

The Divine Liturgy: The Sacrifice

by

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The Sacrifice

The Mass or Divine Liturgy is essentially a sacrifice, as indeed one of the names—The Holy Sacrifice—most frequently given to it states. It is not, as one would have us believe, only a sacrifice of praise or simply a memorial supper; nor is it a commemoration of a sacrifice accomplished once and for all at some remote time. While it is a memorial of a violent and bloody sacrifice, that of Golgotha, it is also itself a true sacrifice—a repetition of that sacrifice of Golgotha, and consequently endowed with the same power of reconciliation and propitiation.¹ Unquestionably the Mass is more extensive and embraces other great supernatural realities beyond those of a bloody sacrifice; just as the very idea of sacrifice possesses a greater meaning than the bloody immolation of a victim. We will on numerous occasions return to this point. However, the fact remains that the idea of immolation is principal, as much in the theology of Redemption as it is in the Mass which is its ritual perpetuation. It is thus this central reality of the Mass, which is its very core, that we must examine if we are to understand the Eucharistic celebration.

The sacrifice of Christ, as indeed His entire mission, is accomplished in continuity with the Jewish tradition of the Old Testament. We shall therefore start by reviewing the different forms of sacrifice practiced in the old Law; this will allow us to demonstrate how the Cross of Christ recapitulates, while at the same time it transcends, the sacrifices that preceded it, sacrifices that to a certain extent are its explanation. Having thus reinserted the sacrifice of Calvary in its ethno-religious context—if one can use such a phrase—we shall be in a position to analyze more usefully the nature of sacrifice itself from a phenomenological, and then from a metaphysical, point of view.

1. Council of Trent, Sess. 22, Canon 1 (Denzinger-Umberg, No. 948): “Si quis dixerit, in missa non offerri Deo verum et proprium sacrificium, aut quod offerri non sit aliud quam nobis Christum ad manducandum dari: anathema sit.”; Canon 3 (ibid., No. 950): “Si quis dixerit, missæ sacrificium tantum esse laudis et gratiarum actionis, aut nudam commemorationem sacrificii in cruce peracti, non autem propitiatorium, etc.”

The Jews knew and practiced several kinds of sacrifice. Apart from the offering of incense which constitutes a sacrifice which we will discuss later, they had, first of all, an unbloody sacrifice called *Minhah*, or “oblation”, which originated as an offering of the first fruits of the earth. In the *Minhah*, cakes made of fine white flour, oil, and incense were offered; part of them were burnt, which is to say consecrated, and the rest consumed by the priests. The most well-known form of the *Minhah* is the rite known as the “loaves of proposition” (*Lehem Panim*), in which twelve loaves representing the twelve tribes of Israel were placed on a gold table in the Temple. On each of them a small amount of incense was burnt. They were set out freshly on each Sabbath and the loaves of the preceding week were eaten by the priests.

Among the bloody sacrifices, the most important, and indeed, the most sacred form of worship was the holocaust, called in Hebrew *Olah*.² The Greek word *holocaust* means “entirely burnt”. In effect, the victim, generally a bull or a bullock, after having been bled, was entirely incinerated by the fire on the altar, signifying that it was entirely consecrated and offered to God. The Hebrew word comes from the verb *alah* which means to “rise up”, alluding to the smoke which rises up towards the sky, which is to say that it rises symbolically to the celestial dwelling place of God. The blood of the victim was spread over the four corners of the altar. This rite had an important signification: in effect the blood is connected with the transcendent essence of man which resides in the heart. Now the slain animal was substituted for man, as is shown by the preliminary rite of *Semikhah* in which the offerer placed his hand on the head of the victim and led him to the altar. The effusion of the victim’s blood signified that the offerer identified himself with the animal and offered himself to God on the altar by symbolically following the itinerary of the animal whose flesh was sublimated by the fire and “rose” towards God.

The *Zevach Shelamim*, the “Sacrifice of Peace”, which was performed at the time of great solemnities,³ was a sacrifice of *communion* with God. One part of the immolated victim, the blood and the fat, was burnt and offered to God. The remainder served as food for the faithful and for the priests in a sacred banquet. There were three kinds of *Zevach Shelamim*, the most interesting for us being the *Zevach Todah*, which is to say, the “sacrifice of praise” or “thanksgiving”. These titles are and have always been applied to the Mass, which is also called the *Eucharist*—a name equivalent to “thanksgiving”, and which in several places in the missal is designated in Latin by the expression *sacrificium laudis*. The Hebrew rite commenced with a hymn of thanksgiving, followed by the immolation of the victim, during which time one made a circumambulation of the altar. At the same time one offered loaves of bread and libations of wine, especially a cup called the “chalice of salvation”, an expression taken from Psalm 115, one of the psalms of Hallel.⁴ And this expression is also found in the Roman Mass: at the moment of his communion the priest says “What shall I render to the Lord, for all the things that He hath

2. Lev. 9:17; Num. 29:34; Exod. 29:39, 42; Ezek. 46:13–15.

3. Exod. 23:18; 34:25.

4. Psalms 113-118.

rendered to me? I will take the chalice of salvation; and I will call upon the name of the Lord.”⁵

The sacrifice *Hattat* was a rite of purification and of expiation for sin; here once again the offerer placed his hands on the victim (bullock, buck goat, she-goat, ewe, two pigeons or two turtle-doves), part of which was burnt and the remainder consumed by the priests. Connected with this rite was the important annual ceremony called the Day of Atonement or the Great Pardon (*Yom Kippur*), of which the purpose was to purify the priests and the people of their sins of the past year. It was celebrated on the tenth day of the month of Tishri in the following fashion: the high priest first of all offered up a young bull and a ram for his sins and those of all the clergy. He then offered up two buck goats and a ram for the sins of the people. After having incensed the sanctuary, he immolated the bull and with the blood of the victim sprinkled the sanctuary; he then immolated one of the two goats, sprinkling its blood once again around the sanctuary, then the forecourt, and finally anointing the altar of holocausts. The second goat was the object of a special and well-known rite: the high priest extended his hands over it, while confessing his sins and the sins of the people, thus burdening the animal with them. To the head of the animal he attached a long scarlet ribbon, scarlet being the color symbolic of sin for the Jews.⁶ After this a man led the goat out into a deserted place and threw it down from a high precipice. In this manner the animal “carried away” the sins of Israel, whence comes the name “scapegoat”.

We have somewhat stressed the rites of the Day of Atonement because they have considerable importance for understanding the meaning and import of the sacrifice of Christ, an act which, as we have said, integrates within it all the sacrificial rites that preceded it. This is strikingly clear with regard to the rite of Yom Kippur, as is shown by Saint Paul. In his Epistle to the Hebrews, he compares Christ to the high priest who enters but once a year into the Holy of Holies in order to carry “blood which he offereth for his own, and the people’s ignorance... But Christ, being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect

5. The unfolding of the Hebraic sacrifice closely resembles the most frequently performed sacrifice of ancient Greece, the *Thysia*, which followed a similar ritual pattern: the sharing of the victim between divinity and faithful, hymns, and a banquet. (This was especially so in the celebration of the Mysteries; cf. Sylloge Inscript. Graec. 736). This sacrifice was called the *charistirion* or *eucharistirion*, which latter means “thanks-giving”. There is absolutely no reason to conclude from this, as so many have done, that the Christian sacrifice is modeled directly on the *Thysia*. As we shall see, Christianity had no need to imitate the Greeks; it was sufficient for it to follow, as Jesus in fact did, the practices of the Jewish tradition. If the Greek *Thysia* resembled the *Zevach Shelamin*, it is because at that time, the different religions used the same sacrificial customs, inherited from the same Sacred Tradition and adapted to their historical epoch.

6. Cf. Isaiah, 1:18. For the Egyptians red was also symbolic of evil. (Cf. J. Hani, *La religion égyptienne dans la pensée de Plutarque*, Paris, 1976, p. 272 ff., & 446, which points out that the Egyptians undoubtedly practiced a rite similar to that of the “scapegoat”. Analogous rites are found elsewhere as well; in Greece men called *Pharmakoi* filled a similar role (ibid., p. 278 with references given).

tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation; Neither by the blood of goats, nor of calves, but by his own blood, he entered once into the holy places, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of goats and of oxen, and the ashes of an heifer being sprinkled, sanctify such as are defiled, to the cleansing of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who by the Holy Spirit offered himself without blemish unto God, purge our conscience from dead works, to serve the living God?" (Heb. 9:7-14; cf. *ibid.*, 15-28 and 13: 10-14).

This relationship pointed out by Saint Paul applies to all the other forms of the Hebraic sacrifice. This is particularly obvious with regard to the holocaust. The sacrifice of Christ is an absolute holocaust, while the offerings of the first fruits and the *Zevach Shelamim* prefigure the schema of the Mass. But it is above all the sacrifice of the Pasque, the sacrifice of the Pascal Lamb and the feast that follows it, on which we should concentrate, because this is the type of sacrifice which, having transformed it, Christ chose to undergo—the sacrifice of the New Testament. We shall shortly study in greater depth the integration of the Jewish Pasque into the unfolding of the Divine Liturgy; for the present it suffices to recall some of the essential points.

The Jewish Pasque belongs to the type of sacrifice in which the animal offered is entirely eaten by men in the name of God. It is a sacrifice of communion like the *Zevach Shelamim*. The offerer was the head of the family and also the priest, for the sacrifice of the Pasque was offered both in the home and the Temple. This rite was of greatest importance to the Jews because it commemorated, as one knows, their liberation from the slavery of Egypt and their entry into the Promised Land.⁷ The Pasque, of which the name, *pesach*, signifies “passage” (from exile into the Promised Land) was the symbol that Christ had only to “vitalize” in some way to make it an efficacious sign of the passage from death to life, from the shadows into the light; in the same way that by the Divine Lamb immolated, we are brought into the Kingdom of the Father.

* * *

It is generally taken for granted and considered self-evident that Sacrifice is universal and has been practiced by all people in all ages. One quite naturally knows or readily admits without seeking further that such is necessary in order for man to expiate his sins and to give praise to God. But in fact, when one reflects on the connection between sacrifice and expiation which superficially seems self-evident, the connection is not so easy to explain.

It is important then, if we are to really understand the phenomena of sacrifice, to study in greater depth its meaning and nature. What, basically, is the sacrifice? How can we explain it? What is its origin, its nature and its meaning?

Sacrifices are included in the most general category of sacred rites. Among rites it is necessary to distinguish between those which are fundamental and those which auxiliary. The

7. Exod. 12:25–27.

former are those which usher man into the realm of the sacred: these are all the rites of admission to a traditional community, such as, for example, Christian baptism, the different initiations, and the funeral rites. The latter are the prayers and particularly the offertory and sacrificial rites: that one calls them “auxiliary” should in no way denigrate their importance, much less their necessity. Rites of admission can introduce man into the realm of the sacred only in a potential manner. He cannot, however, effectively partake of the sacred except by the practice of prayer and sacrifice throughout the entire course of his life.

The idea of sacrifice is much broader than the usual notion would allow, in which the word is purely and simply synonymous with “immolation”. As its etymological root indicates, it makes reference in a most extensive way to the sacred: the Latin expression “to sacrifice” is *rem divinam facere*, “to accomplish a divine act”; and the word *sacrificium*, which derives in part from *sacer* and in part from *facere*, has the same sense: “a rendering sacred”.⁸ The verb *sacrificare* signifies not only “to sacrifice” but also “to consecrate”. The term “sacrifice” returns in an exact manner to its object we have just explained, which is to introduce the being into the realm of the sacred. The idea of immolation which is joined to it is merely secondary.

One can define the sacrifice as the act whose double purpose is to bring a gift to God and to sanctify the person who gives it.

Why an offering to God? It is actually the return of a gift. In effect, life is a gift of the Creator, as is everything, such as food, which goes to maintain this life. In order to realize spiritually the sense of this gift and to relate its spiritual meaning to themselves and to make it more prosperous and enduring, conscious and responsible beings must offer in return to the Creator some part of that which He has given. It is this which explains certain secondary forms of sacrifice, such as the libations with meals which were practiced in ancient Greece and India, and again in the giving of the tithe. In the first case, to use a medieval expression, one neither eats nor drinks until one has offered up “God’s portion”; in the second, one surrenders a tenth of what one possesses, thereby acknowledging that all that one has comes from God, and at the same time to guarantee the durability of these goods and to prevent the circle of prosperity from closing in on itself.

In order to trace the history, or more precisely, the pre-history of sacrifice and to seek its origin, one must first of all divest oneself of a host of pseudo-scientific “dogmas” which are to be found in the majority of the texts dealing with the history of religions or anthropology. We have read under the name of an author who is one of the greatest authorities on the subject of sacrifice some of the most perplexing assertions—his theories being founded on evolutionary presuppositions of the grossest nature. But what is even more serious is that these assertions are almost always adopted without any examination by ecclesiastical authors, some of whom today are world-famous theologians. It is truly horrifying to see such “scientific” theories, which are

8. The Greek word *Thysia* originally evoked only the “smoke” of the Sacrifice. (One might note the significance of smoke and the sacred pipe in the American Indian Tradition — ED.)

completely profane and totally lacking in any solid basis, given a place of honor by individuals who at the same time refuse to take seriously the traditional sciences that draw their value and credibility from metaphysical principles and Revelation. One simply cannot understand how a Catholic theologian can attempt to trace the origins of sacrifice as deriving from some presupposed evolutionary process initiated in the time of “primitive” man—man seen as a “savage” little better than the animal from which he “obviously” descended—and at the same time to claim to believe in the recitation of the first chapters of Genesis, and all this without perceiving the fundamental incompatibility between them. This, moreover, is an incompatibility which exists despite the hazy elucidations and the intellectual acrobatics of “Catholic” evolutionists who have tried to reconcile these two ways of viewing things.

The only appropriate manner in which to consider the problem of the origin of sacrifice is to base our study on the traditional doctrines under both their religious and metaphysical aspects.

In the state of innocence, in the Garden of Eden, the sacrifice of the type that we have been considering was unnecessary. In no way subject to material things, primordial man quite naturally rendered up this gift to God, which is the obligatory response of the creature to his Creator, a gift absolutely pure and entirely spiritual: the gift of the heart. In a perfect burst of love, he made an offering to God of all creation and of himself. After the Fall it was no longer thus. Man precipitously fell from a higher and spiritual plane into a material and physical plane—his fault and his fall resulting inevitably from his decision egotistically to appropriate to himself all of creation rather than offering it up without reserve to God.

The consequences of this fall would have been without remedy if the divine Mercy had not intervened to palliate it. It was then that the envoys from Heaven (whose precise nature lies beyond the scope of this discussion) relayed to man the sacrifice desired and determined by God as a means of partially repairing the consequences of this spiritual catastrophe.

The purpose of sacrifice is to return mankind to the spiritual level from which he has fallen. To do this a “transfer” must be effected. Let us explain. In a certain sense, the only way for man to make reparation for the Fall and its consequences was to die, because it is precisely death that separates him from the physical and material world. Moreover, it is clearly stated in Genesis that God decided that man, having become a sinner, would die. However, it was not necessary for him to die immediately; humanity and the whole plan of creation were not to be destroyed. Rather, it was necessary for man to live for a certain time outside of the paradisiacal state, in a fallen and corporal state. The sacrifice was the means of symbolically and ritually bringing about man’s “death” to the material world and his transference back to the primordial, spiritual level. In a certain sense, every sacrifice is fundamentally a human sacrifice, as is shown by the rite of *Semikhah* already discussed, and about which we shall say more shortly. Human sacrifice realized physically is certainly an aberrant and monstrous deviation found among degenerate people of one sort or another, but it is the deviation of an idea—even more, of a profound necessity, although one which is misconstrued in a gross fashion. In sacrifice, as normally conceived, the conveyance of man into the spiritual world is accomplished by means of an

intermediary and a substitution. Man is conveyed by another physical being or physical object which is substituted for him and which is itself conveyed to the spiritual realm through the rite. The mechanism is the following: the being or object is offered to God and thus becomes consecrated by the rite that integrates it into the realm of the sacred; and at the same time it becomes identified by substitution with the offerer and integrates him into the same sacred realm. The being or the object sacrificed thus becomes the *mediator* between Heaven and Earth.

We have spoken of the object offered. In effect, it is not only a living being that one can substitute for man; it can be a vegetable, flowers, a food, bread, wine, or even a manufactured object. Thus for example, in ancient Egypt, the daily ritual involved a double offering: that of the Eye of Horus, a solar symbol, and that of Maat. Maat is the entity which represents Justice and Truth, and in a most general manner, the divine energy.⁹ The priest presented a statue of Maat in the sanctuary: by the offering of this statue, the soul of man rejoined the Godhead in the spiritual universe.

But most commonly, it is an animal that is substituted for man in the sacrifice; this is because animals, especially the higher ones, are closest to man. The bloody sacrifice was the sacrifice *par excellence*. We little understand today, now that these immolations have almost everywhere ceased to exist, the reason that the bloody sacrifice was necessary, especially in the expiation of sin. This, however, is an important point, for the most spectacular, expiatory bloody sacrifice was, if we dare put it so, that of Christ, and we must understand why.

The bloody sacrifice is like a voluntary death: by the intermediation of the immolated animal, man voluntarily “dies” to the phenomenal and material world, and by this act, in accord with the process described above, he is at least potentially restored to the spiritual universe. Rendered sacred by the rite of offering, the animal serves in some way to unite man with the Godhead. This is why, in certain cases, the offerer dresses himself in the skin of the sacrificed animal: in so doing, man is reborn in the form of a supernatural being.¹⁰ It is in the light of this custom that one can fully understand the force and import of the formula of Saint Paul which states “put ye on *induimini* [from *induo*—to dress], the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 13:14).

It is then clear, as against the assertions of certain authors who pretend that the death of the animal, although necessary, is not an essential element, that an immolation must occur. Others, imbued with the same false ideas have contended that there are sacrifices in which no immolation whatever occurs, and cite examples where food, flowers or libations of wine, etc., are offered up: such, they claim, reinforce the aforementioned thesis. But in reality they are wrong, for they ignore the fact that bread is already the result of an immolation by man—the

9. A. Moret, *Rituel du culte journalier*, p. 148 ff., which indicates that the name “Maat”, the neutral passive participle of “maa”, means both “that which is real, true, just” and “that which is offered”.

10. As in the Dionysian religion, or the Egyptian ritual “Tikenou”. Cf. A. Moret, *Mysteres egyptiens*, Paris, 1923, p. 41 ff.

wheat is threshed, ground, and “baked” in the oven; the wine cannot exist without undergoing its own “passion” when the grape is crushed, squeezed, and transformed by the process of fermentation. And beyond this, both finally once again “die” when, after being offered up, they are eaten by the divinity, which is to say, by the priest or the person making the offering. Nor is it otherwise for the oblation of incense which is burnt. Again, with the flower which is cut and killed in order to be offered up, thereby attesting both to its own beauty which reflects the divine Beauty, and its nothingness vis-a-vis the absolute Beauty. Its death in the offering testifies to the supremacy of the Divine Essence.

Returning to the bloody sacrifice, it is necessary to consider yet another aspect which has a great importance in explaining this type of oblation. And this is the fact that for all the traditions, or nearly all, blood is considered as the vehicle of the vital principle, of the living soul. This is particularly affirmed by the Bible (Deut. 12:23; Lev. 17:10-11); it is the medium in which the psychic elements are linked to a corporal modality. When one eats the meat or drinks the blood of a victim, one absorbs and assimilates by this act its vital force; but what is essential here is that we are dealing with a vital force which has been consecrated, and which as a result is a vehicle for the transmission of divine energy. The same consideration explains once again the rites of purification and covenant. We have previously called attention to the former. With regard to the latter, they hold a capital place in the Old Testament. The “covenant” between God and His people is sealed by a “bloody pact” (Exod. 24:8, Zech. 9:11). The victim offered, immolated and accepted by God seals the covenant in the following manner: the animal represents the people; his blood, the life of this people. The animal is offered, consecrated, and hence “passes” into the divine world. His blood is charged with divine energy; God then renews His people; the offering carries His blessing, which is to say, the adoption of the people with all the beneficial consequences of this act. One will be able to calculate the immense importance of this sacrificial scheme of the covenant when we come to see that it constitutes on a higher plane the mechanism of the Christly sacrifice itself—which is that of the New Covenant.

We have made allusion above to the rite in which the offering is eaten, which brings us to consider the importance of ritual banquets, those communion repasts which accompany a good number of sacrificial acts. The repast or sacred banquet has assumed such importance in the different cults that the majority of modern savants wish to see in them the origin of all sacrifice. While this is certainly incorrect, it should not allow us to ignore the fact that the sacred banquet plays a major role in such rites.

This custom was particularly developed in ancient Greece. Perhaps the most characteristic example is that of the Prytanes in Athens. As representatives of the various tribes, the Prytanes formed a body charged with organizing the deliberations of the Senate, and as such enjoyed great prestige. Established at *Prytaneion* or at Tholos, they took their meals near the altar of Hestia, which was where the seat of the Greek government was maintained. As a result this banquet was invested with a sacred character. The Prytanes wore a crown or diadem, which was a sacred symbol worn also by the priests during the sacrifice, and their very persons were also considered

to be sacred, at least for the duration of the banquet. In effect, on these occasions the Prytanes ate in the name of the city, and this feast established a contact between the human collectivity and the supernatural universe concentrated in the hearth of Hestia, which enabled the community to partake of the *mana*. It is also known that Athens had several other ritual banquets: for example, those organized by the tribes on the occasion of great festivals, such as the Dionysia and Panathenaea, and those of the women who attended the sacrifice on the third day of the Thesmophoria. But the most interesting are the sacred banquets which took place among the “Thiasi”, religious confraternities devoted to one of the gods, because this type of religious community is not without certain analogies with the primitive Christian communities that organized themselves in Greece and Rome along similar lines, and which also practiced an analogous rite by the name of *Agape*. Apart from the great festivals that occurred on an annual basis, the cultic worship in the Thiasi included a monthly sacrifice followed by a community banquet which gradually assumed increasing importance as we approach the end of pre-Christian times.

This rite is again seen in the cult of Attis: Firmicus Maternus, who practiced it, tells us about it after his conversion to Christianity, establishing a parallel between it and the Christian repast.¹¹ One sees it again in the cult of Mithra, where one drank a mixture of bread, water and the sap of a plant called *haoma*, and in the cult of Isis and Serapis. In the Iseum at Pompeii there is a room specially reserved for the banquets of initiates and they have even found some curious invitations to these kinds of affairs.¹²

In traditional societies, the ritual character of meals, even the ordinary ones, is clearly evident, for even the partaking of everyday meals incites man to raise his thoughts to God. Here more than anywhere else man takes on the character of a recipient: he must receive nourishment if he is to survive, and he understands that this nourishment comes to him from another to whom he offers his prayer of thanksgiving. “The eyes of all hope in thee, O Lord”, says the Psalmist, “and thou givest them meat in due season. Thou openest thy hand, and fillest with blessing every living creature” (Ps. 144). This is why in normal societies every meal is in some way a religious rite of which the most important act is the libation offered to the gods, which were mentioned above. The Greek meal started with a libation to Zeus Sotirios (Savior) accompanied by a prayer and a ritual blessing, *agathou daimonos*, “good fortune!” In the ritual banquet that followed a sacrifice, the process of the sanctification of the faithful was always similar to what we have described above: the food and the drink were offered to the divinity and consequently incorporated into the divine realm. In return, the portion of these consumed by man united him to the divine world. The food is given to God and God causes man to participate in the gift which gives him life and, to a certain extent, divinizes him by his participation, whence comes the

11. F. Maternus, *De errore prof. relig.*, 18, 1.

12. For example, “Chaeremon requests that you dine at the table of Lord Sarapis, in the Sarapeum, tomorrow, the fifteenth, at nine o’clock”. Cf. *Harv. Theolog. Rev.* 41, (1948), pp. 9–29.

expression “to partake of God”. This last stage is particularly well known in the cult of Dionysus where the animal, usually a fawn, hypostatized by Dionysus, is immolated and consumed by the Bacchants, which act induces among them an ecstasy produced by their incorporation of god. The same occurred with wine, the other hypostasis of Dionysus.¹³

The communal banquet was also known to the Jews, and it was this which, as we have already pointed out, provided Christ with the basis for His sacrament. We shall study this in detail and this will also provide us with an opportunity to examine the nature of the communion banquet in the Old Testament.

But before proceeding to that, we should, in order to finish up our general discussion on the nature of sacrifice, say a word about the significance of holocausts. In this type of sacrifice the immolated victim is entirely consumed by fire. Originally it was an act of transcendent fire, the fire of heaven which fell on the altar in response to the prayer of the officiant when he still had the power to make it come down. We see this in the Bible, for example, in response to the acts of Noah or the prophet Elias. Later, the ritual fire replaced the celestial fire which, nevertheless, it symbolized, and which just the same had received God’s “blessing”.

The significance of the holocaust is evident. It is a sacrifice which is total and absolute. The victim is not shared between the divinity and man: it is entirely given up to God. The divine fire which falls on it takes possession of it and the smoke that is produced rises towards Heaven carrying with it the subtle essence of the victim to the “celestial sanctuary”. The holocaust symbolizes and effects the total gift of the officiant. But it also has a broader meaning. It symbolizes and prefigures the cosmic sacrifice, for actually it is the entire cosmos which is to be offered and transferred to the divine plane.

This cosmic dimension also appears, and in a super-eminent manner, in the sacrifice and memorial of Christ—the Mass. Let us once more return, and recall the operation by which Jesus has integrated, recapitulated, and brought to fullness in His unique sacrifice all these other types of sacrifice. But now we can define the meaning of this act with greater precision. We have seen how in the Epistle to the Hebrews Saint Paul identifies Christ with the high priest who enters the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, carrying His own blood for the remission of sins. Another fact allows us to draw this parallel still further, and to show how the action of Christ in certain details is inscribed in the sacrificial practices of the Jews. Jesus, after declaring that He was king, was delivered by Pilate to the Roman soldiers, who placed on His head a crown of thorns and on His shoulders a red cloak or purple mantle in order to make Him a mock king—purple being the color of royalty among most of the ancients. But by a coincidence which was not accidental, this red mantle showed that Jesus had become the “man of sin”, as scripture tells. Indeed we have already seen that red is the symbol of evil and of sin, and this was the reason that the high priest attached a long scarlet band to the head of the scapegoat. Who after this cannot

13. Cf. Euripides, *Bacchae*, 284.

recognize the extraordinary portent of this episode with Pilate: dressed in the derisory royal purple, Christ appears to the Jews' eyes not as a mocked king, but as Azazel, the Scapegoat. And still more, this circumstance seems to give a particular poignancy to their cry "His blood be upon us".

From the tribunal of Pilate, Jesus walks to Golgotha where the sacrifice is consummated. It is then the holocaust of holocausts, the absolute and supreme holocaust. Christ immolates here his mortal body, and this immolation manifests the integral gift of oneself to the supreme Being and reveals the existence of the "kingdom of God" as the only true reality. Christ is here, at one and the same time, both the sacrificer and the victim sacrificed: the victim, the offering, is supereminently transferred from the terrestrial and physical world to the supernatural world, and further engulfs in itself all the victims and all the material sacrifices which henceforth have become useless. As the High Priest of His own sacrifice, Christ "officiates" from the cross which is a cosmic symbol erected on the height of Golgotha—the cosmic mountain, as we shall come to see in greater detail in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. In other words, the sacrifice of Calvary transfers the totality of the human spatio-temporal cosmos into the divine world. Thus the Fall is effaced, and so to speak, sin and death destroyed. All of nature is ransomed despite the fact that this transfiguration of the world cannot be perceived by the greater portion of mankind in its corporal state.

But in order to understand in its ultimate profundity the meaning of this sacrifice, at one and the same time expiatory and transfiguring, and in a general manner, the real meaning and function of all sacrifice, it is necessary to know its metaphysical basis.

However astonishing the statement may appear, this basis is fundamentally the eternal sacrifice of God, which is in fact the act of creation. In one sense the Creation is the humiliation of God relative to His Absolute Being. God, who in His Absoluteness relates to nothing outside of Himself, becomes relatively-absolute, placing existence in the creature, entering into a relationship with him. This act of placing Himself in relationship with creation is the sacrifice of His Absoluteness, and at the same time the sacrifice of Love for this "other" which He Himself determines as created out of nothing. Moreover, in God, the Son, who is, in one of His aspects, the principle and the ALL of creation, the "first-born of creation" in the words of Saint Paul, the Son as such is eminently the sacrifice of God. The Incarnation was, then, inscribed in the "logic" of God's plan for His Son, if one can use such a phrase, in order to accomplish that which must occur by very necessity, namely, the reintegration of all creation into the Creator. Now the real signification of the sacrifice, insofar as it is an earthly rite directed towards Heaven, is to respond to the divine sacrifice which is directed from Heaven toward earth, and to return all things to their divine Principle. Christ achieved this reintegration because He is God-Man, and the Archetypal, or Universal, Man:¹⁴ "For in him were all things created in Heaven and on earth,

14. Cf. N. Cabasilas: "God created the human species in anticipation, from the beginning, of the new man... Christ was the archetype of our creation... The Savior manifested, uniquely and first the authentic

visible and invisible...and by him all things exist” (Col. 1:16-17). He brings together in Himself all of creation which He is then able to return to the Primordial-Father: “I came forth from the Father and I return to the Father”. And as a consequence, this also becomes true for individual man, since he, too, is a mirror and synthesis of all creation on the microcosmic plane, which is why he alone among all the creatures is equally capable of offering up the sacrifice, and of receiving its fruits: “I have prayed in order that where I am you also may be”. These two sayings of Christ define what one can call the theanthropic journey, first of Christ, and subsequently of man.

The unique aim of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is to have us undertake this journey, as the following prayer indicates: “Grant, O Lord, that these sacred mysteries may cleanse us by their powerful virtue, and bring us with greater purity to Him, who was the author and institutor of them” (Secret of the First Sunday of Advent).

(Original editorial inclusions that followed the essay:)

We hold that all the loveliness of this world comes by communion in Ideal Form. All shapelessness whose kind admits of pattern and of form, as long as it remains outside of Reason and Idea, and has not been entirely mastered by Reason, the matter not yielding at all points and in all respects to Ideal Form, is ugly by that very isolation from the Divine Thought. But where the Ideal Form has entered, it has grouped and co-ordinated what from a diversity of parts was to become a unity; it has rallied confusion into co-operation; it has made the sum one harmonious coherence; for the Idea is a unity and what it moulds must come to unity as far as multiplicity may. And on what has thus been compacted to unity. Beauty enthrones itself, giving itself to the parts as to the sum.

This, then, is how the material thing becomes beautiful – by communicating in the thought that flows from the Divine.

Plotinus.

and perfect man” (*The Life in Christ*).