

DIVINE LITURGY, DIVINE LOVE: Toward a New Understanding of Sacrifice in Christian Worship

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Occasionally an author writes a line in an almost accidental fashion, in the heat of the moment, so to speak, and later the line looks different. At the time of writing, it looked like the climax of a train of thought, but later, even after the train has left the station, it seems to hold promise standing alone. Here is how it happened to me. It occurred in a chapter of my book, *Theologia Prima*, at a juncture where I was trying to explain Alexander Schmemmann's idea of cultic antinomy. I wrote:

So on the one hand, liturgy directs its participants to a goal different from the cultic goal of attaining contact with God [because Christ has effected union with God]. Everything that religious cult foreshadowed has had its fulfillment in Christ. He is the new temple and the new sacrifice, as well as the new altar, priest, king, prophet, Torah, Sabbath, and tabernacle. Everything we use in Christian liturgy has passed through the hypostatic union. The goal of liturgy, in Schmemmann's words, is "the *Church* as the manifestation and presence of the 'new *aeon*' of the Kingdom of God." Christ did not found another religion; he founded a new age, the age of the Church, which is populated by a new race of people in unity with himself. This is his body, the *totus Christus* The liturgy is antinomous because what cult cannot contain is contained in liturgical cult, just as what heaven and earth could not contain was contained in the womb of the *Theotokos*.¹

I can put a finer point on the line I am thinking of by restating it this way: All things must pass through the hypostatic union before they are of any use to us. That is my thesis in this article. Things are different after they have been assumed into Christ, and touched by the hypostatic union (this phrase refers to the incarnation as the union of two natures in one person, one hypostasis). Things are now joined to the activity of the God-Man. Their meaning is new because their context

¹ David Fagerberg, *Theologia Prima* (Chicago: Hillenbrand, 2003) 13–14.

is new, and their context is new because they have a new alpha and a new omega, a new final cause and a new efficient cause.

I am not modest in the claim. I mean that *all things* in the Church must pass through the hypostatic union before we can use them at liturgy. This includes temples, vestments, altars, the priesthood, authority of both the monarchical and collegial variety, Sunday, feast days, canon law, hierarchy, fasting, charity, confraternal fellowships, architecture, music, art, and more. The natural accoutrements of religion can be found in the Church, but they do not function in the Church in the same way because they have been perfected. They have passed through the hypostatic union and are now part and parcel of the Mystical Body of Christ.

As I say, this idea could shine light in various theological directions. To take but one example, I might venture the hypothesis that this line explains the Christian interpretation of Scripture known as typology. Jean Daniélou defined typology as the “science of the similitudes between the two Testaments,”² but we must not take that to mean holding up one beside the other and looking back and forth, first at one, then at the other. It’s rather a matter of seeing everything in the Old Testament pass through the hypostatic union as it arrives at the feet of the Christian interpreter. Typology is Scripture filtered through Christ. It is seeing the prophet Moses, the Jerusalem temple, the Passover lamb, the Red Sea passage, and the Sabbath rest as types of Jesus. Israel’s history comes to us through the hypostatic union and constructs our ecclesiology, moral theology, eschatology, and sacramental mystagogy. But those are other topics.

Liturgy, the Life of Christ in his Body

The thesis I propose is that sacrifice must also pass through the hypostatic union before it can be of any liturgical use to us. This does not negate sacrifice, it perfects it, like Christ’s divinity did not negate his human nature, it perfected it; like God’s grace does not nullify our identity but perfects our humanity. The supreme act of human religion, sacrifice, passes through the hypostatic union and is elevated to be liturgical sacrifice. That’s what it means, in my opinion, to call something “liturgical.” Something is liturgical for being an exercise of Christ’s Mystical Body. I know the term is sometimes used otherwise, as in the time someone said to me, “If you like liturgy, wait until you see a Notre Dame football game.” In their language game, liturgy meant anything done in a fancy, regularized, orderly, ceremonial, formal way. But in my language game, ritual alone, without a divine content, does not a liturgy make. The word “liturgy” names more than ritual form, it names Christological content: the content of liturgy is the life of Christ extended to his Mystical Body. Therefore, in *Mediator Dei* Pope Pius XII defines the sacred liturgy by identifying three interwoven actions:

2 Jean Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1966), 4.

. . . [a] the public worship which our redeemer as head of the Church renders to the Father, as well as [b] the worship which the community of the faithful renders to its founder, and [c] through him to the heavenly Father.

It is, in short, the worship rendered by the Mystical Body of Christ in the entirety of its Head and members.³

This alters how we hear phrases like “liturgical theology” or “liturgical music.” We do not mean a style. We mean a presence. The content of liturgy is the life of Christ extended to his Mystical Body, and the content of liturgical sacrifice will be the sacrifice of Christ continued in us, his Mystical Body.

Of late, I have been reading Emile Mersch’s three classic works on the Mystical Body,⁴ and nobody makes the connection to the hypostatic union closer and clearer than he does. A few quotes from his first volume, *The Whole Christ*:

Christ has a twofold life on earth: one visible and historical, the other invisible and mystical; the first is the preparation for the second, and the second is the prolongation of the first. In the second, which is His mysterious existence in the depths of souls, Christ is far more active, far more truly alive than ever He was in the days when He walked and preached in Judea. (44)

The Church is the continuation, the fullness, the plenitude of Christ. Christ’s actions and sufferings are prolonged and consummated in the action of Christians. (131)

The hypostatic union does not affect our LORD alone, but it is somehow prolonged in us, the members; we are the prolongation of the Head, and the hypostatic union renders us divine by reason of our continuity with the God-man. (283)

The divine life we receive is the life given in all plenitude to Christ’s human nature. (304)

The same hypostatic union causes to flow into our human nature the life that it imparts to the humanity of Christ. (356)

3 Pope Pius XII, *Mediator Dei*, Encyclical Letter on the Sacred Liturgy (November 20, 1947), 20, in *Encyclical Letter of His Holiness Pius XII on the Sacred Liturgy: Vatican Library Translation* (Washington, DC: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1947).

4 Emile Mersch, *The Whole Christ* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1938); *The Theology of the Mystical Body* (St Louis: B. Herder, 1952); and *Morality and the Mystical Body* (New York: P. J. Kennedy & Sons, 1939).

Everything in Christianity derives from the union that Christ's sacred humanity had with the Word. Incarnation is the union of divine and human natures, not a docetic appearance of God in a costume of flesh. This union in one personal hypostasis has changed the relationship of God with man. In the words of St. Athanasius (d. 373): "The Son of God became the Son of man in order that the sons of men, the sons of Adam, might be made sons of God. . . . He is the Son of God by nature, we by grace."⁵ In the words of St. Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444): "No created thing has the power to vivify. . . . The flesh of Paul, for instance, or of Peter, could not produce this effect in us, but only the flesh of our Savior, Christ."⁶ In the words of St. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274): "What is first in any genus is also the cause of whatever comes after it in the genus."⁷

The Church is mankind transfigured by the life of Christ, by the hypostatic union. This may be what Alexander Schmemmann had in mind when he quipped that the Church is not an institution with sacraments, it is a sacrament with institutions. And I propose that the life of Christ has transfigured sacrifice. In the Church, all objects, persons, times, all theology, cult, and authority is liturgical for having passed through the hypostatic union, and for the same reason, and in the same way, the Church knows liturgical sacrifice. The essence of liturgical sacrifice is love, for Christ is all love for the Father, and the Father is all love for his only begotten Son, and through the Spirit this love reaches to all the members united to the head. By spiritual liturgy we participate in the perichoresis of the Trinity's love.

The Mass: Real Sacrifice and Mystical Immolation

There is a difficulty in going straight to this conclusion, however, because the word "sacrifice" has fallen into ill repute today. The source of that bad odor may go back several hundred years, and in order for the world to understand us when we talk about liturgical sacrifice, it behooves us to pause momentarily to notice the meanings that have accrued to the word "sacrifice." I will do so as briefly and quickly as possible, but there are three important persons I should like to mention before returning to divine liturgy and divine love.

The first author I want to mention is Maurice de La Taille. In his *The Mystery of Faith* (1915), he proposes that sacrifice consists of a threefold act, but that our modern definition has infelicitously reduced it to only the middle one. Sacrifice, fully considered, involves offering, immolation, and God's acceptance of the sacrifice. We, however, have placed all our attention on the middle act, immolation. We tend to reduce sacrifice to the death of the victim, but in fact all three component parts are essential.

5 Quoted in Mersch, *The Whole Christ*, 284.

6 Quoted in Mersch, *The Whole Christ*, 340.

7 Quoted in Mersch, *The Whole Christ*, 465.

De La Taille writes, "Neither the offering in itself alone, nor the immolation in itself alone suffices to confer victimhood; both are required." And again: "if God rejects it, the gift will not pass into the ownership of God. . . . For it is ratified as victim at the moment, and only at the moment, when it is accepted by God The sacrifice which is not ratified by God is void."⁸

Applied to Christianity, this means that the full paschal sacrifice involves Christ, the great high priest, who offered the sacrifice of himself at the Last Supper. Christ is also the victim and paschal lamb, who suffered immolation on the cross. That God the Father received and ratified his Son's sacrifice is proven in the Resurrection. "Now in the Resurrection, Christ's Victim has passed over to God; Christ's Victim is received by God; Christ's Victim, food of God so to speak, is absorbed in the uncreated fire of the divine glory. . . . The acceptance in the consumption of the victim by earthly fire was figurative only. Whereas the glorification of Christ was true acceptance."⁹ We celebrate these three moments of sacrifice with particular fullness on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday.

De La Taille's work was beneficial as a course correction to a Catholic apologetic that had emphasized immolation in too exclusive a manner. When the Protestant reformers objected to calling the Mass a sacrifice, a series of apologists rose up to affirm the truth that the Mass is a genuine sacrifice, but they did so by focusing almost exclusively on immolation. The result tended toward an attempt to prove a fresh immolation of the victim on each altar, at each Mass. If sacrifice meant immolation, then to prove Protestants wrong when they said there was no sacrifice at the Mass, one tried to prove there was a fresh immolation at each Mass.

De La Taille patiently works through various theories that were tried. Some looked to the fraction rite, suggesting the body of Christ was broken and immolated anew. Some looked to the communion rite, whereat we chew the body and it is corrupted in our intestines afterward. But most looked to transubstantiation. Immolation came to be defined as moving from a superior status to an inferior one, and what more inferior state could the risen Christ suffer than having his glorified body reduced to an insensitive state under the accident of bread? This state was considered to be an even greater humiliation than the cross, because at least on the cross Christ's body still exerted its connatural function.

8 Maurice de La Taille, *The Mystery of Faith*, 2 vols. (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1940), 1:14–15. Add to this thought the words of Gerhard von Rad: "Sacrifice was, and remained, an event which took place in a sphere lying outside of man and his spirituality: man could as it were only give it the external impulse; its actual operation was not subject to the control of his capacity or capabilities: all this rested with Yahweh, who had the power to accept the offering and let it achieve its purpose." *Old Testament Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 253.

9 De La Taille, *The Mystery of Faith*, 1:193.

In passing, I mention two potential benefits of de La Taille's thesis. First, on the ecumenical front, it might address certain Protestant concerns. Catholics can say clearly that the sacrifice of the Mass does not add to the once-for-all character of the sacrifice on the cross, a principle that is at the foundation of Protestant theology. Second, there has been strenuous resistance by some Catholics toward veneration of the Blessed Sacrament, and I have to wonder if they perhaps associate all tabernacle piety with this emphasis on Christ's wretched immolation.

Some of the explanations became quite vivid in expression. Remember, the Catholic apologists rightly wanted to assert that the Mass is a sacrifice, but since they thought this meant immolation, they sought to prove the risen Christ's renewed immolation by talking about him undergoing a constricted, lessened, reduced status at transubstantiation. One apologist points out that Christ's resurrected body could exercise its glorified senses, but when he assumes a mode of existence under the species of bread and wine, "he is bereft of the acts connatural to corporal life . . . Jesus is constituted there [in the host] after the manner of an inanimate thing, as far as regards any act connatural to the sensitive life, which state, in comparison with the connatural state, is a kind of exinanition [an enfeebling]."¹⁰ Another apologist writes:

In the Eucharist (what a humiliation!) Christ so humbled himself and chose a state so abject that, apart from a singular miracle, He is like a dead trunk or a log, he can no longer obtain knowledge through acquired images, nor any longer can he, in the light of that knowledge, make acts of the will, likewise he has no more power to feel or move in any way whatever than he would have if he possessed no faculty of reason, sense, or motion. . . . Could anything be added to the supreme humiliation of Christ in the Eucharist, since he lies there like a dead trunk or a log, a state not realized even on the cross? For there, in the midst of his torments, his senses still exerted their connatural function. . . . Hence this state of Christ is by far the most wretched, a greater humiliation than even his abject condition on the cross."¹¹

I only pause to notice these apologists because this way of defending the Mass led to a certain kind of tabernacle piety that caused some members in the liturgical renewal movement in the middle part of the last century to strenuously oppose adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. But what would tabernacle piety look like if it was based on a more adequate theology of sacrifice, one which was not restricted to immolation, but was, as de La Taille was trying to bring us to see, a full movement of Christ the priest, Christ the victim, and the Father's reception?

¹⁰ De La Taille, quoting Franzelin, *The Mystery of Faith*, 2:203.

¹¹ De La Taille, quoting Renaud, *The Mystery of Faith*, 2:203–204.

But that, as I said, is a passing comment offered for your reflection. The use I wished to make of de La Taille here is to affirm with him that the Mass is a “real sacrifice but a mystical immolation.” De La Taille quotes Peter Lombard to this effect.

It is asked: is sacrifice or immolation the proper term for what the priest does, and is Christ immolated each day, or was He immolated once only? Our answer is briefly this: what is offered and consecrated by the priest is called a sacrifice and an oblation, because it is the memorial and the representation of the holy immolation made on the altar of the cross. And Christ died on the Cross once, and in Himself he was immolated there; but he is daily immolated in the sacrament, because in the sacrament was made the memorial of what was done once.¹²

The offering, the immolation, and the reception by the Father together make up the sacrifice. So, in the words of the Council of Trent (1545–1563), Jesus did what he did at the Last Supper in order that

His priesthood might not come to an end with His death . . . that he might leave to His beloved spouse the Church a visible sacrifice, such as the nature of man requires, whereby that bloody sacrifice once to be accomplished on the cross might be represented, the memory thereof remain even to the end of the world . . . [He] offered up to God the Father His own Body and Blood under the form of bread and wine.¹³

Or, in the words of the Second Vatican Council document *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (1963): “At the Last Supper, on the night when he was betrayed, our Savior instituted the eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the centuries.”¹⁴ Or, in the words of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice: “The victim is one and the same: the same now offers through the ministry of priests, who then offered himself on the cross; only the manner of offering is different.” “And since

12 De La Taille, quoting Lombard, *The Mystery of Faith*, 2:210.

13 Council of Trent, Session 22, chapter 1. Text in *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* (Rockford, IL: Tan, 1978), 144.

14 Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (December 4, 1963), 47, in *The Liturgy Documents*, 4th ed., 2 vols. (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2004), 1:13.

in this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and is offered in an unbloody manner . . . this sacrifice is truly propitiatory."¹⁵

The victim who is made present on the altar is an immolated victim, so when the Church gives him over to the Father it is a real sacrifice. But the victim made present on the altar is already an immolated victim, so we do not add to his victimhood. That is how it can be affirmed, as Catholic teaching always has, that our "new" sacrifice of the Mass does not add something new (in the sense of "additional") to the cross. "Hence whatever is new in the sacrifice of the mass in relation to the sacrifice of the Cross comes only from the Church, which now makes its own the offering made by Christ in the past, making it new only in so far as the power and the act of sacrificing passes from the Head to the body."¹⁶

Recovering the True Meaning of Sacrifice

The second author I want to mention is Royden Yerkes, who analyzes the ditch that divides the modern thinker from medieval, ancient, and biblical thinkers. As a young graduate student, Yerkes became increasingly uncertain about the explanation of sacrifice offered by prevailing nineteenth century theories of religion, and later summarized his conclusions in a 1953 study entitled *Sacrifice in Greek and Roman Religions and Early Judaism*.

Yerkes contrasts the modern, secular connotations of sacrifice with the ancient, religious connotations. According to the prevailing modern definition, sacrifice may be material or immaterial and it must be valuable to the person making the sacrifice. Sacrifice is constituted by renouncing or giving up something, because the sacrificer is depriving himself of its use. The sacrifice is *by* somebody, *of* something, and *for* something, but never *to* anybody. Thus, the emphasis is upon the sacrificed thing's destruction; because of this, sacrifice denotes sadness and misfortune. Finally, the cost of the sacrifice should be compared with the value obtained because we desire to obtain as much as possible for as little as possible.

Yerkes concludes: "The word sacrifice has . . . undergone a complete transformation of meaning. The general and popular use of the term today, with a few esoteric exceptions, is wholly secular and describes some sort of renunciation, usually destruction, of something valuable in order that something more valuable may be obtained."¹⁷

15 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), no. 1367. The paragraph is quoting Council of Trent (1562); compare Heb 9:14, 27.

16 De La Taille, *The Mystery of Faith*, 2:193.

17 Royden Yerkes, *Sacrifice in Greek and Roman Religions and Early Judaism* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1953), 2.

In contrast, he notes the connotations associated with sacrifice in the ancient mind, Hebrew as well as Greco-Roman. The word was only used to describe religious rites and things, it had no secular usage. Sacrifice never connoted reluctance or deprivation or renunciation or sadness, but rather sacrifices were occasions of greatest joy and festivity and thanksgiving—gladly performed as expressions of the attitude of people toward their gods. Therefore, sacrifices were always as large as possible, because the larger the sacrifice the greater the accompanying joy and festivity. Sacrifices were offered *by men to* their gods, and a sacrifice not offered to some person was inconceivable (the emphasis was on the *giving to* and not the *giving up*). While sometimes offered to procure boons, sacrifices were frequently offered as thanksgiving after the boon had already been received. The death of the animal was a necessary preliminary act but no particular significance was attached to the fact that the animal had died.

Thus Yerkes provides us with some vocabulary. “Any object which had been given to a god by repetition of prescribed words and with a prescribed ceremony was called *sacer*.” Objects set apart were called *sacra*. The process of devoting things to the use of a god was described by the word *sacrificare* or its kindred *consecrare*.¹⁸ This leads him to the definition of sacrifice as “to make a thing sacred” or “to do a sacred act.”

To Do What is Sacred

The third and final author I want to mention is Louis Bouyer because he advances a clarification on this point. It was a clarification that he refined in his own mind over the course of his career. In a series of talks at the University of Notre Dame, finally published under the title *Liturgical Piety* in 1955, he follows St. Augustine (d. 430) in saying sacrifice creates a people, and writes:

Here is the deepest meaning of the word “sacrifice”: *sacrum facere*, to make holy. What is the holy thing which is made, or the thing which is made holy as the final effect of God’s Word proclaimed to the world? We can say that it is the people, for it is made a people in being made the people of God. This is precisely the conclusion reached by St. Augustine. . . . The sacrifice which is offered to God the Father in Christianity is finally the whole redeemed city offering itself to its redeemer.¹⁹

But eight years later, in 1963, Bouyer published *Rite and Man* which contains a more careful consideration and a more nuanced definition. Here he first reviews various theories about natural religion, and developments in the history of religions and psychology, and he arrives at the conclusion that “*sacrum facere*

¹⁸ Yerkes, *Sacrifice*, 6.

¹⁹ Louis Bouyer, *Liturgical Piety* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1955), 160.

could not mean 'to make sacred' unless one had consciousness that the world was not sacred." In other words, one thinks one must go round with a sacrifice wand consecrating things only if one thinks the world is not sacred and needs man to effect its consecration. Such a consciousness does not belong to the most primitive, natural religious consciousness of man, Bouyer insists. Instead, it belongs to a later stage that is rather far removed from the sensibility of natural religion. Bouyer therefore refines his own, earlier definition of sacrifice:

Originally, *sacrum facere* certainly did not mean "to make sacred" what supposedly was not sacred up to that particular moment, but rather quite simply "to do what is sacred" *in se ac per se*. For the ancient Latins, sacrifice was nothing more than the sacred act. . . . By definition, the "sacred" is that over which man has no control.²⁰

Whence arose this erroneous illusion by men and women that the earth is theirs, and all the glory therein, and for God to have a piece of it—a mountain, a tree, a well, a sheep—the human being must make that thing sacred by sacrifice? Bouyer's answer is that sin has corrupted our understanding.

[Modern man] assumes that reality was from the first profane and in order to have something sacred it was necessary to take hold of that which was profane and consecrate it. The truth, however, is the very opposite to this rather smug opinion. Not only was the sacred never made out of the profane, but, in fact, it is the profane that has come into being through a desecration of the sacred.²¹

Notice the inversion that sin has caused in our understanding. In fact, the sacred does not appear when the profane is consecrated; the profane appears when the sacred is desecrated. Bouyer goes on to analyze the source and effect of desecration.

20 Bouyer, *Rite and Man* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1963), 80. Bouyer is familiar with de La Taille's work, and has this to say: "In his beautiful and profound study, *The Mystery of Faith*, Pere de La Taille maintains that in a state of integral nature the oblation would actually constitute the essence of a sacrifice, and that the painful immolation has only come in as a result of sin. . . . In favor of a general application of Pere de La Taille's thesis to the history of religions it might still be said that it corresponds well enough to the etymology of the word *sacrificium*, that is, *sacrum facere*, 'to make sacred.' . . . Unfortunately, however, this etymological interpretation bears the obvious stamp of an advanced stage of religious development." From here, Bouyer goes ahead to correct the definition he once shared with de La Taille.

21 Bouyer, *Rite and Man*, 80.

[Man] circumscribes a limited area in this reality as his own to the exclusion of God. At this moment the profane in contrast to the sacred makes its appearance. The more firmly a man establishes himself in the world as his own home, the more this area of the profane is extended. Moreover, the farther he extends the boundaries of his own piece of ground, the less interest he takes in the rest. A time finally comes when the profane practically seems to coincide with the real. The sacred is no more than a local survival. The rites then easily appear to man as the making of something sacred.²²

Such is sinful man's outlook on the cosmos once his attitude toward sacrifice has been corrupted.

What Happens in the Sacrifice of the Liturgy

With these perspectives on sacrifice, we have positioned ourselves to consider what is really happening in the liturgical sacrifice. From de La Taille we want to remember that for a full understanding of sacrifice, the immolated victim must be both offered up (as Christ gave his apostles the power to do) and accepted (as the Father has promised to do by commanding his angel to carry the sacrifice to his altar in heaven). Sacrifice is defined as a dynamic motion of relationship, not the killing of a static thing. From Yerkes we want to remember the gift quality of sacrifice. It is a gesture of thanksgiving wherein we emphasize *giving to*, not just *giving up*. From Bouyer we want to see how to reverse the egoism that first excludes God from the world, and then offers him a place for local survival in a sacred sphere cut off from our so-called "real life."

I have asserted that sacrifice must pass through the hypostatic union to be used in liturgy. Sacrifice is the supreme act of religion, but our religion is transformed by Christ. Natural religion, with its sacrifice, is elevated by the instrumental causality of Christ's sacred humanity. The Christian liturgy does not do its own human religion—it does the religion of the Christ, who is God as human person. The Christian sacrifice is natural sacrifice restored and elevated by passing through the hypostatic union to be used in divine cult. Sacrifice is a uniquely human activity, but now that human nature has been united with the divine Word, our sacrifices are transfigured through Jesus.

To see this transfiguration, I would like to look at sacrifice through three lenses: the protological, the soteriological, and the eschatological—or, what should have been, what is, and what it is becoming. Protologically, because man is made in the image of God, and that means man's sacrifice will reflect relationship. Soteriologically, because man is a sinner, and that means his sacrifice, now become

22 Bouyer, *Rite and Man*, 80–81.

ineffective, will need redemption. Eschatologically, because what liturgical sacrifice communicates is not an improved natural religion, but Christ's supernatural religion.

First, protology affirms that sacrifice is a natural act of humanity's natural religion. The *Catechism* offers Augustine's definition as its own when it says: "Sacrifice is 'every action done so as to cling to God in communion of holiness, and thus achieve blessedness.'"²³ When we consecrate something, we are clinging to God. Mersch defines sacrifice "as the supreme act of religion," and then defines religion as "a conscious and deliberate straining of the creature toward the Creator, an aspiration toward God, a desire of nearness and union with Him, so far as this is possible for a creature."²⁴ Sacrifice acknowledges the primordial relationship of dependence upon God, leading Mersch to the vivid conclusion, "To exist is our first cult. Thereafter our entire existence can be a religion."²⁵ And, as usual, G. K. Chesterton can put this into words better than I can.

[Greek sacrifice] did satisfy a thing very deep in humanity indeed; the idea of surrendering something as the portion of the unknown powers; of pouring out wine on the ground, of throwing a ring into the sea; in a word, of sacrifice. It is the wise and worthy idea of not taking our advantage to the full; of putting something in the other balance to ballast our dubious pride, of paying tithes to nature for our land. . . . Where that gesture of surrender is most magnificent, as among the great Greeks, there is really much more idea that the man will be the better for losing the ox than that the god will be the better for getting it.²⁶

This was sacrifice, protologically speaking. It was an expression of dependence and thanksgiving upon God. It was a secret connection between sacrifice and thanksgiving (*thysia* and *eucharistia*). If sacrifice is every action done so as to cling to God, as the *Catechism* says, then one would hope that one's whole life would be sacrificial—that every action in life would be done so as to cling to God.

This protological definition is included in liturgical sacrifice. Aidan Kavanagh used to speak of the person at liturgy being "stunningly normal." He writes, "A liturgy of Christians is thus nothing less than the way a redeemed world is, so to speak, done."²⁷ At the sacrificial action of the Mass, we stand again as man and woman were created to stand in Eden—that is, righteously, in right relationship to

23 *Catechism*, no. 2099, quoting St. Augustine, *The City of God*, 10.

24 Mersch, *Theology of the Mystical Body*, 580.

25 Mersch, *Morality and the Mystical Body*, 8, 10.

26 Gilbert K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*, in G. K. Chesterton *Collected Works*, vol. 2 (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986), 242.

27 Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology* (New York: Pueblo, 1984), 100.

Creator above and creation below. Sacrifice is an act that comes out of relationship and expresses the divine-human relationship. The righteous person has an instinct to sacrifice, and a righteous person expects a response from heaven, as de La Taille reminded.

However, we don't do nature naturally any more, so in the second place liturgical sacrifice will include a soteriological dimension. When mankind is sinful, as is actually the case, religious activity and sacrifice will include yet another factor. Sacrifice is "every action done so as to cling to God in communion of holiness." But for a sinner to cling to God, he must stop clinging to himself. The righteous offering pronounced over the victim expects a response from heaven. But our sacrifices are not offered righteously any more. Our sacrifices are ineffective. The only righteous sacrifice, one that could receive a response from heaven, would be a sacrifice offered by a righteous man. And we know from Scripture that no man is righteous (Rom. 3:10). So our offerings will have to be joined to the Righteous One (Acts 3:14; 7:52) by passing through the hypostatic union.

In order to cling to God in sacrifice, the sinner must not be afraid. Yet when the Lord God called to the man and asked, "Where are you?" the man answered, "I heard you in the garden, but I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid myself." The human race has been hiding in the bushes ever since, and only a corrupt form of sacrifice can come forth from a hiding place.

Sacrifice is supposed to be born of a desire to be near to God, but ever since our ancestors by disobedience seized what was not yet theirs to have, our sacrifice has been faulty. The very purpose of sacrifice has been inverted. We no longer desire to be near God, and mankind makes sacrifice in order to stay "safe" from God. If sinful man has circumscribed the world as his own, to the exclusion of God, then the first act of true religion must consist of man relinquishing his rash claims upon everything in the world. Because sin has entered the picture, sacrifice involves a prior, negative, soteriological act before it can be the positive act it was protologically intended to be. The sinner must resign his illusory control over his world, his life, himself, before the positive act of clinging to God in the communion of holiness can be made.

That is why sacrifice looks painful to us: because it will be painful to our old Adam! It will be positively mortifying! Sacrifice looks different under the law of sin than it looked in the garden of Eden. That's probably why sacrifice appears to us as a "giving up"—because exactly the first thing we must do is to give up the profanity that attempts to circumscribe God to a local survival. The sinner's first act of sacrifice must be an act of surrender, an unclenching of his grasping hands. But this is exactly what the sinner is powerless to do. Archimandrite Boniface Luykx, of blessed memory, told me religion is building a road for God to come to you on. But the sinner is afraid of God coming to him, so he is afraid of religion, and he is inept at sacrifice.

Cosmic Priests and Divinized Sacrifice

We must remember how things had been brought to such a state, according to the salvation history we find recorded in Scripture. Before the high king, all creatures should bring their sacrifice. The sacrifices presented by the cherubim are accepted, as well as by the seraphim, archangels and principalities. But where is earth's sacrifice? Where is the sacrifice from visible creation? The angel of that world (Lucifer) has begrudged the king and withheld it. So the king appoints a new priest, one made of flesh and spirit: Adam and Eve. They will be able to make the visible sacrifice because they belong to the visible world and are simultaneously endowed with spiritual soul. Man and woman are the cosmic priests. But they are too easily seduced away from their task by that rebellious prince of this world. The enemy finds it all too easy to give them easy amnesia and they forget their purpose. They no longer see the world as sacrament. They begin to look upon matter as something other than raw material for Eucharist. The cause of all sin is forgetting God, the Church fathers say, and by our weak-willed amnesia, the human race has discovered the reality of life apart from God; in other words, death.

What was God to do? More than we expect. (Isn't that always the way with grace?) Here enters our third lens, the eschatological understanding of sacrifice. The king's Son unites his own nature to these priests, and makes himself the victim. Thus, the sacrifice he gives back to Adam and Eve is a divinized sacrifice. He is the only priest, the high priest, the righteous priest, yet at the Last Supper he tells his apostles they should continue doing what he has just done. They should offer him to the Father just as he is offering himself to the Father. He is the victim, but this is once for all, and because it is a righteous offering it penetrates heaven, as the book of Hebrews says (Heb. 9:23–24).

Sacrifice is restored, but —*O felix culpa!*—in a transfigured form. God gives himself to himself as the first-fruits of humanity's graced sacrifice. What the first Adam refused to do, the second Adam did willingly. Christ lived his life in total obedience to the Father, in total love to the Father, with total religion, in perfect sacrifice toward the Father, clinging at all times to the Father. And for this reason did he love us, too, as George MacDonald captures so well:

The sons of men were his Father's children like himself; that the Father should have them all in his bosom was the one thought of his heart; that should be his doing for his Father, cost him what it might! He came to do his will and on the earth was the same as he had been from the beginning, the eternal first. He was not interested in himself, but in his Father and his Father's children.²⁸

28 George MacDonald, *Unspoken Sermons* (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen Press, 2004), 2:172.

The liturgy therefore has twofold terrain—cultic and mundane. Jean Corbon²⁹ called them ritual liturgy and lived liturgy. It was sin that circumscribed an area to the exclusion of God; in Christ there is no sin, and therefore there was no area of his life that did not belong to the Father. There must not be any such area in our lives, either. Our whole life must be a clinging to God, as Christ's whole life was sacrificial. He was doing his Father's will as he loved the poor around him, so St. John Chrysostom (d. 407) reminded his parishioners that the ones seeking alms in the courtyard outside the church are a sacrificial opportunity:

Do not protest! This stone altar is august because of the Victim that rests upon it; but the altar of almsgiving is more so because it is made of this very Victim. The former is august because, though made of stone, it is sanctified by contact with the body of Christ; the latter, because it is the body of Christ. . . . This altar you can see everywhere, in the streets and in the market place, and at any hour you may offer sacrifice thereon; for it too is a place of sacrifice.³⁰

Christ is the first-fruits because He is the choicest part. The best lamb is offered on behalf of the flock; the best man is offered on behalf of humanity. As representative, God gives himself to himself (making no end to complications in the doctrine of Atonement). Christ took his humanity from us, the humanity in which all persons are united, and thus connected his sacrifice with every person redemptively. As Mersch says, Christ's reason for being "is to constitute the contact between God and men. His humanity is a means: the Word took it to use it, to sacrifice it, to exalt it too, under the title of first fruits of the human race."³¹ And now, when the Church offers up the visible creation's sacrifice, it is only joining God's offering of himself to himself.

The priesthood of the Church is but a share in Christ's priesthood; the offering of the Church is but a share in Christ's self-offering. This is the basis of the priesthood of the Church, belonging to both the laity and the ordained, as the *Catechism* reminds us. "The whole community of believers is, as such, priestly since the faithful exercise their baptismal priesthood through their participation, each according to his own vocation, in Christ's mission as priest, prophet, and king"³²

In order to equip and capacitate this common priesthood, Christ has instituted the ministerial priesthood, which is "directed at the unfolding of the baptismal grace of all Christians. The ministerial priesthood is a means by which Christ

29 See his *The Wellspring of Worship* (New York: Paulist, 1988).

30 Chrysostom, *Homilies on 2 Corinthians*, quoted in Mersch, *The Whole Christ*, 335.

31 Mersch, *Morality and the Mystical Body*, 65.

32 *Catechism*, no. 1546.

unceasingly builds up and leads his Church.”³³ If there is a difference between these two kinds of priesthood, that difference “is not found in the priesthood of Christ, which remains forever one and indivisible, nor in the sanctity to which all of the faithful are called. . . . This diversity exists at the mode of participation in the priesthood of Christ.”³⁴ This sacrifice, given by the Son to the Father, is the Church’s liturgy. The liturgy is the work of a few on behalf of the many. At one time, it was the work of one man; every day more join Jesus’ priestly act.

The regeneration of sacrifice is more than a soteriological solution; it is an eschatological accomplishment. It does more than untwist sin’s snarl. The restoration is a transformation. We are not given back the first Adam’s religion, we are given the God-Man’s religion to practice. Blessed Columba Marmion writes, “The Church receives her mission from Christ: she receives the sacraments and the privilege of infallibility in order to sanctify men; but she has a part too in the religion of Christ towards his Father in order to continue upon earth the homage of praise that Christ in his sacred humanity offered to his Father.”³⁵

Adoration is the first act of religion, and now, because we are baptismally regenerated by the Holy Spirit, we adore the Father in the Son. To repeat Pius XII’s definition of liturgy, the Church renders worship to her founder, and through him it goes to the heavenly Father, and thus the members participate in the worship which our redeemer renders to the Father as head of his Mystical Body. To borrow Marmion’s words again:

Christ does not separate himself from his Mystical Body. Before ascending into heaven, he bequeaths his riches and mission to his Church. Christ, in uniting himself to the Church, gives her his power of adoring and praising the Father; this is the liturgy. It is the praise of the Church united to Jesus, supported by Jesus; or rather it is the praise of Christ, the incarnate Word, passing through the lips of the Church.³⁶

33 *Catechism*, no. 1547.

34 Vatican Congregation for the Clergy, *Instruction On Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of the Priest* (August 15, 1997), 1. Text at: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/laity/documents/rc_con_interdic_doc_15081997_en.html

35 Columba Marmion, *Christ the Life of the Soul* (St. Louis: Herder, 1926), 284.

36 Columba Marmion, *Christ, the Ideal of the Monk*, (St. Louis: Herder, 1922), 297. Again, in *Life of the Soul*, 83: “Jesus Christ, when upon earth, offered a perfect canticle of praise to his Father; His soul unceasingly contemplated the divine perfections, and from this contemplation came forth his continual praise and adoration to the glory of his Father. By his incarnation, Christ associated entire humanity, in principle, with this work of praise. When he left us, he gave to his Church the charge of perpetuating, in his name, this praise due to His Father.”

As I have tried to say it before, "Liturgy is not the performance of a human religion. Liturgy is the religion of Christ—the religion he enacted in the flesh before the Father—perpetuated."³⁷

What was true of Christ by nature, is true of us by grace. We are made members of the one who was the hypostatic union of human nature and Logos. So human beings are changed—now they are Christians. And our human religion is changed—now it is Christianity. Natural sacrifice is elevated and in the liturgy we step into the supernal relations of love between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To effect this unity was the whole purpose of the hypostatic union, says Mersch, and with his words we might end.

Religion is a relation between man and God. . . . In the midst of us an individual has arisen, who, man and God at the same time, is the perfect priest. Let our religion be organized about this Emmanuel and in this Emmanuel, let it pass through him and it will pierce the skies and will penetrate the holy of holies And, in order to pass through him, our religion need not impose any mutilation on itself. Christ has assumed all our nature. There is then, nothing human which cannot be integrated into his religion.³⁸

What has passed through the hypostatic union for our use, passes again through the hypostatic union to pierce the skies and penetrate the holy of holies. Christ is the mediator of liturgical sacrifice.

37 Fagerberg, "Theosis in a Roman Key? The Conferences of Columba Marmion," *Antiphon* 7:1 (2002): 30–39.

38 Mersch, *Morality and the Mystical Body*, 29–30.

