

The Relation of Penitence to Oblation in the Eucharistic Offertory

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“When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil?”—Malachi 1:7

“So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”—Matthew 5:23, 24

“On the Lord’s own day, assemble in common to break bread and offer thanks; but first confess your sins, so that your sacrifice may be pure.”—Didache, par. 14

Introduction

ONE OF the significant movements in twentieth century theological circles has been the renewal of interest in the theology of sacrifice,

“the creature giving itself and reaching God in a great impact in which our deepest needs are satisfied.”¹

This movement has influenced the study of the New Testament and Christology; it has led to an interesting literature on the anthropological origins of sacrifice; but above all it has led to new glimpses of the possibility of agreement between the scattered bodies of Christendom, through a redefinition of some of the thorniest problems besetting the controversies of the Reformation; namely, the problem that the connection between our Lord’s sacrifice on Calvary and the *anamnesis* of His sacrifice in the Holy Eucharist.

One aspect of this discussion has been the recognition that the Reformers, inheriting from the Middle Ages a faulty understanding of the nature of the Eucharist in general, and of its relation to the sacrifice of Christ in particular, carried out certain radical modifications of the primitive ‘Shape of the Liturgy.’² Various views have been expressed as to the reasons for these misunderstandings, but one thing is plain, that a rite which in the early Church had been a corporate act involving all orders of the Christian Community, had evolved by the late Middle Ages into a monopoly of the priesthood. Whereas the emphasis had originally been on the common offering of the Body of Christ, it had in effect shifted to the calling forth of the Divine Presence by a priest, before an adoring, but otherwise passive, laity.

¹ E. Masure, *The Christian Sacrifice*, p. 49.

² Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, pp. xii, 10, etc.

In the Church of the second and third centuries A.D., according to Dom Gregory Dix, there emerged a basic ‘Shape of the Liturgy’ consisting of four fundamental actions, which comprised the common framework of the Holy Eucharist in both East and West. These actions were in turn a modification of the ‘seven-action scheme’ to be found in the earliest narratives of the Institution in 1 Corinthians, Matthew, and Mark.

“With absolute unanimity the liturgical tradition reproduces these seven actions as four: (1). The offertory; bread and wine are ‘taken’ and placed on the table together. (2). The prayer; the president gives thanks to God over the bread and wine together. (3). The fraction; the bread is broken. (4). The communion; the bread and wine are distributed together.”³

This rite was essentially a corporate action of the entire community.

“The layman brought the sacrifice of himself, of which he is the priest. The deacon, the ‘servant’ of the whole body, ‘presented’ all together in the Person of Christ, as Ignatius reminds us. The high-priest, the bishop, ‘offered’ all together, for he alone can speak for the whole body.”⁴

“The whole rite was a true corporate offering by the church in its hierarchic completeness of the church in its organic unity.”⁵

The medieval shift resulted in an almost exclusive emphasis on what had originally been the ‘liturgy of the Bishop’ (now consecration by a priest), to the disregard of the liturgies of deacons and laity in the Offertory.

Today the need for restoration of the proper balance between the various actions of this scheme is generally recognized by specialists. But there is still little adequate understanding on the part of the rank and file of Christians, both clerical and lay, of the theological and liturgical changes involved in such a reform. These changes are twofold: (1). Theological—a renewed understanding of the true nature of the eucharistic sacrifice. (2). Liturgical—the expression of such a theology in fitting forms; i.e., by a restoration of the proper balance between Offertory, Consecration, and Communion, resulting once more in any adequate opportunity for participation by all orders of the Church.

It is common knowledge today that the Anglican Reformers, influenced by Luther and other continentals, radically modified the structure of the medieval Mass in order to eliminate from it any idea of the offering of a material sacrifice.

“To Luther, any emphasis upon the Offertory seemed to imply that the redeeming action of God depended upon a prior preparation for such action which had to be carried out by man.”⁶

Article xxxi of the Thirty-nine Articles gives another reason for the change, based on the medieval distortion of the doctrine of the eucharistic sacrifice

³ Ibid., p. 48.

⁴ Dix, op. cit., p. 48.

⁵ Ibid., p. 117.

⁶ F. Hastings Smyth, *Discerning the Lord's Body*, p. 77.

“that in every celebration ... Christ is offered *afresh* ... The reference of Article 31, not to ‘the sacrifice of the Mass,’ but to ‘the sacrifices of Masses,’ is evidence of the dread of the Anglican reformers in this regard.”⁷

Incidentally we find this view of sacrifice deprecated by contemporary Roman theologians like Canon Masure as a ‘false trail.’⁸

But their reasons go far beyond the justifiable reform of a medieval abuse. For the change involves a very real misunderstanding on their own parts of the nature of sacrifice. This was bound up with the entire reformation misunderstanding of the doctrines of Man and the Church. Dom Gregory Dix has pointed out how Cranmer repudiated the concept of a material offering in the Eucharist, and substituted for it a ‘spiritual’ ‘sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.’ He ascribes this to two causes. (1). Lack of emphasis in the medieval western rite on the Offertory through the non-participation of the laity.⁹ (2). The Nominalist influence in the theology of the period, leading to an exclusively subjective interpretation.

“The real eucharistic action for Cranmer . . . is something purely mental and psychological.”¹⁰

This concept of a ‘spiritual’ sacrifice is considered by the majority of Anglicans today as being in some way a ‘higher’ concept, and all attempts to point out its inconsistency with the basic incarnational and sacramental nature of Christianity are met with strong and often highly emotional resistance. “The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit,” they will quote reprovingly.

A second argument often heard against the idea of a material sacrifice is that reliance on such a ‘mechanical’ means of grace leads to a disregard of the highly ethical emphasis in Christianity. In discussions on Prayer Book revision, this argument is often coupled with a practical objection to the exclusion of the Decalogue from the body of the Liturgy.

Such objections indicate a widespread misunderstanding concerning the theology of the eucharistic sacrifice and its relation to the action of the Liturgy. This misunderstanding manifests itself even in the thinking of quite specialized groups, as, for example, in the Prayer Book Studies of the American Episcopal Church’s Standing Liturgical Commission, *The Eucharistic Liturgy*.

There is a good deal of foggy thinking about the eucharistic sacrifice in this otherwise interesting and informative report. For instance, the alms are confused with the oblations of bread and wine.

“The Offerings of the People (i.e., the Alms) are their integral participation in the Christian Sacrifice.”¹¹

⁷ Colin Dunlop, *Anglican Public Worship*, p. 88.

⁸ Masure, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

⁹ Dix, *op. cit.*, p. 598.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 671.

¹¹ Prayer Book Studies, vol. IV, *The Eucharistic Liturgy*, p. 201. Compare this view with Dix, *op. cit.*, pp. 112, etc.

On page 41 the materials of the sacrifice are confused with a sacrifice of ‘ourselves, our souls and bodies.’

This uncertainty reappears in the Canon, where they term it “a curious conceit” to ask God “to command *these* things to be brought ... to thine altar on high.”¹² This criticism results in a highly spiritual revision of the *supplices te rogamus* in their suggested liturgy.

For these reasons, it is of vital importance that we try to attain to a view of the eucharistic sacrifice and its liturgical expression which will be as close to the primitive beliefs of the Church as it is possible for us in this day and age to attain. Not only is a great deal of the disunity of Christendom to be traced back to a lack of common understanding of this very subject. But the general feeling held, not only by outsiders, but also by a great number of practising Christians, that Christianity is nothing but a conglomeration of somewhat esoteric doctrines which possess little connection with the hard facts of life, is the result of an unsacramental dichotomy between life and worship which first manifested itself when the laity ceased to have any functional part in the offering of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

It is impossible in the course of a brief essay such as this, to do more than give a bare outline of the subject, and to mention a few of the significant writers who have helped to form our thinking.

We shall inquire first of all into the nature of the Offertory; then go on to examine its relationship to the practice of sacrifice by mankind in general. This will lead us to think about the problem of the ‘acceptability’ of a sacrifice; the conditions required for its effectual offering. Next we shall go on to think about the one ‘unblemished’ sacrifice of our Lord on Calvary, and the way in which He ordained that His Church should participate, through the Eucharist in the benefits of His offering. This entails a reconsideration of the part played by penitence, as exemplified in our present service of Holy Communion by the General Confession and Absolution, in the Liturgy, and certain recommendations for change.

Chapter One—What is the Offertory?

WE HAVE noticed earlier how Dix traced a four-action ‘Shape of the Liturgy’ which, by the second century had become the universal way of doing the things which Christ had commanded His Church to do “in *anamnesis* of him.”¹³ The first of these actions consists in the taking of the materials of bread and wine as a preliminary to ‘eucharistizing’ them; that is, giving thanks over them, and thus consecrating them.

“The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread ... Took the cup...”¹⁴

In the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus, we are given the earliest detailed account of the Offertory as it was practised in the Church of that day.

¹² *Eucharistic Liturgy*, p. 39.

¹³ 1 Corinthians 11:24.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

“To (the bishop) then let the deacons bring up the oblation (*prospora*), and he with all the presbyters laying his hands on the oblation shall say ‘eucharistising’ thus”¹⁵

There are still earlier references to the Offertory in Justin Martyr (Apology I.65) and even earlier in the first epistle of Clement of Rome, which was written at the end of the first century A.D., over a hundred years before Hippolytus.¹⁶

Even the bare, priest-centred liturgy of our own Book of Common Prayer directs the celebrant to take the elements and “place (them) upon the Table.”¹⁷

The ‘taking’ of the bread and wine is thus fundamentally nothing but a preliminary to the offering of them by the celebrant in the Consecration. But the early teachers of the Catholic Church developed an exceedingly rich interpretation of this simple act which shows that they considered it to be something much more complex and meaningful.

We have noticed in the passage quoted from Hippolytus that the bread and wine, being brought up by the deacons, are spoken of as *prospora*, oblations. Dix points out¹⁸ that this word is used by Hippolytus of the bread and wine even before they are brought up by the deacons, when those about to be baptized at Easter are instructed each “to bring his *prospora*” with him to his initiation.¹⁹

The verb form of the same word is used somewhat differently, both by Justin and Clement of Rome, of the offering (*προσφέρειν*) by the bishop and the *sacrifice* (*θυσία*),

“that is the bread of the eucharist and the cup likewise of the eucharist,”²⁰

in the Canon.

Saint Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons in Gaul, writing in the late second century, speaks of the Offertory as oblations of the first fruits of God’s creation, offered at

“the altar frequently and without intermission,”²¹

and directed toward “an altar in heaven.”

Tertullian, who wrote in Africa soon after 200 A.D., brings together these diverse references into a coherent pattern when he teaches, according to Dix, that

“the eucharist is a *sacrificium* (de Orat. 18); that the material of the sacrifice is the *oblaciones* brought by the people (de Corona, 4); and ‘that the bread which He

¹⁵ Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition*, iv. 2, trans. Dix (Rome, c. A.D., 215).

¹⁶ 1 Clement, 40, 41.

¹⁷ Book of Common Prayer, 2nd Offertory rubric—almost offhand, compared to the preceding rubric for the alms.

¹⁸ Op. cit., p. 110.

¹⁹ Ap. Trad., xx. 10.

²⁰ Justin, Dialogue, 41, quoted by Dix, op. cit., p. 111.

²¹ Adv. Haer. iv. xviii.4-xviii.6, quoted by Dix, op. cit., p. 114.

took and gave to His disciples He made His own very Body by saying (*dicendo*) 'This is My Body.' (adv. Marcion IV.40)²²

In other words, the terms *oblatio* (προσφορά) and *sacrificium* (θυσία) are used by the patristic writers because the Eucharist was considered by the early Church to be in some sense a sacrifice in its own right. The materials of this sacrifice are the bread and wine brought by the people, and offered to God by their priestly representatives,

“the ‘rational worship’ by free reasonable creatures of their Creator, a self-sacrificial act by which each Christian comes to his being as a member of Christ in the ‘re-calling’ before God of the self-sacrifice on Calvary.”²³

The later fathers, who gave to Western eucharistic theology much of its characteristic flavour, concur in this view. Saint Cyprian, who wrote in Africa about one generation after Tertullian, is famous for his definition of the eucharistic sacrifice,

“*Passio est enim Domini sacrificium quod offerimus,*”²⁴

But he also agrees with the primitive writers we have been studying when he rebukes a wealthy woman

“who comest to the *dominicum* (Lord’s sacrifice) without a sacrifice, who takest thy share (i.e., makes her communion) from the sacrifice offered by the poor.”²⁵

Saint Augustine, in a famous Easter sermon to his newly confirmed communicants at Hippo, exclaims in his best rhetorical style,

“There you are upon the table, there you are in the chalice.”²⁶

Consequently, it is evident that the question of the Offertory is intimately linked with the whole idea of sacrifice in general. Now this latter was a concept with which the ancients, wherever they lived, were thoroughly familiar. But it is one about which we know lamentably little, except that it is a primitive and somewhat disagreeable rite from which we in this age of scientific and superior wisdom feel somehow emancipated. And yet, whatever our own feelings may be, modern anthropology has shown us that the institution of sacrifice, in some form or other, is common to practically every race and culture and age. Historically, too, Christian teachers have taught, like Saint Thomas Aquinas, that it is justifiable to interpret the universality of this phenomenon as

“an institution of the natural law.”²⁷

It is therefore only the idealism of our modern era which has made it so difficult for us to grasp what it was mankind was aiming at when they offered sacrifice.

Various theories have been offered in recent times as to the nature and purpose of sacrifice among primitive and ancient peoples. Interest for Christians has naturally

²² Ibid. p. 115.

²³ Ibid. p. 117.

²⁴ Epistle 63.

²⁵ Quoted by Dix, op. cit., p. 115.

²⁶ Sermo 229.

²⁷ Masure, op. cit., p. 51. Compare S. Th. IIa, IIae. Q.85,a.1.

centred about the sacrifices of the Hebrews in the Old Testament as bearing the closest relation to Christian thought. As early as the last part of the nineteenth century, the rise of the study of comparative religion led scholars like the Scotsman, W. Robertson Smith, in his *magnum opus*, *The Religion of the Semites*, to examine the Old Testament sacrifices against the background of the practice of Semitic sacrifice in general. His conclusion was that

“the leading idea in the animal sacrifices of the Semites ... was not that of a gift made over to the god, but of an act of communion, in which the god and his worshippers unite by partaking together of the flesh and blood of a sacred victim.”²⁸

It is true that this definition does not include vegetable sacrifices or holocausts, but these, says Robertson Smith, are a later development, the one having its origin in the Canaanite practice of paying tribute to the *ba'alim*, or local deities of the land,²⁹ while the latter came into prominence in later times with the emphasis on a central altar at Jerusalem. Here it was naturally impossible for everyone to ‘communicate’ at every sacrifice, although the practice was maintained as normative at the great feasts like the Passover.³⁰

G. Buchanan Gray, writing some years later, used his monumental knowledge of philology to criticize Robertson Smith’s ‘Communion Theory.’ He maintains that a careful analysis of the Hebrew terms for sacrifice, combined with the tracing of their history in Old Testament times (that is, post-exilic), shows that whatever their ultimate origins may have been,

“Jewish sacrifices ... were gifts to the deity ... though ... some were doubtless in origin ... more than gifts.”³¹

These pioneering works set the scene for an elaborate study of the subject on the part of modern scholars of many differing schools of thought. In spite of the inevitable differences in detail, a number of common conclusions have emerged regarding the nature and purpose of sacrifice. In sacrifice,

- (1). “We can discern groping attempts to move the vital principle of something prepared, grown or achieved in this world *into* the life of the being of a worshipped god.”³²
- (2). “In one way or another, the god has then been believed to respond by finding a means of returning something of the virtue of that gift which he has received and accepted to his human givers.”³³
- (3). “By this means there is established a bond of union or covenant with the benevolent powers in order to maintain a vital relationship between the

²⁸ W. Robertson Smith, *The Religion of the Semites*, 2nd edition, p. 209.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 220, Lect. VI, VII.

³¹ G. Buchanan Gray, *Sacrifice in the Old Testament*, p. 33.

³² F. Hastings Smyth, *Sacrifice*, p. 13.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

worshipper and the object of worship, and so to gain free communication between natural and supernatural orders.”³⁴

Incidentally, it is important to note the place ascribed by all of these writers to the death of the victim in the sacrificial ritual. The Middle Ages seem to have been obsessed by an idea, which we have inherited, that sacrifice *consists in* the death, or at least in the deprivation of, the object offered. But scholars find no support for this theory among ancient or primitive peoples. As we have seen, their aim was to ‘get across to’ the god in order to establish a life-giving bond with him. But in order to attain this objective, the animal or thing offered had first to pass out of the realm of natural existence.

In the case of an animal, this was usually accomplished by slaying the animal; by pouring out its blood.

“It is not the taking of life, but the giving of life that is really fundamental, for blood is not death, but life.”³⁵

Or else the animal was ‘etherealized’ by burning it, thus making it capable of being received by the more ethereal being of the god.³⁶ In the case of milk, honey, wine, or even of water, which will soon disappear if poured onto the ground, a simple libation was thought to be sufficient to accomplish this end. In short, death, or immolation, is a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. The true end is always life.³⁷

In the light of this definition of sacrifice, it is now possible to obtain some inkling of what the Jews were attempting to do in the complex sacrificial system which formed so great a portion of their Law. Among the masses of ritual accumulated there, we can only stop to mention two examples which, according to the views of the scholars, mark the early and the late in point of development.

First of these is the Passover. Oesterley and Robinson think that the Passover was a synthesis of the nomadic Israelite ritual-offering of the firstling of his flock to ensure fertility, with the Canaanite agricultural New Year ritual of Unleavened Bread.³⁸ If this is true, we have here united in one rite an illustration of a number of the theories which we have just been studying. For the nomadic Hebrew, feasting upon the lamb which has been offered to Yahweh, takes part in that primitive ‘communion service’ which Robertson Smith described. At the same time the ‘ritual offering’ implies the idea of a gift; the surrender of a possession as the precondition of communion with, or the obtaining of some favour from, the deity.

Through its combination with the Canaanite New Year ritual, the Passover joins that great family of rites which celebrate each year the death of the god-king in order to participate in his resurrection with new strength.³⁹ Modern scholarship would include in this family all those cults which appeared from time to time in every part of the

³⁴ E.O. James, *Origins of Sacrifice*, Ch. IX, p. 255.

³⁵ James, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

³⁶ Robertson Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

³⁷ See Masure, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

³⁸ Oesterley and Robinson, *Hebrew Religion*, Bk. I., Ch. IX, also Bk. II, Ch. II.

³⁹ See S. H. Hooke, *Myth and Ritual*, Ch. VI, *et passim*.

Mediterranean world: in Greece, in Asia Minor, and in Egypt, as well as in Mesopotamia. Consequently, as a result of its ancestry, Hebrew sacrifice becomes a representative of the ritual activity of every culture of 'the world' of its day.

In the context of the developed Jewish ritual, the Passover is connected with the Exodus. Here it becomes the symbol of the covenant between Yahweh and His people, whereby is yearly renewed the memorial of the might act by which Israel was saved from slavery and oppression.

Chapter Two—The Materials of Sacrifice

AT THIS point we must pause to consider in some detail the question of the materials used in sacrifice, and their relation to the ritual action. We have seen that sacrifice entails the moving of "something prepared, grown or achieved in this world, *into* the life of the being of a worshipped god."⁴⁰

It is probable that in many if not all ancient cultures this 'something' was a human representative of the tribe, often its king. (Although, as certain writers, for example James, in *Origins of Sacrifice*, point out, animals in some tribes were from the first thought of as possessing a spiritual unity with the life of the clan or tribe, and therefore capable of acting as its representatives.)

In the symposium, *Myth and Ritual*,⁴¹ it is suggested that the origin of the Horus-Osiris myth of death and resurrection, which was yearly enacted by the reigning monarch of Egypt, was to be found in the practice, today still carried out among certain tribes of North Africa, in which the heir to the throne killed the king (usually his father). In this way the new king was thought to reincarnate the person of the god-king, thus maintaining unabated the vigour of the nation which depended on the continued health of the ruler for its strength. But because these sacrifices involve such drastic removal of their victim irrevocably from the sphere of human activity, the practice of substitution (and later of commutation, although there is an essential difference between the two) became general at an early date.

Two practices may indicate an intermediate stage in this process. First of these is the sacrifice of the firstborn son which seems to have been practiced in Egypt, and is implied in certain Old Testament passages, as, for example, the Mosaic command, "You shall set apart to the Lord all that first opens the womb."⁴²

A second and similar process of substitution has been indicated among the Aztecs of Mexico, who transformed what had once been a peaceful agrarian culture into a warlike army-state for the sole purpose of keeping up a supply of human victims necessary, as they thought, to keep the processes of Nature working by means of an elaborate system of substitutionary human sacrifices.⁴³

Most societies, however, avoided at an early state of their development the suicidal implications of a system built solely on human sacrifice. Possibly under the

⁴⁰ Smyth, *Sacrifice*, p. 13, above.

⁴¹ Hooke, *op. cit.*, Chapters I and II.

⁴² Exodus 13:2, 12, etc.

⁴³ James, *op. cit.*, ch. 3.

influence of totemism, or perhaps with more utilitarian motives, the practice of using animals, vegetables, and other products of human activity became the normal method of establishing the communication with deity which was so necessary to the maintenance of society in working order.

It is now possible to form two generalizations concerning the materials of sacrifice. First, sacrifice by definition, implies the use of material objects as the media of communication, or transaction, with the supernatural. That is, there is a qualitative difference between certain spiritual activities like prayer, or even self-dedication, and sacrifice.⁴⁴

Second, in the case of substitution, it is not sufficient merely to provide any kind of material whatever at random. The material, or victim, must bear some relation, not only to the objective of the sacrifice (e.g., firstfruits; i.e., the seeking of fertility by the gift of the firstfruits to the god), but also to the offerer. If it is not to be his own son, then it must be an animal raised by him, or grain grown on his farm. The elaborate requirements of the levitical law were laid down to safeguard these relationships, especially after the rise of the practice of commutation, which was essentially in the nature of a commercial transaction with the deity, rather than a gift.⁴⁵

The concern of Christianity with the material of a sacrament is related to this same idea. We cannot have a christening without water, or mass without bread and wine. And this is for two reasons. (1). Our Lord has ordained it. (2). It provides the vehicle by which (as we have seen in sacrifice) the offerer is offered, and by which he received back grace from God. At this point we are naturally concerned principally with the first half of the act.

As Father Smyth has pointed out, the animal, or thing substituted, was thought of, not merely as representing the offerer, but as actually *being* an extension of his true self.⁴⁶ This concept first emerges in primitive notions of clan unity with some 'totemic' animal or other object, as is seen in the Ainu bear-festival in northern Japan. But it remains true also at higher levels of sophistication.

When Saint Irenaeus writes,

“That poor widow the Church casts in all her life (πάντα τὸν βίον) into the treasury of God,”⁴⁷

or Saint Augustine exclaims to his confirmation candidates, “There you are upon the table,” they are giving expression to a truth which is crucial to our understanding of the nature of sacrifice.

The history of ‘preparing, growing or achieving’ the materials of a sacrifice entails the establishment of a bond between the objects and their offerer. This was particularly evident in the nomadic or agrarian societies from which the institution of sacrifice emerged. Here the tending of flocks or the growing of grain formed the central

⁴⁴ See Smyth, *Sacrifice*, p. 22ff.

⁴⁵ Gray, op. cit., Ch. III.

⁴⁶ *Sacrifice*, p. 15ff, etc.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Dix, op. cit., p. 117.

activity around which all the life was organized. The duties of the household as much as 'outside activities,' ministered to the one objective of 'fine flocks and abundant harvests.' It was thus natural that the offering of a representative of this work should have been thought of as including the totality of the history which had led up to its production. When a man offered such a victim on the altar he was not just offering a thing, he was in fact offering a piece of himself. As Canon Masure has phrased it,

"Man may give the impression of offering only his material riches, but by their mediation he is really offering himself."

In the complex organization of our modern society it is much more difficult for the individual to retain this intimate sense of relationship to the objects which he offers to God. Comparatively few are privileged to produce with their own hands the grain, to mill the flour, or to bake the bread, which goes to make the material of the Offering in the Christian Sacrifice. Yet in this very fact perceptive minds have been able to see the means whereby God carries out His redemptive purpose. Father Mascal, in the Appendix to his new book *Corpus Christi*, refers to Archbishop Temple's frequently quoted remark,

"that the matter of the Eucharist is not just corn and grapes, but bread and wine; that is to say, not just the fruits of the earth, but those fruits as worked upon by the hands of man."⁴⁸

Today this simple fact entails the cooperative enterprise of many different portions of society, involving literally millions of individuals.

"In these days it involves threshing machines and rolling mills. It involves grain elevators and systems of storage warehouses. It involves financial operations ... It involves wholesale dealers... it involves brokers and their speculative operations in wheat pits. It involves scientists, chemists and engineers ... Collaterally, a simple piece of bread also involves iron ore mines, collieries, blast furnaces, and steel rolling mills.... It even includes political maneuvers and international relationships."⁴⁹

This complex relationship between a product and its producers has been described in metaphysical terms by philosophers as widely separated as Aristotle and Karl Marx.

"The act of building resides in the thing built."⁵⁰

"All commodities are nothing but definite masses of congealed labour-time."⁵¹

It has been summed up by Father Smyth as follows.

"The emergent values of the multitudinous human relationships and social acts of labour which have produced them, *reside in portions of natural bread and wine.*"⁵²

⁴⁸ E.L. Mascal, *Corpus Christi*, p. 180.

⁴⁹ Smyth, *Discerning the Lord's Body*, p. 66.

⁵⁰ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IX.viii.13. Loeb translation.

⁵¹ Marx, *Capital*, I, Ch. 1.

⁵² Smyth, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

How then does the individual Christian in our day appropriate to himself this bread and wine which are to be his *prospora* at the coming sacrifice? By buying them, just as all of us in this commercial economy must get our daily bread. Here is the true use of money at the Eucharist, rather than the elaborate ‘elevation of the Alms’ which for many, one fears, forms a kind of ‘little Canon’ at the eleven o’clock Sung Eucharist on Sundays.

Incidentally, the Prayer Book Studies on *The Eucharistic Liturgy* suffers from muddled thinking in this aspect of the Offertory when it remarks,

“Historically (sic) and actually, the Offerings of the People (i.e., the alms) are their integral participation in the Christian Sacrifice.”⁵³

One will search the Scriptures and the Fathers in vain to discover a historical example of the ‘Offerings of the People’ being equated with money, rather than with bread and wine. Money is merely the medium of exchange with which we buy our ‘daily bread.’ It has no place upon the altar.

In a later work, Father Hastings Smyth bids us beware of certain tendencies in modern thought to sentimentalize about the preparation of the Offertory (which he terms Oblation), and to consider this alone as a final end of Christian worship and devotion, without taking into consideration the necessity of the offerings being carried through the transit from the natural to the supernatural levels, in the Consecration.⁵⁴

Fr. Smyth draws a clear distinction between the terms ‘Oblation,’ referred to above, and ‘Sacrifice.’ He quotes Saint Thomas Aquinas, “Every sacrifice is an oblation, but not conversely.” In other words, it is only insofar as it contributes to our understanding of the relationship between offerer and victim that the abstraction of the Offertory from the complete eucharistic action is of value. For the human activity involved possesses no final value until it has been included in the further transition which is effected by its sacrifice,

“*quando circa res Deo oblata aliquid fit, sicut quod animalia occidebantur, etc.*”⁵⁵

So it is of the materials of sacrifice, of our *prospora*, that we have been thinking in this chapter.

Chapter Three—The Problem of Acceptability

IT IS precisely at this point that a problem arose of which the Hebrews became acutely aware as their history progressed. As the great prophets of the eighth and seventh centuries, B.C., shaped its expression, the dilemma was as follows. ‘It seems impossible to express sacrifice in terms of substitution without losing the moral emphasis. On the other hand, it is equally impossible to have a moral life without the communion with God that sacrifice makes possible.’

⁵³ *The Eucharistic Liturgy*, p. 201.

⁵⁴ Smyth, *Sacrifice*, p. 22ff. A similar warning is voiced in somewhat different terms by both Dix and Mascall—*Shape of the Liturgy*, p. 119, fn2, *Corpus Christi*, Appendix.

⁵⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 85, Art. 3, ad 3.

As the problem of divine acceptance, this problem showed itself at a period much earlier than the prophets, and is already visible in the J narrative of the story of Cain and Abel.

“And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard.”⁵⁶

Initially, to be acceptable it was thought that the god required the very best and physically most perfectly developed offering in any given class of objects. If it were an animal offering, the victim must be

“A male or female without blemish....”⁵⁷

In the case of a cereal offering,

“his offering shall be of fine flour....”⁵⁸

At a later period the prophet Malachi rebukes the Jews for having grown careless about sacrifice.

“You say, ‘How have we despised thy name?’ By offering polluted food upon my altar, and you say, ‘how have we polluted it?’ by thinking that the Lord’s table may be despised. When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that no evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that no evil? Present that to your governor; will he be pleased with you or show you favour? says the LORD of hosts.”⁵⁹

But the great contribution of the prophets lay in their demonstration that the blemishes which go to make a sacrifice unacceptable to Yahweh are not only material imperfections in the victim, but consist equally of moral disorder in the offerer as well. In one of the earliest of such statements, the prophet Amos declares,

“Because you trample upon the poor and take from him exactions of wheat... Even thou you offer me your burnt offerings and cereal offerings, I will not accept them.”⁶⁰

In a famous passage, Isaiah says,

“What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?
says the Lord;
... cease to do evil,
learn to do good;
seek justice,
correct oppression.....”⁶¹

⁵⁶ Genesis 4:4 ff.

⁵⁷ Leviticus 3:1.

⁵⁸ Leviticus 2:1.

⁵⁹ Malachi 1:6-8.

⁶⁰ Amos 5:11, 22.

⁶¹ Isaiah 1:11, 17.

It is of course possible to multiply such examples almost without limit. If the offerer is oppressing the poor, taking bribes, or otherwise living immorally, no matter how lavish and materially perfect his offering may have been, blemishes have been introduced into them by this moral disorder which makes them unacceptable to God.

This question is broader, too, than the individual character of the offerer. For the social environment from which the offering has come is also capable of introducing blemishes. Our study of the previous chapter should have made it easy for us to see why this should be so. For if the material offering contains within its structure the history of its production, it will thus naturally contain the disorder resident in that history as well. Accordingly, the nation or society that does not do God's will cannot expect its sacrifices to be acceptable.

“The Lord said to me: ‘Do not pray for the welfare of this people. Though they fast, I will not hear their cry, and though they offer burnt offerings and cereal offering, I will not accept them.’”⁶²

The rites of the Day of Atonement, according to James,⁶³ mark the attempt on the part of post-exilic Judaism to make use of the ethical and social insights of the prophets, and to integrate them into the structure of the highly developed sacrificial system of the period. To our hindsight, it appears more like a last desperate attempt to save that system. For, although the Old Testament sacrifices continued in use right up to the destruction of the Temple in the first century A.D., they had long lost their meaning for their offerers. As Buchanan Gray has remarked,

“The entire ritual was simply accepted as ordinances of God (and nothing else).”⁶⁴

By and large, late Judaism could only attempt to solve the dilemma in which it found itself with regard to sacrifices by eventually rejecting them completely and developing a ‘spiritual’ type of ethical moralism.

The theology of Saint Paul marks, from one point of view, the final stage in the evolution of this problem. Making use of insights which he must have shared with many of the more sensitive minds among the Pharisees of his day,⁶⁵ the Apostle shows how

“The Law and the Prophets pointed the true way to prepare successful sacrifices (to be *righteous* and *justified*, in St. Paul's terminology) but failed to make it possible to achieve what was enjoined....”⁶⁶

In other words, it had by this time become apparent that man, by his own unaided efforts, could never be expected to prepare a sacrificial offering which would be acceptable to God.

Chapter Four—The Sacrifice of Christ and the Eucharist

⁶² Jeremiah 14:11, 12.

⁶³ Op. cit., ch. 7.

⁶⁴ Gray, op. cit., p. 51.

⁶⁵ See comment on 2 Esdras 4:1, 5:19, by Oesterley in the SPCK *New Commentary*, quoted by Smyth, in *Sacrifice*, p. 32.

⁶⁶ Smyth, op. cit., p. 32.

IT WAS as the answer to the helplessness that gripped the ancient world that the gospel of Christianity made its most powerful appeal.

“So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand ... Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”⁶⁷

In “the fullness of time” God sent forth His Son “who, made of a woman ... under the law,” was yet able to “redeem them that were under the law.”⁶⁸

As writers like Vincent Taylor and Hastings Smyth have shown, it is possible to interpret the doctrine of the Incarnation, whether in the gospel narratives, or in its more systematic form in Catholic dogma, entirely in sacrificial terms.

“In perfect dedication to God’s purpose and in perfect loving obedience to God’s will, Jesus of Nazareth nurtured and matured within this world the substance of a sacrificial victim free from every defect, one without blemish, that could indeed be termed the Lamb of God. And this spotless, flawless, and unblemished Victim was none other than His human Self.”⁶⁹

It was possible for our Lord to be the preparer of such an ‘unblemished Victim’ on the natural level, and to carry it through to the supernatural; that is, to make it ‘acceptable’ to God, because in Him was that unique and perfect union of the divine and human natures. The Epistle to the Hebrews gives classic expression to this idea.

“But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit *offered himself without blemish to God*, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.”⁷⁰

Thus, at the very point where sacrifice under the Old Covenant had proved itself impotent to secure for man fellowship with God, that is, in the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement, Christ has succeeded. He is both victim and priest, being in Himself both the perfect Representative of our human nature and the means whereby this is offered.

And furthermore, as a sacrifice, however pure, is not perfected; i.e., it can only be termed an Oblation until it has accomplished its purpose of passing from the natural to the supernatural level; unless it be first withdrawn from the realm of our natural existence, so our Lord had first to be offered on the altar of the Cross. The ‘success’ of this sacrifice, demonstrated to men on Easter Day, was finally accomplished at the Ascension,

⁶⁷ Romans 7:21, 24, 25.

⁶⁸ Galatians 4:4 (A.V.).

⁶⁹ Smyth, *Sacrifice*, p. 33.

⁷⁰ Hebrews 9:11-14.

“When Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.”⁷¹

This is why, in the Fourth Gospel, at a time when the Disciples were saddened by the thought of their approaching separation from the Master, He yet spoke of it as His ‘glorification,’ bidding them

“be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”⁷²

By His one perfect sacrifice, the way had been opened, once for all, for man to reach through Him from the natural world to the realm of God.

“we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus.”⁷³

* * * * *

What then is the relation of the Eucharist, which, we have seen, the Fathers universally interpreted as a sacrifice, to the one perfect sacrifice of Christ? Saint Paul, writing to the Corinthian Church, quotes the words of our Lord in instituting the Eucharist at the Last supper,

Τούτο ποιείτε εις την ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν⁷⁴

He then proceeds to explain the meaning of the word *anamnesis*,

“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim (καταγγέλλετε) the Lord’s death until He comes.”⁷⁵

Dom Gregory Dix⁷⁶ makes a clear distinction between the meanings of the word *anamnesis* and of our own words like ‘memorial’ and ‘remembrance,’ whose associations are primarily subjective. His conclusion is that through the word *anamnesis*, the early Church identified completely

“the offering of the eucharist by the church with the offering of Himself by our Lord, not by way of repetition, but as a ‘re-presentation’ (*anamnesis*) of *the same* offering by the church ‘which is His Body.’”⁷⁷

Thus this, in his view, is the meaning of St. Cyprian’s words

“*Passio est enim Domini sacrificium quod offerimus.*”⁷⁸

The Middle Ages, identifying as it did the idea of sacrifice with death, and coupling with this a liturgy in which the laity had ceased to ‘do’ their distinctive part, developed a lopsided conception of the eucharistic sacrifice as a repetition of the death of

⁷¹ Hebrews 10:12.

⁷² John 16:33.

⁷³ Hebrews 10:19.

⁷⁴ 1 Corinthians 11:24.

⁷⁵ 1 Corinthians 11:26.

⁷⁶ Op. cit., p. 161.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ep. 63.

Christ. The Protestant Reformers reacted to this distorted doctrine by maintaining that, at the most, it was a commemoration of Calvary.

But, as Dix and Mascall have both pointed out, the Reformers themselves did not depart from the basic assumption of medieval theology. The result was what Mascall calls 'the Reformation deadlock.'

"The Protestants were in effect repeatedly asserting 'Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; therefore the Eucharist cannot be a sacrifice. While the Catholics as constantly replied 'But the Eucharist is a sacrifice, therefor Christ must be in some sense put to death in it.'"⁷⁹

It was de la Taille in France and Hicks in England who, evidently quite independently of one another, pointed out the fallacy of the medieval view, and showed the change in approach to the problem which would result from a more balanced view of the nature of sacrifice. There is now a movement afoot to work out the implications of this 'new view,' and to return to a standpoint which is actually much more akin to the primitive attitude to which we have referred in Chapter One.

We have already noticed how Dix described the early Eucharist as an *Anamnesis*, or 're-presentation.' But he does not define or make very clear just what is meant by the word 're-presentation' as used in this objective sense. Just what *is* the relation of the Christian community to the sacrifice of Christ? In what way can it be said that this sacrifice is offered by the Church?

One explanation is offered by Canon Eugène Masure, in *The Christian Sacrifice*, by means of the theory of the 'efficacious symbol.' According to Masure, the subjective connotation of the word 'symbol' dates from the Reformation controversies, and in order to understand its true meaning we must go back beyond this period to discover its use by the Fathers, especially Saint Augustine. In these writers the words 'sign,' 'symbol' and 'sacrament' were all used more or less synonymously.

"A sign was an action, a series of actions and words, a ceremony or a body of rites, allowing the faithful to share in the mystery, recalled to mind and represented by the rite itself."⁸⁰

It is by the use of this 'sign' or sacrament, as instituted by our Lord Himself on the eve of His offering up that we are made partakers of the benefits of that sacrifice made once for all in history, now become eternal.

"Without the Eucharist the Redemption would have had no liturgical character enabling us to link it with our ritual needs; but without the Redemption the Eucharist would have had no true significance or real value."⁸¹

Thus the sign is an 'efficacious symbol' whereby we may enter into the benefits of the Redemption. Or, to put it another way, it is by means of this sign that a past event, now eternal, is made once more to emerge in time for us.

⁷⁹ Mascall, op. cit., p. 83.

⁸⁰ Masure, op. cit., p. 206.

⁸¹ Masure, op. cit., p. 195.

“This sign is symbolic because it represents the Saviour’s passion, and efficacious because it applies all the fruits of it to ourselves, thanks to the presence of the same immolated victim.”⁸²

But we are not justified in interpreting the efficacy of this symbol as constituted by its *resemblance* to the sacrifice which it represents, as was the tendency in Medieval and Counter-reformation theology.

“The sacramental sign is not efficacious because it symbolically resembles the mystery to be produced by it. It is efficacious because it has been instituted by Our Lord....”⁸³

Here we see the signs of that movement back to the Pauline “the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed ...” which we have noticed to be the characteristic of much of contemporary eucharistic theology.

However, it is still possible even with this interpretation for subjective thinking to enter in, unless we continually hark back to the twin strand in any sacrament wherein is not only the grace conferred on us, but also the means whereby this grace is given. This Measure does by means of an extensive survey in the first part of his book of the universal character of sacrifice.

“In fine, sacrifice is the entire movement of our created nature. This makes us personified tendencies, subsisting relations to God; it demands our attainment of Him like the flight of the arrow to the mark.”⁸⁴

Thus there is only one sacrifice, the Sacrifice of our Lord, which is offered, but the means whereby the Christian community enters into this self-offering of our Lord is the *prophora* brought by each Christian to the Offertory.

It can be seen that such an interpretation makes of crucial importance the way in which we think of the action which thus demonstrates most clearly the participation of the Community in the eucharistic sacrifice. It is therefore time once more to turn our attention back to the Offertory.

* * * * *

“The Offertory is ... a self-sacrificial act by which each Christian comes to his being as a member of Christ in the ‘re-calling’ before God of the self-sacrificial offering of Christ on Calvary.”⁸⁵

In these words Dom Gregory Dix describes the primitive view of the first of the four liturgical actions in the ‘Shape of the Liturgy’ which was initiated by Christ when, at the Last Supper, He “took bread ... also the cup ...” It is his view that at the point of his offering of the materials of bread and wine, the individual Christian becomes a participator in the Christian sacrifice. This was the distinctive ‘liturgy of the laity,’ performed in silence, as our Lord’s ‘taking’ was “done without comment;”

⁸² Ibid., p. 205.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 225.

⁸⁴ Measure, op. cit., p. 48.

⁸⁵ Dix, op. cit., p. 117.

“the act of the people through the deacons, from which nothing should distract attention.”⁸⁶

Dix then goes on to compare the relation of the Offertory to the eucharistic Oblation, with that of the Last Supper to the actual sacrifice of Christ on Calvary.

“It is directed to that oblation as its pledge and starting point.”⁸⁷

This distinction is an important one because it goes a long way to meet the objections of those who, like Fr. Mascall, feel that by stressing the Offertory (e.g., by means of Offertory Processions and the like), the ‘Shape of the Liturgy’ is once more distorted, this time in a different direction, but nonetheless to its eventual detriment. Both Dom Gregory and Fr. Smyth, who at this point hold similar views, agree that it must always be thought of as the *first step* in the sacramental action. However,

“The offering of themselves by the members of Christ could not be acceptable to God unless taken up into the offering of Himself by Christ in consecration and communion.”⁸⁸

“The Priest who here effects this sacrifice is Our Lord; for it is He alone who, receiving the offering within the content of His Incarnation, can effect the necessary transit.”⁸⁹

We have seen, then, the point at which the people become participators in the Christian sacrifice. But how are they enabled to make this participation? First and foremost, of course, the Christian is made capable of participating in the Sacrifice of Christ through his Baptism, wherein he is “made free from sin”⁹⁰ and grafted onto the True Vine.⁹¹ It is by this fundamental act of redemption alone that the Christian is enabled to take part in the Offertory at all, and any betrayal of this trust disqualifies him for further participation.⁹²

Once become a member of Christ in Baptism, the Christian then participates, as we have seen, by means of the bread and wine which he offers. Our study of the history of sacrifice has shown us that the materials of a sacrifice, at the point of their offering, not only represent, but in a sense actually *are* the offerer.⁹³ Thus when the bread and wine offered by the Christian are taken up by our Lord and offered in union with His own perfect sacrifice, (then returned to us as His Body and Blood in Communion) our lives are in a real sense offered to God in Him.

Moreover, not only are our lives as individuals offered, but within the structure of the bread and wine are included, as we have seen in Chapter Two, every act within our social environment which ‘*went into*’ the making of these materials. Through their

⁸⁶ Dix, op. cit., p. 118.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Smyth, *Discerning the Lord's Body*, p. 89.

⁹⁰ Romans 6:22.

⁹¹ John 15:5.

⁹² See Dix, op. cit., p. 117.

⁹³ For a fuller discussion, see Smyth, *Sacrifice*, pp. 14-20.

offering by the members of the Christian community for inclusion in the sacrifice of Christ, the redemptive activity of our Lord works upon them to transform the corruption of their fallen state, making them acceptable to God.⁹⁴

Understood in this sense, surely the words of the *Supplices te rogamus*, to which the American revisers take exception, are full of meaning. As we make anamnesis of the Sacrifice of Calvary, He offers it all together at ‘the Altar on high.’

“The Angel here introduced in the Western Liturgy is our Lord Himself. He it is who, in His acceptance and Consecration, conveys our offerings of bread and wine into the level of His ascended state . . . to the ‘Altar on high.’”⁹⁵

To sum up, the Offertory is (1). The necessary prerequisite for the ‘eucharistising,’ as Dix calls it, of bread and wine. (2). But it is something much more than this. For in the gathering of these gifts of God’s creation by man, ‘nature’s priest,’ a free, rational being, rendering his ‘bounden duty and service’ to his Creator, (a). The Christian is enabled to participate in the Perfect Sacrifice which Christ offered for him on Calvary. (b). By union with this sacrifice, his life is transformed and made acceptable to God. (c). Through this transformation God’s redemptive power transforms the entire creation which has thus been offered to Him through Christ.⁹⁶

Chapter Five—The Necessity of Penitence as a Condition of Oblation

ONE QUESTION still remains to be discussed which is of great importance for a proper understanding of our relation as Christians to the Eucharistic Offertory. We have seen in the Introduction how, for Cranmer and the English reformers,

“it is the stirring up of our penitence, our thankful acknowledgment of His benefits, our faith and consolation in His passion, and our intention of amendment, which constitute the only eucharistic action and offering.”⁹⁷

We have also noted that this was the result of two factors in the background of the Reformation: (1) The Nominalism which pervaded the theology of the late Middle Ages. (2) The shift from a primitive emphasis on eucharistic sacrifice to an almost exclusive preoccupation with the eucharistic presence, thus turning the liturgical action into a virtual monopoly of the priest-celebrant.

Accordingly, it is natural that, as far as the bulk of Christians were concerned, any preparation which they were to make for participation in the rite, would be for Communion, the only point at which they could do so. Such preparation is indeed enjoined with great seriousness in the ‘Long Exhortation’ of our Book of Common Prayer, but the injunctions are entirely in terms of the idealistic ‘receptionism’ which lay behind the whole write. Nor was this theory limited to reformed liturgies, as we shall see.

A good example of this observation is to be found in the position assigned to the General Confession and Absolution (together, of course, with the Comfortable Words), in

⁹⁴ See Smyth, DTLB, pp. 75-77, also ch. VIII.

⁹⁵ Note in the *Anamnesis* of the Society of the Catholic Commonwealth, appended to Smyth, *Sacrifice*, p. 145.

⁹⁶ See Mascall, *op. cit.*, Appendix, conclusion.

⁹⁷ Dix, *op. cit.*, p. 663.

Anglican Liturgies from 1552 on. We shall discuss this matter in greater detail in the next chapter, but it suffices here to note that their position seems to emphasize the idea that a remembering of our sins, and of God's willingness to forgive them through Jesus Christ, forms a kind of preparation for our participation in the Lord's Supper, which means, of course, our communion. (For the Catholic, too, it is still 'Confession before Communion' today.) The result is that to this day the entire emphasis is placed upon an individual and highly subjective 'preparation of the soul,' as the *Eucharistic Liturgy* calls it,⁹⁸ for the reception of certain 'spiritual benefits' at the time of communion, rather than on the corporate offering of Christ's Body in His Holy Sacrifice.

What place, then, can be assigned to our *prosphora* in such a scheme? We have seen that the early Church, at least, thought of the Oblation as the means whereby each Christian is offered in union with Christ. But is it possible to think of it in this context, simply as an 'unblemished offering' ready by virtue of our offering them as Christians for Christ to use? Or, on the other hand, are oblations of bread and wine largely irrelevant to the central action of the Eucharist? Our study of the nature of sacrifice in the preceding chapters should have prepared us, if not the Reformers, to give a negative reply to the last question without hesitation. But we must spend a little more time with the last question but one.

We learned in Chapter Two that the material of an offering, at the time of its being offered, has to be thought of as being something far more than, say, just a lamb or a wafer. For this offering comprises within it the various actions which have gone into its 'preparation, growth or achievement' as a product of its social environment. Thus, not only is it possible to say with Saint Augustine and others, that in offering a thing a man "is really offering himself,"⁹⁹ but it is equally true that he is also offering a great many other things as well—the work of the shepherds who tended the lamb, the farmers who grew the grain, the laborers who took part in the processing of the bread, and so forth. In other words, a whole slice of God's creation is here being offered to Him by man, that creation's priest.

But we have also seen in Chapter Three that the environment thus offered in its disorder and sin constitutes a serious blemish on that offering, as does the sin of the offerer. Father Hastings Smyth has dealt with the nature of these blemishes in many of his books and terms them 'defects introduced into the Offertory.'¹⁰⁰ In Chapter VIII of *Discerning the Lord's Body*, he classifies limitations on the Offertory into two categories. (1). *Contingencies*. These are limitations "derived from conditions imposed by man's situation within ... this fallen world," and are discoverable "even in the perfect individual humanity of Our Lord Himself."¹⁰¹ (2). *Sins*. These are "actual sins committed by members of the Divine Community during the period of the preparation of any given

⁹⁸ Op. cit., p. 191.

⁹⁹ Measure, op. cit., p. 49.

¹⁰⁰ E.g., *A Preparation for the Christian Sacrifice, Discerning the Lord's Body, Sacrifice*, etc.

¹⁰¹ p. 96.

Offertory,” and “distinct from contingencies, are not to be found within the individual humanity of Our Lord.”¹⁰²

In Fr. Smyth’s terminology, sacrifice is in effect a transit from the level of the contingent (i.e., the natural world) to that of the absolute (i.e., the supernatural realm of God’s being). It is of course our Lord alone who is able to effect this transit, and it is this action of our Lord that is called His Atonement. It is only in and through the Atonement that man’s offerings, which are not only limited by their contingency, but actually defaced by sin, can become acceptable to God.¹⁰³

But even the power of the Atonement does not override man’s freedom. In order to invoke this power there must be an act of free repentance on his part. As applied to the Offertory, this means a complete examination, prior to its offering, not primarily of one’s soul, but rather of the structure of one’s *prospora*, in order to discover as far as possible the defects which have been introduced into it, and to endeavour to make amends for them. Naturally, since the defects best known to us will be those which we ourselves have introduced, this preparation will include a thorough-going self-examination, but the area is far broader than this, and the orientation is different.

If we examine certain passages in the New Testament and early Christian writings, we shall find that this view is borne out by them.

(1). 1 Corinthians 11:28, 29. “Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself.”

Here, appended to the earliest account we possess of the institution of the Eucharist, we find Saint Paul laying down in categorical terms the need for preparation for the Christian Sacrifice. In the ‘Long Exhortation’ of our Book of Common Prayer, this passage is quoted, but with the emphasis on the words ‘examine *himself*.’ Actually, in the context of the Apostle’s words, self-examination is placed parallel to ‘discerning the body.’ This, as we shall see, takes the emphasis off an exclusively subjective interpretation, and places it in a corporate and social context.

Another passage which has traditionally been grouped with St. Paul’s instruction is to be found in Matthew 22:11-14. This is the story of the man without a wedding garment which forms the sequel to the Matthean version of the parable of the Great Feast. Although modern writers and commentators tend to think of this parable exclusively in eschatological terms, classical teachers have discovered in it a richness of instruction regarding the relation of the Christian to the Lord’s Supper. Here it is the objective state of the guest, not some private feeling, which forms the basis of his rejection. But it is likely that an even more basic parallel between this parable and the words ‘discerning the body’ exists here. As Fr. Smyth has said,

“It is likely that this wedding garment stands ... for Our Lord’s Atonement. No member of His social humanity can ever be prepared *in his own human right* to come forward with the gift of his life within Our Lord’s Memorial Feast ... But

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Smyth, *Discerning the Lord’s Body*, p. 97 ff.

whoever comes forward asking for this garment without first having expended all his own powers toward reconciliation with his brother Is in the position of one who overworks the Atonement.”¹⁰⁴

In other words, lack of preparation, either through negligence or pride, is equated with inability to ‘discern the body,’ or of refusal to avail oneself of the saving power of the Atonement.

This conclusion leads us on to what is perhaps a key text in connection with our preparation for the Christian Sacrifice, which is to be found in a famous saying of our Lord, recorded in Matthew 5:23, 24.

“So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”

Two observations must be made about this passage. The first concerns the sacrificial nature of the terminology used. Buchanan Gray and others have pointed out that the words for ‘gift,’ ‘altar,’ and ‘offerer’ here used (δῶρον, θυσιαστήριον, προσφέρειν) have inescapable sacrificial connotations which show that our Lord was speaking in the prophetic tradition of conditions which were necessary to anyone who was taking part in a Jewish sacrifice. Christians, who have historically applied this terminology to their own sacrifice, have therefore felt themselves justified in interpreting this passage as a dominically ordained condition for participating in the action of the liturgical Offertory.

The second observation is concerned with the nature of this condition. Preparation *for* our sacrifice is not a simple, private ‘preparation of the soul’ for the reception of our Saviour, as most modern Communion Manuals imply.

“For the Liturgical Christian there are no strictly private sins.”¹⁰⁵

It is rather a preparation *of* our sacrifice in the most objective and social sense, by the examination of the historical structure of our *prosphora*. And this, as we have seen, includes the environment in which this sacrifice is being prepared. Unless we are in a state of reconciliation with our brother, our sacrifice is a blemished one, and will not be an acceptable vehicle for our Lord’s purpose. Such a reconciliation involves a complex of relations, not only of ourselves with God, but of ourselves with our brothers under God.

“When you mar your individual relationship with God Incarnate you mar, at the same time, the whole structure of social relationships within the baptised community to which you belong.”¹⁰⁶

From the earliest times this reconciliation was accomplished within the Church through the mutual confession of wrongs done, together with resolution for amendment and restitution, and followed by sacramental absolution. There is no need to deal in detail here with the processes by which auricular confession became the sacramental means of mediating this reconciliation within the Christian community. But it cannot be a mere

¹⁰⁴ Smyth, *op. cit.*, p. 144 footnote.

¹⁰⁵ Smyth, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

¹⁰⁶ Smyth, *A Preparation for the Christian Sacrifice*, p. 12.

coincidence that this process of reconciliation is laid down as a prerequisite for the offering of the Christian Sacrifice by a document which is usually considered to belong to the second century of the Christian era, the *Didache*, or *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*.

“On the Lord’s own day, assemble in common to break bread and offer thanks (εὐχαριστήσατε); *but first confess your sins, so that your sacrifice may be pure*. 2. However, no one quarreling with his brother may join your meeting until they are reconciled; *your sacrifice must not be defiled.*”¹⁰⁷

This is by far the clearest statement in early Christian literature concerning the relationship between penitence and the offering of sacrifice. However, it is borne out indirectly by the heavy emphasis laid on ethical perfection on the part of the baptised community. To a modern reader, one of the truly arresting characteristics of a document like the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus consists in this ‘perfectionism’ which is strikingly demonstrated in a long list of professions forbidden to those who wished to become candidates for Baptism. In these lists, not only are obviously immoral occupations like prostitution, the pagan priesthood, or participation in the gladiatorial shows proscribed, but also the army as a career, teaching in pagan school, holding offices in connection with the secular courts, and so forth.¹⁰⁸

Of course this strictness can be interpreted as undue rigorism on Hippolytus’ part, in the light of his quarrel with Pope Callistus over the question of post-baptismal sin. And yet the very fact that this was a live issue, as we know from other sources it was, shows that the early Church was seriously concerned with what we have termed the introduction of blemishes into its sacrifices by a Church which was too closely tied to a fallen society.

The quotation from the *Didache*, by linking penitence with offering, combines this same ethical seriousness with a realism which is perhaps lacking in Hippolytus. And it is this realistic way that the Church of the Catholic west has accepted.

Today, in almost all liturgies, the aspect of reconciliation is focused on the liturgical action by means of a General Confession and Absolution. And yet there is very little in these liturgies themselves to show the precise relation of this Confession to the overall ‘Shape of the Liturgy.’

It has been the purpose of this essay to show that

(1). Confession is a necessary prerequisite for the offering of the materials of the Christian Sacrifice. Such confession involves a truly social reconciliation, such as is demonstrated by numerous sayings of our Lord, summed up in the petition from the Lord’s Prayer,

“Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.”¹⁰⁹

In the complex series of historical relationships which is implicated in the preparation of an offering today such reconciliation must mean, not only the personal reconciliation which is scripturally enjoined between individual members of the Christian community,

¹⁰⁷ *Didache*, par. 14. Emphasis mine.

¹⁰⁸ *Ap. Trad.*, Part II, ch. xvi:9-25.

¹⁰⁹ Matthew 6:12, A.V.

but also an active participation by the Christian offerer in organized movements, political and otherwise, for the ameliorative of the defective social environment.¹¹⁰

(2). This reconciliation is undertaken, not as some spiritual ‘preparation of the soul,’ but as the prior condition required in order that Christ may redeem the structure of the offering of bread and wine which has been disordered, both by the personal sin of the offerer, and by the environment from which it has emerged. This is accomplished liturgically through the Absolution pronounced by the priest. Here, in the terminology of Fr. Smyth, sins are transformed into contingencies by their reception into Christ’s Atonement.

“God cannot make a wrong deed committed in the past to be as if it had not occurred at all. He can, however, weave its otherwise disastrous present effects within the Offertory into the pattern of His human perfection in such wise that these defects... assume the character of true contingencies.”¹¹¹

Thus, in a sense, it is the bread and wine that are absolved in the Absolution of the Liturgy (as distinct from the absolution in the Sacrament of Penance which applies more generally and directly to the penitent himself) and through them their offerer.

(3). Consequently, it is important that liturgical reform should take this relationship into account by closely linking the General Confession and Absolution with the Offertory, and by the use of forms which would make the theology of this connection clear and understandable.

Chapter Six—The Liturgical Expression – A Practical Suggestion

HOW THEN, is this last suggestion to be accomplished? As we have seen, the early Church, with its uncompromising attitude toward post-baptismal sin, and later, with the general use of the Sacrament of Penance as a precondition for participation in the Holy Sacrifice, did not find it necessary to include a form of General Confession in the body of the Liturgy.

By the time that this began to be included, the split between priest and laity, together with the growing tendency toward subjectivism and individualism, had become apparent. In the Roman Mass today, the priest and servers confess apart from the people in the Preparation at the very beginning of the liturgy. This is the fashion today for ‘Catholics’ in our own church as well. Then, if there are any communicants, they say their own confession just prior to their communion. We have mentioned above the implications of this way of doing things.

The present position of the General Confession in the Anglican rite of 1552-1662 merely takes away the Priest’s confession (in itself a very necessary thing), without basically altering in any way the individualistic ‘receptionist’ stress which is laid on Communion. In addition, as Dom Gregory Dix has pointed out, it interrupts the sequence of the liturgical action in a most unsatisfactory manner.

“The offertory is thus separated from the consecration by the whole length of the intercessions, long and short exhortations, confession, absolution and comfortable

¹¹⁰ See esp., *Discerning the Lord’s Body*, pp. 105-126.

¹¹¹ Smyth, *Discerning the Lord’s Body*, p. 102.

words, and prayer of humble access.... This long sagging gap ... is one of the chief structural weaknesses of our present rite.”¹¹²

And yet, most of the revised Anglican liturgies follow this pattern.

In quite recent times, several revisions are at least showing a dawning realization that there is a connection of some kind, although this is never actually made explicit in any definite manner. As we have noticed, the American Prayer Book Studies, vol. IV, *The Eucharistic Liturgy*, toys with the notion. It rejects the placing of the penitential section just before the Offertory on some highly interesting grounds. For although they

“have been unable to find any fault with it in theory,”¹¹³

they have found that the “working clergy” object that

“if a beautiful theory of the liturgical scholars were allowed to interrupt this triumphal progress of the service (from the exaltation of the sermon (!) to the Offertory) by making a new start from penitential depths, ... the impetus attained would be lost, and its effectiveness would be sacrificed.”¹¹⁴

Surely here is subjectivism far surpassing anything attributed by Dix to Cranmer!

In the recent revision of the Japanese Liturgy, the General Confession is actually placed just before the Offertory. But very typically, this is mainly for practical, rather than for theological reasons. The committee in that country was at first inclined to follow preparation of the priest at the very beginning. But, argued one hard-head realist among the revisers, the Japanese are notorious late-comers, so why not give them a few minutes of grace by putting the penitential section forward to the Offertory!

Of course, it would be an injustice to the Japanese revisers to suggest that this was their *only* reason for doing so, but one other illustration will show that there did exist a certain lack of understanding on their part of the function of the General Confession and Absolution in the Liturgy as we have outlined it here. The form of the confession used, while not the traditional one from the Book of Common Prayer, still displays certain inadequacies. For one thing, it maintains the single form, to be said by priest and people together. But this disregards the mutual and social nature of the reconciliation laid down by the texts which we have noted.¹¹⁵ The mutual form used by priest and server in the Roman rite demonstrates this principle clearly.

The liturgy which illustrates most concretely the kind of theology which we have here been attempting to expound, is to be seen in the use of the Society of the Catholic Commonwealth, which has been printed at the conclusion of Fr. Smyth’s latest book, the doctrinal homily, *Sacrifice*. In a note¹¹⁶ on the General Confession, he explains the form used as follows.

¹¹² Op. cit., p. 692.

¹¹³ *The Eucharistic Liturgy*, pp. 191ff.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Matthew 5:23, 6:12, etc.

¹¹⁶ *Sacrifice*, p. 139.

“First the Priest makes his Confession to the people. The people, by the authority of that Priesthood which is the possession of the Church as a whole, then give him Absolution. Then the people, in their turn, make a similar Confession and are absolved by the authority of their sacramentally representative Priest...

“These Absolutions are to be understood as coming from God, through our Incarnate Lord, and mediated within His Church. Their direct application is to the perfecting of the histories structurally carried along by the bread and wine now offered ... Thus the liturgical Confessions and Absolutions are not ‘purely spiritual’ transactions; but are instead the means of the application of the Atonement for the perfection of the material offerings which issue from the work of the Community of the Incarnation.”¹¹⁷

In conclusion, it may not be completely idealistic to append a form in which this theology might be carried out in a revision of our own Canadian Liturgy.

Upon entering the Church, each Communicant deposits a coin in a place prepared at the church door. He receives in turn a wafer which he deposits in a receptacle conveniently placed therefor.

The Service then proceeds in the customary manner. Following the saying of the Nicene Creed,

The Priest, turning to the people, says:

Let us confess our sins, that our sacrifice may be pure.

Then the Priest, turning to the Altar, makes his Confession in an audible voice:

I confess to God Almighty, to the whole Company of Heaven, to all the Church, and especially to you my brethren here present, that I have sinned exceedingly in thought, word and deed, by my fault, by my own fault, by my own most grievous fault.

Therefore I beg the whole Company of Heaven, all the Church, and especially you my brethren here present, to pray for me to the Lord our God: that through the atoning action of His Son, he may forgive my sins.

The People respond:

Almighty God have mercy upon thee, forgive thee thy sins, and bring thee to everlasting life.

Priest: Amen.

Then the people, kneeling, make their Confessions:

We confess, etc., (as above)

The Priest says the Absolution:

Almighty God have mercy upon you, etc. (as above)

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

The Almighty and merciful Lord grant unto you pardon, absolution + and remission of your sins.

Response: Amen.

Then turning to the Altar, he says the Offertory.

The Oblations of bread and wine are now brought to the Altar by a representative of the people...

The End

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