

## Transformation

The Latin roots of the word *transformation* tell part of the story: *trans* (across) meets *forma*(condition) to suggest the taking place of a radical change of ontological status. Let's track this point with a sample sentence.

*After his stint in Federal Prison  
John underwent a total transformation.*

To undergo a total transformation is to become the opposite of what once you were. At least that formula aligns with ordinary English usage. But that proposition, concerning opposites, does not make sense here for there is no plausible opposite to 'what you are now.' Thus *trans*, in the term *transformation*, is going to need a meaning less mechanical than *across*, which bypasses the issue of whatever occurs in a transformation. We're going to have to enrich our interpretation of the word *trans*. John, who is changed by his stint in Federal Prison, must not have been changed into a transformed opposite of himself, but rather to have been changed into a deeper or more realized form of himself. With that usage of *trans* we are enabled to think toward the notion of transformation not as mechanical substitution of one thing for another but as thoroughgoing recreation. A true transformation is not mechanical.

It will be apparent, as an historical point, that the word usage discussion before us has wide theological ramifications. Transformation is a potentially rich term which, if directed to the central ritual of the Catholic mass, the transformation of the actual body of Christ into the wafer consumed during the eucharist, makes historical sense of a word meaning discussion, in which a simple hyphenated word like *trans* acquires global historical implications.