agent that "normally" acts in this way. Grasping the coming to be of something out of nothing, Thomas says, is certainly not easy; but we can at least see that this pertains to the mode of producing that is appropriate for an absolutely "first" cause, a cause that presupposes nothing other than itself. By contrast, a production in which something is presupposed, and yet nothing of it remains, does not pertain to the mode of producing that generally responds to *any* cause, created or divine.

In transubstantiation, something is presupposed to the production. The event is a change and a conversion. This pertains to the creaturely mode of acting.⁽⁶¹⁾ Yet nothing presupposed is a constituent of what is produced. This pertains to the mode of acting proper to God.

So transubstantiation belongs to an order which is in some way between the order proper to the nature of created causes and the order proper to the uncreated first cause. The difficulty seems to be precisely in grasping that there *could* be anything between

them. Creatures are involved in the event, but their own natures are insufficient to explain what goes on; judged in their light, the event seems impossible. God is using them to produce an effect for which his nature alone is adequate. But his nature, all by itself, is perfectly sufficient for producing the effect. Judged in relation to him, the result certainly seems possible; but the creatures seem merely superfluous. Our particular problem was that the substance of the bread seemed superfluous. It seemed to have no true role to play as the *terminus a quo* of a conversion.

What lies between the natural order and the strictly divine order is a created supernatural order, the order of grace.⁽⁶²⁾ The creature's involvement in it is not superfluous, but it is "gratuitous." It is not impossible; the "nature of being," as gathered from creatures and studied in metaphysics, does somehow allow for the possibility of a supernatural order. But its existence and its true shape are known only by revelation (and then only imperfectly).

If the foregoing interpretation is correct, Thomas's conception of transubstantiation is formed strictly in light of its supernatural proximate cause: a human utterance of the Word incarnate. If we prescind from the cause, the metaphysical analysis would be idle. The analogy between "the substance under the accidents" and a subject of transformation would seem merely irrelevant. We would indeed find it unintelligible to speak of transubstantiation as a conversion. But of course this is hardly an objection. It only means that for all the philosophy involved, Thomas's doctrine of the Eucharistic conversion is quite formally theological.⁽⁶³⁾

1. Germain Grisez, "An Alternative Theology of Jesus' Substantial Presence in the Eucharist," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 65 no. 2 (2000): 111-31; cited hereafter by page number alone.

2. Considering them fatal, Grisez goes on to propose a vastly different account of Jesus' presence in the sacrament. I shall not discuss Grisez's own proposal in any detail. He presents it only as a hypothesis, and he assures us that if he thought that one could reasonably accept Aquinas's account, he would not question it (113).
3. This may not be Grisez's view. What he seems to find most problematic is Thomas's view that the accidents of the bread and wine subsist without a subject. In general this does appear to be the most controversial aspect of the doctrine. But I find Grisez's particular objection to it less difficult to resolve than the one concerning transubstantiation. In any case, it seems to me that the transubstantiation issue should be addressed first. In all of Thomas's systematic treatments of the sacrament, the discussion of transubstantiation precedes and determines his positions on the other matters. See *IV Sent.*, dd. 8-12; *ScG IV*, cc. 63-68; *STh III*, qq. 75-80.
4. The bread is turned into a body that exists even before the change, with its own matter, distinct from the matter of the bread. Thomas provides an imaginary illustration: the conversion of "this finger" into "that finger" (*ScG IV*, c. 63, §7, *Nunc autem*).
5. *STh III*, q. 75, a. 4, ad 1. (Throughout this paper, translations of passages from St Thomas are mine.)
6. "Quoniam autem Christus redemptor noster corpus suum id, quod sub specie panis offerebat, vere esse dixit, ideo persuasum semper in Ecclesia Dei fuit, idque nunc denuo sancta haec Synodus declarat: per consecrationem panis et vini conversionem fieri *totius substantiae panis* in substantiam corporis Christi Domini nostri, et *totius substantiae vini* in substantiam sanguinis eius. Quae conversio convenienter et proprie a sancta catholica Ecclesia transsubstantiatio est appellata" (DS 1642, emphasis added). "Si quis dixerit, in sacrosancto Eucharistiae sacramento remanere substantiam panis et vini una cum corpore et sanguine Domini nostri Iesu Christi, negaveritque mirabilem illam et singularem conversionem *totius substantiae panis* in corpus et *totius substantiae vini* in sanguinem, manentibus dumtaxat speciebus panis et vini, quam quidem conversionem catholica Ecclesia aptissime transsubstantiationem appellat: anathema sit" (DS 1652, emphasis added).
7. I am not addressing Grisez's suggestion that Trent might be open to the possibility that the immediate terminus ad quem of the sacramental conversion not be the whole substance of Christ's body and blood (124). The issue here is what is meant by "the whole substance of the bread" and "the whole substance of the wine."
8. Durandi a Sancto Porciano, *In Petri Lombardi Sententias Theologicas Commentariorum libri IV*, vol. 2 (Venetiis: Ex typographia Guerra, 1621; republished by The Gregg Press Incorporated, Ridgewood N.J., 1964), IV, d. 11, qq. 2-3, pp. 318vb-320ra.
9. *Ibid.*, q. 3, §5 (near the end), p. 319vb; cf. q. 2, §11, p. 319rb.
10. *Ibid.*, q. 2, §6, p. 319ra; q. 3, §4, p. 319va.
11. *Ibid.*, q. 3, §5, p. 319vb.
12. *Ibid.*, q. 3, §5 (near the end) & §6, p. 319vb.
13. Cajetan's whole discussion of *STh III*, q. 75, a. 4 merits study (Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Opera omnia*, Iussu impensaque Leonis XIII P.M. edita, vol. XIII: *Tertia pars summae theologiae*, a Q. 60 ad Q. 90, cum commentariis Thomae de Vio Caietani [Roma: ex typographia polyglotta S.C. de Propaganda Fide, 1906], pp. 168-72). Sections X-XVI concern Durand. Cajetan's analysis of the conversion is quite technical; I shall not attempt a summary of it. But in what follows I draw a good deal from it, especially as regards the analogy between the sacramental conversion and a transformation. There is only one point on which I would take issue with it (see below, n. 35).

14. Grisez argues that the Fathers of Trent "meant to allow for theological differences among themselves and their advisers," so that even if in fact most or all of them understood the canons on the Eucharist in light of Thomas's theology, there would still be room for dogmatic development (124). I do not wish to quarrel with this. But as Grisez says, "what the Council asserts by those canons should be determined by interpreting them in a way that accounts reasonably for their text considered in its historical context" (ibid.). I do not think that he offers a reasonable interpretation of *totius substantiae*.

15. Cf. IV *Sent.*, d. 11, q. 1, a. 3, qa. 1, obj. 3: "a conversion is in some way [*quodammodo*] an accident." Presumably Thomas does not mean by this that conversions are only with respect to accidental genera of being. He is talking precisely about a certain type of substantial conversion. But although it regards the genus of substance, it is not itself a kind of substance. It does not subsist, and neither does it belong to the very essence of any subsistent thing.

16. I do not mean by this what Grisez means. He says that Thomas has only shown that *conversion* can function as a predicate, with the concepts of bread and of Jesus' body as its subject. Taken at face value, this is hard to understand. To predicate conversion of the concepts would be to say that the concept of bread is converted into the concept of Jesus' body! What Grisez must mean is that on Thomas's account, even if "the bread is converted into the body of Christ" respects the logic of its terms--it is a well-formed sentence--it cannot possibly be true. What I mean is that although the real bread and the real body of Christ are what constitute the subject, they do so only in the apprehension of reason, not in themselves.

17. See IV *Sent.*, d. 11, q. 1, a. 3, qa. 1, ad 3.

18. Of course, prior to the conversion, the bread and the body of Christ do exist simultaneously, somewhere; the nonsimultaneity and the succession between them is with respect to their existence in the sacrament.

19. Is the relation of succession itself a "real" relation? In IV *Sent.*, d. 11, q. 1, a. 3, qa. 1, ad 3, Thomas says that it is something real "in the bread, which is changed" (whereas the body of Christ remains unchanged). Yet previously in the same work he says that "a real relation requires that both of the extremes be in act" (I *Sent.*, d. 26, q. 2, a. 1). In the later *De Potentia*, q. 7, a. 11, one of his examples of a mere relation of reason is that of something present to something future. (Cf. III *Phys.*, lect. 5, §324. On relations between a being and a non-being as relations of reason, see *STh* I, q. 13, a. 7.) At any rate it seems clear that the succession cannot be a real "form" or "act." It is not even the sort of "incomplete form" or "imperfect act" that is called "motion" (In IV *Sent.*, d. 11, q. 1, a. 3, qa. 1, ad 3). That would require a material substrate.

20. Even if the succession is not a real relation (see previous note), it can still be a real succession. This is not absurd. Consider, for instance, that God's action of creation is not a real relation of God to creature, and yet it is certainly a real *action* (*STh* I, q. 45, a. 3, ad 1; cf. *STh* I, q. 13, a. 7). What it means for an instance of something to be "real" depends on what sort of thing it is. There is real evil, even though evil is not a positive act or a real "being." A real succession would be one that is neither fictitious nor merely metaphorical (e.g., the atemporal "succession" of numbers in a series).

21. Further on we shall see that the accidents also play a role in making the change intelligible precisely as a conversion, insofar as they mediate the reference of the pronoun "this" in the sacramental formula.

22. This is not to dispute Thomas's remark that "in a natural change the same matter or subject remains." If we analyze these examples, we find that they are only what we might call "supervenient" changes, mere results of more fundamental ones. Underlying them are changes that do have proper subjects. For instance, the dancer's change in partners is the result of the first partner's stepping aside and the second partner's stepping in. By contrast, there is no more fundamental change or set of changes underlying the shift in the contents of the sacramental species.

23. The subject of substantial change is itself very difficult to grasp. Substantial change has a proper subject, but the subject is only a very qualified sort of being. It does not have a complete nature of its own. There is nothing definite that it is *per se*. Only the terms of the change--what it is from and to--are unqualified beings. It is not perfectly proper to say that one substance "becomes" or comes to be the other, e.g., that Lazarus's corpse "became" Lazarus (118). See below, n. 53.

24. For the sequence "change in place, change in quantity or quality, generation or corruption, transubstantiation," see IV *Sent.*, d. 11, q. 1, a. 3, qa. 1.

25. See above, n. 22. The annihilation of the bread, of course, would not have a proper subject, any more than creation does.

26. *STh* III, q. 75, a. 8. Creation cannot be called a conversion, because one term does not "pass away into" the other, as it does in a natural change and in the Eucharist. Presumably annihilation would not be a conversion either; there is nothing that the annihilated thing passes into. Thomas often employs the verb *transire* to signify a conversion: see, e.g., *STh* I, q. 119, a. 1, where he uses it in several places to speak of the conversion of food into the nature of what is fed. *Transire* literally means "to go across" or "to pass over," or even "to pass away." When it is used to refer to a conversion, it does not mean a change in place. The passage is from what is distinctive about one term to what is distinctive about the other, across what they have in common. In this sense the first term also "passes away." It loses what distinguishes it from the second, ceasing to be what its name signifies. (The passing away may of course be only a qualified sort, as when an unbeliever is converted into a believer. He or she does not absolutely pass away, but only ceases to be an unbeliever.)

27. However, Grisez overlooks an important qualification to this denial; see below, at n. 52.

28. See *STh* III, q. 75, a. 8, ad 4: this conversion does not come about through a passive power of the creature, but solely through the active power of the creator.

29. Thomas is giving a reason why all conversions effected by the natural power of created agents involve an underlying subject. In his commentary on Aristotle's *Physics* (I *Phys.*, lect. 12, §107), he remarks that whereas the natural philosopher only proves by induction that all natural productions have a subject, the metaphysician proves it by a reason. For this he cites book 7 of the *Metaphysics*. He seems to be thinking of *Metaphysics* 7.7.1032a20-22, where Aristotle argues that things produced by nature or by art must have matter, because there must be a potentiality for them to be and also not to be. (Aristotle is in fact resolving the notion of matter into the more universal, "metaphysical" notions of potency, being and not-being. In the *Summa* passage, Thomas is showing precisely what it is about created agencies that makes such indeterminate potency--potency to be and not to be--a necessary presupposition.) This is interesting, because it indicates that even from the standpoint of "natural reason" the need for an underlying subject is not something that is simply taken for granted, as though it were a universal and self-evident feature of change, just as such. Instead, the need is reasoned to, as a condition of the types of changes effected by particular types of agency ("nature or art"). Still, the reasoning is so "elementary"--the conclusion is so close to "first principles"--that the need for a subject can easily look axiomatic (as it does to Grisez); cf. IV *Sent.*, d. 11, q. 1, a. 3, qa. 3, ad 1.

30. Cf. *STh* I, q. 65, a. 3: "quanto aliqua causa est superior, tanto ad plura se extendit in causando. Semper autem id quod substernitur in rebus invenitur communius quam id quod informat et restringit ipsum; sicut esse quam vivere, et vivere quam intelligere, et materia quam forma. Quanto ergo aliquid est magis substratum, tanto a superiori causa directe procedit. Id ergo quod est primo substratum in omnibus, proprie pertinet ad causalitatem supremae causae."

31. Of course there could not be a conversion if the terms were not both beings; see above, n. 26.

32. I do not mean to deny that there is such a thing as the "universal nature of being" or *ens*

commune in Thomas's thought. There obviously is, and God is its agent, the universal cause of "being *qua* being." As he says in the body of the article, God has action that extends to the "whole nature of being," *totam naturam entis*. But it is well known that for Thomas *ens commune* is not univocal. Being is not a single genus. This is so even if we restrict our focus to "real" being, which is what *entitas* seems to refer to. Earlier in the *Summa*, in the course of distinguishing between being as convertible with "the real" and being as signifying the truth of a proposition, Thomas says that the former "signifies the entity of what is real [*entitatem rei*], according as it is divided into the ten categories" (*STh* I, q. 48, a. 2, ad 2). The categories are ultimate genera. They do not divide being by adding specific differences to something whose signification remains constant throughout; they divide it by constituting diverse significations of being itself (*V Metaphys.*, lect. 9, §889-90). Their unity is only analogical. It consists in the fact that there is one chief signification to which all of the others refer, one primary nature to which the others are somehow proportioned. Moreover, within each category, being is also divided analogically according to act and potency (*ibid.*, §897).

33. At *IV Sent.*, d. 10, q. 1, a. 2, qa. 3, Thomas also says that the substance of the bread cannot be converted into the accidents of Christ, because it has no "proportion of similitude" to them. I take it that he means that even if accidents are in some way proportioned and assimilated to substance, as effect to cause, the proportion and likeness is not mutual (cf. *STh* I, q. 4, a. 3, ad 4). There is nothing in which substance and accident are simply equal. Conversion requires that the terms be in some respect equal or equivalent. This entails their being in a common genus. (Cf. *ibid.*, obj. 2: there is no *comparison* between things of diverse genera.)

34. Cf. *IV Sent.*, d. 10, q. 1, a. 2, qa. 1.

35. It is here that I part from Cajetan. In his commentary on *STh* III, q. 75, a. 4, he says that Thomas is speaking of the nature of being that is common to all created beings (section VIII). This leads him to say that it is possible for any created being to be converted into any other--an angel into a stone, for example. Evidently he would even have to say that an angel can be converted into a color! If Thomas meant this, why would he say that the matter of the bread cannot be converted into the substantial form of the body of Christ, nor the substance of the bread into the accidents?

36. So Thomas might have said that the nature of *matter* is common to the two matters, and the nature of *form* is common to the two forms. The reason why he chooses to designate each as a nature of "being," I would suggest, is that he is constructing a very synthetic presentation of the convertibility as a function of two factors: the presence of some common nature in each pair, and the universal scope of the action of the author of being. Neither factor alone is sufficient to display the convertibility.

37. *V Metaphys.*, lect. 12, §923: "in quolibet motu vel mutatione, terminus a quo opponitur termino ad quem."

38. Not all distinctions involve contrast or incompatibility. Things in diverse genera of being are not directly contrary. One and the same subject can have potentiality and actuality, substance and accidents, etc. It is even possible for one and the same subject to have both humanity and divinity.

39. The two forms cannot be forms of one and the same body, because they are principles of species with contrary differentiae. The bread is inorganic, whereas the body of Christ is organic. (Thus, in line with *STh* III, q. 75, a. 6, ad 2, it is precisely when the form of the bread and the form of the body of Christ are both considered as forms giving corporeal existence that they are seen as contraries. The latter gives organic corporeity, the former inorganic.) As for the two signate matters, we are speaking of each as the matter of a whole body. It makes no sense for a whole body to have two distinct signate matters. That would mean that one and the same body could be located in separate places, and thereby subject to contrary dispositions, at the same time.

40. See Aristotle, *On Generation and Corruption*, I.7.324a1; Aquinas, *V Metaphys.*, lect. 12,

§926. There is contrariety even between diverse signate matters, not according to their "essence" (which is sheer potentiality), but according to the contrasting accidental differences by which they are designated (cf. *ibid.*, §927).

41. These in turn are divided because one somehow includes in its *ratio* the negation of the other. Ultimately at the root of any division there must lie a contradiction; see *In Boet. de Trin.*, q. 4, a. 1. Cf. IV *Metaphys.*, lect. 15, §719: contraries cannot belong simultaneously to the same subject, *even though* each of them is a positive nature, because one of them has attached to it a privation of something in the other. Privation is a kind of negation or contradiction (see X *Metaphys.*, lect. 6, §2044). The contradictories are what are divided *secundum se*. This of course means, as we have already seen, that there can be no conversion of a being to a non-being or vice-versa.

42. Thus Thomas's very purpose in adverting to a common nature of being would seem to exclude the *ens commune* interpretation. He is looking for something that does not divide or distinguish one term of the conversion from the other. He cannot be seeing the *entitas* itself as something by which one term is distinguished from the other. Merely analogical unity would not suffice for this purpose, since items that are one by analogy are distinguished precisely in what they have in common.

43. In calling it a *ratio*, I do not mean that it is a mere "concept," something existing only "in the mind." Unity under a common *ratio* is unity in *relation* to the mind; it is a function of the mind's capacity to consider the *ratio* in abstraction from the subjects by which it is divided and multiplied. But the principle of the unity is in the things themselves. In other words, the common *ratio* does not exist in reality as an "individual"; but it does exist in reality, as something predicated of real individuals. This is because it is an *essential* predicate. The nature of form is predicated *per se* of the real form of the bread and the real form of the body of Christ, and the nature of matter is predicated *per se* of their respective matters.

44. Thomas seems to have changed his mind about the way to handle the issue raised in the objection. A very similar objection is raised at IV *Sent.*, d. 11, q. 1, a. 3, qa. 1, obj. 4: "whatever becomes something takes on that which it is said to become. But every singular is incommunicable, and so one singular cannot become another." The reply: "communication implies some sort of conferral, and so it requires something that receives what is conferred or given; hence it is found only in formal conversions, in which the change is only with respect to form; and so, given that in this conversion nothing remains to which something can be conferred, there is no communication in it." By contrast, in the *Summa* reply he is presenting something *analogous* to a recipient that remains throughout.

45. Cajetan, commentary on *STh* III, q. 75, a. 4 (sect. IX, ¶15).

46. A genus is related to its differentiae as matter to diverse forms. See VII *Metaphys.*, lect. 12, §1549-50; X *Metaphys.*, lect. 10, §2116.

47. This is another reason for insisting that what the terms of the conversion have in common, the common *entitas*, must be something univocal. If there were no common name belonging univocally to them, then there would be no unambiguous "this" that changes from one of them into the other. The very meaning of "this" would change too. Although the pronoun gets its singularity from the accidents, it does not signify the accidents; there must be something constant not only in that by which it signifies, but also in what it signifies.

48. However, it is only a *general* substantial item. Its nature is such as to be predicated of something else, something that subsists *per se*--a determinate individual. This would explain why Thomas does not appeal to it in *STh* III, q. 75, a. 4, ad 1. There he is looking for an ultimate subject of predication, one that is not said *per se* of something else. He is treating the conversion as a quasi-form and identifying the subsistent item that serves as its quasi-subject: both substances together. "This" cannot stand for both substances together ("these"), but only for one or the other, indeterminately. What it signifies functions as a quasi-subject of the conversion insofar as the conversion is considered, not as a quasi-form, but as a quasi-transformation.

49. Readers of Grisez's article will be aware that this "association with the accidents" is another point in Thomas's account that Grisez finds objectionable. Thomas holds that the body of Christ is not subject to the accidents of the bread. The accidents do not inhere in it as they did in the bread. Grisez argues that this excludes any one type of relation to the accidents that is common to the bread and the body of Christ; that is, he cannot find any clear sense in which both the bread and the body of Christ are "under" the accidents (see below, n. 60). I cannot address this objection fully here, but I think it can be shown that Thomas does have a valid sense for the expression. It is presented at *STh* II-II, q. 8, a. 1. It refers simply to the intelligible existence of the substance of the body there, wherever the accidents are. This association of the substance with the accidents is something other than their inherence in the substance and ontologically prior to it. Hence it can obtain even when the accidents do not inhere.

50. Thomas observes that if the substance of the bread remained together with the body of Christ in the host, then the formula would have to be "Here is my body" rather than "This is my body" (*STh* III, q. 75, a. 2).

51. *STh* III, q. 78, a. 5. The treatment of the pronoun in terms of "substance and quality" stems from Priscian's definition of a noun: *proprium est nominis substantiam et qualitatem significare* (Priscian, *Institutiones grammaticae*, 2.4.18, in *Grammatici Latini*, vol. 2, ed. H. Keil [Leipzig: Teubner, 1855], 55.6). Elsewhere Thomas explains that in this definition of a noun, "substance" and "quality" are not to be taken properly, as referring to distinct categories (I *Sent.*, d. 22, q. 1, a. 1, ad 3). They refer only to modes of signifying. A noun signifies a thing in the manner of a substance, as though subsisting; and it signifies the thing according to some item by which the thing is known or defined, i.e., some item functioning as a quality or a form. (On "that by which something is named" as playing the role of a form, even if it is not truly a form, see *STh* I, q. 37, a. 2.)

52. The objection had said that the subject of one color *becomes* the subject of the other. In his reply, Thomas is careful not to say that what there is of entity in one term becomes what there is of entity in the other. He only says that one is converted to the other. But there is something *like* a "becoming" here.

53. In the same article, Thomas notes that even in ordinary substantial changes, it is not perfectly proper to say that one term "can be" or "becomes" the other. One and the same body is first this white thing, then this black thing; but there is nothing one and the same that is first this animal, then this carcass. There is only something that is first a part of this animal and then a part of this carcass, namely the matter. So in a substantial change, "the substance subsisting in this matter" is not unqualifiedly the same before and after the change. It is only the same in matter and in genus.

54. "Quod erat panis ante consecrationem iam corpus Christi est post consecrationem, quia sermo Christi creaturam mutat" (St Ambrose, *De sacramentis*, 4.4; Aquinas, IV *Sent.*, d. 11, q. 1, a. 4, qa. 1, sol. & ad 1). Cajetan makes much of this text. It is cited in the *sed contra* of *STh* III, q. 78, a. 4.

55. Cf. Cajetan, commentary on *STh* III, q. 75, a. 4 (sect. VIII, ¶5): "being" does not add any further nature to the specific and generic natures of things. This is not to deny the real distinction between a being (*ens*) and its act of being (*esse*). "A being" means a subject of *esse*, or at least something that somehow shares in *esse*. But there is not one nature in a thing by which it shares in *esse*, and another nature by which its proper identity is constituted. That by which its identity is constituted *is* that by which it shares in *esse*; it is that by which it is disposed to *be itself*. *Entitas* and *esse* are not synonyms. *Entitas* is an abstract noun corresponding to the concrete *ens*; *esse* is an infinitive verb corresponding to the finite *est*.

56. As Cajetan says, to convert what there is of entity in a thing is to diversify the whole thing (commentary on *STh* III, q. 75, a. 4 [sect. IX, ¶4]).

57. In the sentence, "This substance is bread," the predicate is not contained in the definition of the subject. It is a *per accidens* type of predication (cf. VII *Metaphys.*, lect. 2, §1273). On the legitimacy of "the substance contained under the accidents" as a subject of predication, see Cajetan, commentary on *STh* III, q. 75, a. 4 (sect. VII).

58. Cf. Durandi a Sancto Porciano, IV *Sent.*, d. 11, q. 1, §14, p. 318vb, ll. 2-13. This would not be a real change in the body of Christ, since it would not involve the loss of any previous disposition, as, e.g., in the case of a local movement.

59. What the words effect is a simple event, and what they signify is also something simple--the host's being the body of Christ. Hence, Thomas says, they obtain the power for the effect only in the simple, final instant of their pronouncement. But he also insists that they do so *in ordine ad praecedentia*--in relation to the preceding instants (*STh* III, q. 78, a. 4, ad 3).

60. Obviously Thomas does not mean that the substance that is the body of Christ does not exist at all prior to the sacramental conversion. In itself it exists already. Through the conversion it is only "communicated" or "applied" to the host. It takes on a new relation to the accidents of the bread; it begins to "exist under" the accidents. See *STh* III, q. 76, a. 6: "it is not the same for Christ to exist in himself, and to exist under this sacrament; for when we say this, that he exists under this sacrament, a certain relation of him to the sacrament is signified." In line with these considerations, Cajetan argues that strictly speaking, the substance of the bread and the substance of the body of Christ, taken absolutely, are not the terms of the conversion (commentary on *STh* III, q. 75, a. 4 [sect. V-VI]). Rather, the first term is the substance under the accidents that is bread, and the second is the substance under the accidents that is the body of Christ.

61. Thus the very involvement of a creature in the sacramental action suffices to explain why Thomas takes it for granted that the existence of Christ's body in the sacrament must be the term of a real change in something. (See above, at n. 58.) On the fact that a creature's action always consists in applying some nature to a presupposed object, see *STh* I, q. 45, a. 5, ad 1; cf. *STh* III, q. 78, a. 4, ad 2.

62. Cf. *STh* III, q. 77, a. 1, ad 1: the subsistence of the accidents of the bread without a subject is against "the common order of nature," but there is a "special reason" for it "according to the order of grace."

63. My thanks to Kevin Flannery, S.J., Lawrence Feingold, and David Twetten for their very helpful comments on drafts of this paper.