Comment: *Surprises of history*

Historical studies often surprise us. What has long been regarded as indisputable can be thrown into question by the discovery of a forgotten text. For instance, ask anyone interested in the matter and they will tell you that the doctrine of transubstantiation was defined at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. It says so in the reference books. The doctrine is inextricable from a certain Aristotelian philosophy of substance, people usually think.

In fact, of course, the word was introduced a century before the relevant works of Aristotle were translated into Latin. Trawling through manuscripts in college libraries, Professor Joseph Goering found one in Corpus Christi College Oxford and one in Peterhouse Cambridge which are now our earliest evidence (see 'The invention of transubstantiation', *Traditio* 46 (1991): 147-70). These manuscripts date from about 1140 and seem to have originated in Paris. Referring to the consecration, the author of the Oxford manuscript writes of it as 'not a transformation of a quality but, if I may say so, a *transubstantio* [sic] *vel transmutatio* of one substance into another'. That certainly sounds like some one introducing a new word. According to the Cambridge manuscript, the word was coined by Robert Pullen, an Englishman, an Oxford master who moved to Paris, where he taught for some years before becoming a Cardinal, dying in 1146.

The word first appears in a conciliar text at Lateran IV, right enough, in the verbal form ('the bread and wine having been transsubstantiated'). This does not look like a 'definition'. It looks like what was by then the natural word. Well into the 13th century, however, historical studies have shown, three different meanings of the word are to be found: (1) the bread and wine coexist with Christ's body and blood; (2) the substances of the bread and wine are annihilated and Christ's body and blood substituted; and (3) they are converted into the substances of Christ's body and blood.

By the 1260s we find Saint Thomas Aquinas arguing that the first of these views is 'heretical', and the second 'false', so that we have no option but to adopt the third. He knows of colleagues, or near contemporaries, who do not share his position. None of the arguments he deploys against the first two views, in the *Summa Theologiae* (III.75. 1-4), owes anything to Aristotle's philosophy. Nor does he appeal to the authority of Lateran IV.

Elsewhere, however, in a study of Lateran IV composed for the Archdeacon of Todi, he holds that the first view was condemned and the third solemnly endorsed. He explains it as meaning that the 'accidents' of the bread and wine remain without any 'subject'. This is clearly Aristotelian language, nonsensical as it would seem to any Aristotelian — which is presumably the point: he is not explaining quasi-scientifically how the eucharistic change takes place but twisting the newly discovered metaphysical terminology to locate its uniqueness. He introduces the same jargon in the second reading for matins in the Corpus Christi Office, perhaps incongruously, or anyway somewhat self-consciously. It was innovatory jargon and many of his contemporaries disliked it.

Years later, we find Blessed John Duns Scotus, in his *Opus Oxoniense*, completed about 1306-07, arguing that coexistence and substitution make better sense than conversion of substances — but that this last is the only acceptable view since, as he believes, it was solemnly defined at Lateran IV.

Even at the Council of Trent in 1551, as Hans Jorissen showed in 1965, in a careful study of what was said at the time, the coexistence view was excluded as heretical ('consubstantiation'); but, tacitly at least, many preferred the substitution view to Aquinas's view.

According to the Anglican/Roman Catholic Commission's Agreed Statement on Eucharistic Doctrine (1971), communion with Christ in the eucharist 'presupposes his true presence, effectually signified by the bread and wine which, in this mystery, become his body and blood' (§6).

We are directed in a footnote to the following statement: 'The word transubstantiation is commonly used in the Roman Catholic Church to indicate that God acting in the eucharist effects a change in the inner reality of the elements. The term should be seen as affirming the fact of Christ's presence and of the mysterious and radical change which takes place. In contemporary Roman Catholic theology it is not understood as explaining *how* the change takes place'.

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1992), the mode of Christ's presence is 'real' inasmuch as it is 'a substantial presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present' (§1374). This involves a 'conversion of the bread and wine into Christ's body and blood', as we find in Ambrose of Milan and John Chrysostom (§1375). Finally, citing the Council of Trent, 'this change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation' (§1376).

Thus, for ARCIC, the word transubstantiation is assigned to a footnote: what Catholics believe can be stated without it. Perhaps the ARCIC footnote suggests a need for historical study of what earlier theology understood transubstantiation to mean. According to the Catechism, what the word means now is simply what it meant in its equivalents in Greek and Latin patristic theology. Historical studies are often surprising.

F.K.