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# THE MASS

**What is it?**

By

**REV. WILLIAM  
MORAN, D.D.**



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# THE MASS: WHAT IS IT?

By REV. W. MORAN, D.D.

## INTRODUCTORY.

Many of the dogmas of Christianity are peculiar in this, that while they are sufficiently simple to be grasped in a practical manner by the ordinary faithful, yet they are sufficiently profound to engage in deep and long-continued study the ablest intellects in the Church. The dogma of the Mass is a case in point. A child preparing for Confirmation could answer the question—What is the Mass? His answer would run something like this: the Mass is the sacrifice of the New Law, in which we offer to God the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ under the appearances of bread and wine. But few children would fully understand that answer: for consider how much one must know, to follow in all its bearings the definition just given. One must know what a sacrifice means; one must know something about the sacrifice of the Redemption, i.e., the sacrifice of Calvary; and one must know how the sacrifice of the Mass is related to the sacrifice of Calvary. Only a person who has satisfied himself in regard to these three points of inquiry is in a position to understand the place occupied by the Mass in the scheme of man's salvation.

## THE NECESSITY OF REDEMPTION.

When man was created he was called by God to a supernatural destiny, to which he had no natural right whatever. Moreover, to prepare him for the attainment of this destiny hereafter, he was raised to a supernatural condition of soul even in this life, by the gift of sanctifying grace. Both gifts were granted to man conditionally, the condition being that he should serve God faithfully on earth, and thereby merit the reward in store for him in heaven. Adam, the first head of the human race, failed to fulfil this condition; and by his fall he lost, not merely for himself, but also for his posterity,



the gift of sanctifying grace on earth, and the right to enjoy the vision of God hereafter. Man had been offered certain gifts to which he had no natural right; he had failed to fulfil the condition on which they were offered; the offer was withdrawn; and that was the end of the whole transaction, in so far as man's natural powers and natural rights were concerned. If the gifts were to be won back at all, they must be won back by a divine person; because no one else could establish by his natural merits a right to sanctifying grace, or to the beatific vision of God. Hence the necessity of a divine Saviour.

There was a second reason why a divine Saviour was necessary. Man had grievously offended God, and thereby placed an obstacle in the way of his own reinstatement. Moreover, the case of innumerable individuals, the sin inherited from Adam was to be aggravated by personal sins of their own. We do not sufficiently understand the attribute of divine justice, to be allowed to say for certain whether God could have pardoned fallen humanity without demanding full satisfaction, i.e., full reparation for the injury done to God's honour by human sin. But we know from revelation that, although God mercifully decreed to reinstate mankind, He did as a matter of fact demand full satisfaction for the sins of men. Man himself was incapable of making such satisfaction; only a person of infinite dignity was capable of making a suitable reparation of honour for the insult offered to God by mortal sin. In His wisdom and goodness, God found a way of satisfying at once the prompting of divine mercy and of divine justice. He sent His own Son into the world to redeem mankind; and the reparation of honour due to God from mankind was made on the Cross of Calvary by the divine Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

The redemption wrought by Christ on our behalf had two aspects, therefore—first, satisfaction, i.e., reparation to God's honour for the injury done by sin; secondly, merit, i.e., the winning back for us of the supernatural gifts lost by the fall

of our first parents. No child of Adam, either under the Old Law or under the New, ever obtained sanctifying grace on earth or the beatific vision in heaven, except through the redemption wrought by Christ. We do not, however, inherit the effects of Christ's redemptive work on our behalf in the same way as we inherit the effects of Adam's fall. Adam and Christ were each head of the race, but in different ways. Adam was our head by natural fatherhood, and we are in his members, i.e., we are linked up with him, by the fact of our descent from him according to the flesh. We have no such natural bond of connection with Christ. Hence, even though Christ is head of the race by reason of His dignity as God-man, and even though He had abundantly redeemed the whole human race, nevertheless, all that is not sufficient to ensure our justification. To benefit by the redemption wrought by Christ, each individual soul has to be linked up with Him, to become a member of Christ, as St. Paul expresses it. This is done by complying with certain conditions laid down by Christ Himself—the most necessary of these conditions being faith and baptism, and repentance if we have sinned personally.

### THE NOTION OF SACRIFICE

The *Epistle to the Hebrews* emphatically teaches that the death of Christ on the Cross was a true sacrifice; and furthermore that the sacrifice of the Cross was the means whereby Our Lord redeemed the human race. We must, therefore, consider the notion of sacrifice in general; and see how that notion is verified, first in the sacrifice of Calvary, and secondly in the sacrifice of the Mass.

In human society we are accustomed to acknowledge great excellence or great authority in our fellow-men by certain signs, such as doffing our hats when we meet them. Again, we feel called upon to make some acknowledgement, if only by the words "Thank you" for favours received from others.



We feel the necessity, too, of cultivating the goodwill of those on whom we depend for favours to be received in future; and we apologise to them, if we have the misfortune to offend them wilfully. The claims that our fellow-man has upon us in these respects are as nothing compared with the claims of God. When we stand before God, we stand before infinite excellence; we stand before our sovereign Lord and Master, who owns us far more completely than any man owns the work of his own hands; we stand before the supreme benefactor, who has given us all that we have, and all that we are, and on whom we depend for everything we can hope for in future. Reason itself bids us acknowledge this dependence; and historically, man for thousands of years has endeavoured to fulfil his obligations in these respects, chiefly by offering to God (or to those things that he worshipped as gods) gifts called sacrifices. There is nothing very strange in this notion of presenting a gift to God. From time immemorial, the presentation of a gift has been one of the chief means used by man to express his appreciation for, or his gratitude towards, his fellow-man. Even if the gift were not very valuable to the recipient, it served at least as a token of the giver's sentiments of admiration or gratitude. Down through the ages men have likewise presented gifts to obtain the goodwill of others, and to placate them, if offence had been previously given. It was only natural that man should have recourse to the same kind of tokens in his dealings with God. Hence we find among nearly all peoples the practice of offering sacrifice.

Among the Jews, at least, sacrifice was an outward manifestation of an inward attitude of will—the will to acknowledge God's complete mastery over man, and man's dependence on God. The outward act of sacrifice was the language, so to speak, by which man expressed his complete submission to God, and the dedication of himself to God's service. It logically implied in the worshipper sentiments of adoration, thanksgiving, prayer and repentance for sin, if sin had been committed. The consciousness of sin furnished a

powerful move for sacrifice. Realising how he had rebelled against his Lord and Master, the pious Jew felt the need for some outward rite, to express his sense of guilt, his repentance, his desire to placate God and obtain pardon and reconciliation. The sacrifice of animals appeared to be particularly appropriate for the purpose. Among the Jews, death was regarded as the punishment of sin: hence bloody sacrifices appropriately symbolised man's acknowledgement of the penalty of death incurred by his sins. The blood of animals was shed, that the blood of the sinner himself might be spared. This aspect of sacrifice, that aims at the reconciliation of the sinner with God, is called propitiation. Hence sacrifices offered principally for the purpose of atoning for sin are called propitiatory sacrifices. The motive of propitiation for sin did not, of course, include the motives of adoration, thanksgiving, and impetration (or prayer). Among the Jews, at least, every sacrifice expressed more or less clearly all these aspects of man's acknowledgement of God's dominion over him but according as one or other aspect was emphasised the sacrifice was classified as one of thanksgiving, propitiation, and so on. In all cases the outward (or ritual) act of sacrifice was meant to be a sign or token of an inward attitude or will; so that if the sinner in his heart remained stubbornly rebellious and unrepentant, the outward sacrifice offered in his name availed him nothing. It was only a false and lying token calculated further to offend rather than placate God. St. Augustine expresses the same idea, when he says that the ritual (or outward) sacrifice is the visible sign of the invisible sacrifice of the will. God is never deceived by the man who has repentance on his lips but rebellion in his heart.

Supposing now that the internal will (or heart) of the worshipper was all that it should be, we turn to the outward sacrificial rite, by which that internal will was manifested. And we shall direct our attention chiefly to sacrifices of living things, since it is those that will throw most light on the sacrifice of Christ. By comparing the sacrifices described in



the Old Law we can pick out four elements that appear to be essential to the notion of sacrifice. These four elements are—a sensible gift to be presented to God, a person authorised to present it, a special manner of presenting it, and the acceptance of the gift by God. Without a gift (or victim) there can be no sacrifice. An authorised person (or priest) is required, because, since at least the time of God's covenant with the Jews, sacrifice has been an act of public worship; and as the person offering the sacrifice is thus a representative of the people, he has to be appointed as their representative by some competent authority. This appointment might have been made in various ways, had not God Himself settled the question by appointing as priests the descendants of Aaron under the Old Law and the Apostles and their successors under the New Law. After such a direct intervention by God, sacrifice offered to Him by a person usurping priestly functions would not be acceptable\*; and without God's acceptance the sacrifice would be void. A gift cannot be effectively presented to God, if He will not accept it.

There remains to be considered one other element of sacrifice—the special manner of offering or presenting the gift of God. If sacrifice is to be an act of public worship, there must be some manner of offering, which is known to the people and recognised as such; otherwise they could not take an intelligent part in the sacrifice. The slaying of the animal in God's honour was the most obvious way of offering it, especially in the case of sacrifices for sin; and this was probably how the earliest sacrifices were offered. From an early period it became customary to offer sacrifices on a specially constructed altar. Whatever may have been the origin of this custom, the altar eventually became an important fact in sacrificial worship; it came to be regarded as representing in some way the divinity. In the Mosaic Code, this view of the part played by the altar appears to be

\*King Ozias was afflicted with leprosy by God because he dared to offer sacrifice on his own authority.

confirmed by divine authority; and special regulations were laid down for the consecration of the altar itself. How exactly did the altar represent God? Most probably in the following manner. We have already seen that the sacrifices must be void, unless the gift be accepted by God. This acceptance depended, of course, primarily on the good dispositions of the worshipper. But human nature craved for some visible token of acceptance on God's part. Since God was invisible, His acceptance could not be directly manifested except by miracle; and miracles are outside the order of God's ordinary providence. To comfort and reassure the pious worshipper, however, He appointed a visible agent to receive the gift on His behalf; and His agent was the altar. The altar, therefore, outwardly manifested God's acceptance of the gift; just as the presentation of the gift outwardly manifested the worshipper's self-dedication to the service of God. The sign was not infallible on either side, yet it satisfied a want felt by human nature.

In the sacrifices of the Jewish people, therefore, we have to take account of two distinct acts, which together seem to have constituted the special manner of offering for nearly all bloody sacrifices. Those two acts are the killing of the animal, and the application of blood to the altar. The two acts were outwardly indistinguishable, whenever the animal was slaughtered on the altar itself. It was thus, apparently, that the sacrifices of the patriarchs were offered. After the promulgation of the Mosaic Code, however, the two acts were usually quite distinct and separate. The killing of the animal—usually spoken of as the immolation—was very often carried out by a lay person. The application of its blood—usually spoken of as the oblation—was always reserved to the priest. We can infer, therefore, that the immolation (killing), since it was not a specially priestly function, was not a part of the sacrificial offering in the strict sense, but rather a necessary preliminary condition. It was required in order to provide the priest with the victim's blood, and in order to place the animal in the condition of victimhood, i.e., in a



suitable condition to be offered to God. The real offering consisted in the application of the victim's blood to the altar. It was by this act that the victim was formally presented to God, i.e., actually transferred to His sole ownership and possession.

But why should the victim be presented by means of its blood? Because to the Jewish mind the life was in the blood. In the *Book of Leviticus* (ch. 17) we read:—"If any man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, eat blood, I (i.e., God) will set my face against his soul and I will cut him off from among his people; for the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you that you may make atonement with it on the altar of your souls." The life being the most important element in the victim, and the life being in the blood, the application of the blood to the altar was at once an intelligible and striking manner of presenting the gift to God.\* By this application of the victim's blood to the altar, not merely the blood and the life but the whole victim passed into the sole possession of God. The body was henceforth His also, to be disposed of as He willed. Hence, detailed instructions about the disposal of the carcass are laid down by God in the Mosaic Law. In some cases a portion of it was given to the priest, or divided between the priest and the person in whose name the sacrifice had been offered. In these latter cases, God entertained at His own table, so to speak, the parties chiefly concerned in the presentation of the gift—a figure, presumably, of the Eucharistic banquet, to which we are invited at Mass.

\* The necessity for immolation as a preliminary condition now becomes obvious. The sprinkling of the animal's blood on the altar would fail in its purpose of transferring the life, if the animal still continued to enjoy its life after the sprinkling had been completed. Hence the animal must be put to death. As we should say now, the altar had to be sprinkled not merely with the blood but with the "life-blood" of the animal. The immolation may be regarded, therefore, as the means of placing the animal in the necessary condition of victimhood.

To illustrate the sacrificial factors just described, I shall quote from the Old Testament an example of bloody sacrifice. There is a question of one of the ordinary faithful, who wishes to have a sacrifice offered in propitiation for his sins. The procedure to be followed is described in the *Book of Leviticus* (ch. 4): "But if he offer of the flock a victim for his sins, to wit an ewe without blemish, he shall put his hand upon the head thereof, and shall immolate it in the place where the victims of holocausts are wont to be slain. And the priest shall take the blood thereof with his fingers, and shall touch the horns of the altar of holocaust, and the rest he shall pour out at the foot thereof.. All the fat also he shall take off . . . and shall burn it upon the altar for a burnt-sacrifice of the Lord; and he shall pray for him and for his sin, and it shall be forgiven him." There are several points to be noticed in this passage. In the first place it is the owner of the animal that immolates (or slaughters) it. Before he does so he places his hand on the animal's head, thereby expressing his intention of devoting this animal as a victim for sacrifice to be offered to God on his behalf. The gesture of laying the hand on the animal's head is not made by the priest; hence it is not a part of the sacrificial offering (or oblation).\* The third point to be noticed is the promise of forgiveness of sins. From this passage and from many others like it, one might hastily conclude that the propitiatory sacrifices of the Old Law were in themselves acceptable to God and sufficiently valuable in His sight to obtain reconciliation for the sinner. Certain other passages in the Old Testament, however, and more particularly the *Epistle to the Hebrews* in the New Testament, warn us against any such conclusion. These sacrifices were acceptable to God only because they were types and figures of a future sacrifice, that was to be acceptable in itself. That future sacrifice was the sacrifice of the Cross. The Jewish sacrifices, if they obtained pardon for

\* In a word, the owner signified that he was supplying this animal as a victim to be offered to God by the priest on his (the owner's) behalf.



sin\* at all, obtained it not because of any propitiatory value they had in themselves, but because they were shadows of the sacrifice of Calvary. No man ever passed from the state of mortal sin to the state of friendship with God, except in the virtue of the propitiatory value of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross.

### THE SACRIFICE OF REDEMPTION

We now turn to Calvary. Our Lord was well aware of the great work He had to perform: He knew that in Him were to be fulfilled the good things pre-figured by numerous rites in the Old Law. We may take it then that He was careful to keep as close as the nature of the case would permit to the traditional notion of sacrifice, familiar to His Jewish disciples. On the other hand we must also remember that the sacrifices of the Old Law, compared with that of Calvary, were only like the shadow of a thing compared with the substance. Consequently to try to force Christ's sacrifice on the Cross to comply with a cast-iron definition, derived from a comparison of the sacrifices of the Old Law, would be exactly like trying to make the substance of a thing conform to its shadow. Christ's sacrifice stands alone in value and importance to the human race; and we need not be surprised if it exhibits special features in the manner of its celebration. As a matter of fact it does exhibit several special features. In the first place the priest and victim are identical—a fact that makes it impossible for the priest to sprinkle the altar with the blood of the victim, after the immolation has been completed. Since priest and victim are identical in the sacrifice of Calvary, and since a dead priest cannot officiate, the oblation must have been made by Christ as priest either prior to, or simultaneous with, the completion of the immolation (i.e., the immolation of Himself as victim).

\* i.e., supposing the sin to be real sin, and not merely the legal uncleanness of the Mosaic Code.

Again, the sacrifice of the Cross presents some apparent difficulties both in regard to the immolation and in regard to the oblation. At first sight there appears to be no sacrificial immolation on Calvary. The killing of Christ appears to have no connection with sacrificial worship: He is condemned and executed by those in authority, on the plea that He is a malefactor. Again, there appears to be no sacrificial oblation; for there is no consecrated altar, and consequently no sprinkling of the victim's blood on the altar. In spite of these apparent difficulties, it is easy enough to understand how Christ offered a true sacrifice on the Cross. Let us consider the events of His passion and death, bearing in mind the example of sacrifice already quoted from the *Book of Leviticus*.

Immediately before His passion began, as He sat at table with His disciples, Jesus took bread and blessed it and gave it to them, saying "This is My Body which shall be delivered (to death) for you." And taking the chalice likewise, He said "This is My Blood of the New Covenant, which shall be shed for you and for (the) many unto the remission of sins." In this emphatically sacrificial language, Christ not only promises that a victim will be sacrificed for their sins, but He nominates Himself that victim, and pledges His word that He will shed His blood for the remission of sins, and for the confirmation of a new covenant between God and man. You may recall the passage from *Leviticus*: "But if he offer of the flock of a victim . . . he shall put his hand on the head thereof." As the owner of the sheep nominated and pledged the sheep as a victim for sacrifice, so in a somewhat similar fashion Our Lord nominated and pledged His own body and blood at the last supper.

The next point to be considered is the immolation. Our Lord did not kill Himself. Those who did kill Him did not do so with a view of preparing Him as a victim for oblation to God. Nevertheless, the death of Christ actually took place for that purpose, in spite of the intentions of His executioners. In other words, the death of Christ was in fact a sacrificial



immolation. The truth of this statement will be obvious from the following considerations. Some time previously Our Lord had made it clear to His disciples that He could not be put to death, except by His own permission—"Therefore doth the Father love Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of myself; and I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again" (John 10). The very night of His passion, He gave a dramatic proof of this power; for when those who came to arrest Him said "We seek Jesus of Nazareth", He replied "I am He"; and immediately they fell helpless to the ground. He could be put to death only in so far as He Himself freely accepted death. Consequently, the true objective reason for His death was the reason on account of which He allowed Himself to be executed. And what was that reason? "This is My blood of the New Covenant, which shall be shed for (the) many unto the remission of sins." He shed His blood for the remission of sins—He was immolated as a victim for sin—whatever may have been the intention of His executioners.

We now come to the sacrificial act proper—the specifically priestly act of oblation (offering). How did Christ offer Himself to the Father as a sacrificial victim? In the sacrifice of Redemption, what corresponded to the application of the victim's blood to the altar in the sacrifices of the Old Law? We have seen that Christ at the last Supper nominated and pledged Himself as a victim. He thereby offered Himself in a certain sense too; He undertook to become a victim (on the Cross). But in as much as Christ was not yet really immolated at the Supper, He was not yet in the condition of real victimhood; and hence this undertaking at the Last Supper did not constitute the essential presentation of the victim to God. It was not the formal oblation (offering) of the sacrifice of Redemption; it was not the presentation that was to transfer the victim to the sole possession and ownership of God: it was merely the symbol and promise of the effective offering that

was to take place on Calvary.\* Just as the real and effective immolation was yet to come, so the real and effective oblation was yet to come: both were reserved for Calvary. In the words of the Council of Trent: "Although Christ was to offer Himself once by His death on the altar of the Cross to accomplish eternal redemption . . . yet He offered His body and blood under the appearances of bread and wine at the Supper, that He might leave to His Church a visible sacrifice" (Sess. 22). The real and effective oblation that was to transfer the victim to God's possession and "accomplish eternal redemption"—that oblation was made only once, it was made on the Cross; it was made by His Death (morte intercedente). The offering made at the Last Supper belonged to a different order of things: it belonged to the order of sacramental signs; and its meaning will become clearer from what is to be said later on about the offering of the same victim in the sacrifice of the Mass.

*Objection.*  
At this point someone may bring forward a difficulty already referred to. It was not sufficient in the sacrifices of the Jewish Temple to shed the blood of the victim; the blood must be shed on the altar, or sprinkled on it after the immolation: how then can Christ have offered Himself by merely shedding His blood unto death? The purpose of the altar as already explained, was to manifest God's acceptance of the gift: and as it was the acceptance, rather than the manifestation of the acceptance, that was essential to the validity of the sacrifice,

*Answer.*  
\* The offering of the Supper and the offering of Calvary might be compared to the two contracts of espousals and matrimony. In espousals the bride-to-be undertakes to give certain rights to a man at some time in the future; in matrimony the bride actually gives those rights by the contract here and now made. Similarly, at the Supper, Our Lord pledged Himself to become a victim, and to present Himself to God (in that state of victimhood) as a propitiatory sacrifice for the sins of men: on the Cross He actually carried out His pledge, and presented Himself as victim to God.



the altar was not entirely indispensable.\* In any case, Christ for several reasons did not require an artificial altar for His sacrifice. In the first place, an outward manifestation of God's acceptance was unnecessary. A divine person, Who had become man for that purpose, was offering the sacrifice of Redemption according to His Father's will: non-acceptance of which was inconceivable. Secondly, God's acceptance was soon to become manifest to the world by the miracles of the Resurrection and Ascension. Thirdly, the blood of Christ flowed over His own body, which being hypostatically united to the Divinity, would have served the purpose of an altar, if an altar were required. In fact, several of the early Christian writers say that Christ's body was the altar on which He offered His sacrifice. In short, Christ was at once the priest and the victim: and He was likewise the altar, if altar were necessary. I need hardly add that when the Fathers of Trent speak of the "altar" of the Cross they are not using the word in the strict sense of an altar consecrated for liturgical use.

From what I have said about the immolation and oblation of Christ, it will be seen that in one respect the sacrifice of Calvary resembles more closely the ancient sacrifices of the patriarchs than it does the later sacrifices of the Jewish Temple. In the latter, the immolation and the oblation were usually separate acts, performed by different persons, and in different parts of the Temple enclosure. In the early sacrifices the victim appears to have been immolated and offered by one and the same act, namely, by slaying it upon the altar. On Calvary, likewise, the immolation and the oblation are outwardly indistinguishable. The shedding of His blood, culminating in death, considered as freely accepted and endured by Christ, constituted the sacrificial immolation. The same shedding of His blood unto death constituted the oblation, i.e., the sign used by Christ as priest to present Himself as victim to God.

\* Even among the Jews there was one sacrifice (the Passover) in which no altar was used. (Cfr. Exodus XII 27).

## THE UNITY (ONE-NESS) OF CHRIST'S SACRIFICE

The *Epistle to the Hebrews* rings the changes on the perfection, the completeness, the finality of Christ's one sacrifice, offered through the shedding of His blood unto death. Unlike the high priests of the Old Law, who had to repeat their sacrifices year after year for the sins of the people, Christ, the high priest of the New Law, offered Himself once for all and by that oblation of Himself, made once for all, He made reparation for human sin, obtained eternal redemption for mankind, and won for men the gift of sanctification (Hebr. chaps. 7, 9, and 10). Hence, when Christ died on the Cross, the veil of the Temple was rent in two, to indicate the passing away of the whole scheme of Jewish sacrifices. It was neither necessary nor possible to add a further instalment of propitiation for sin to what had been made on Calvary. The sacrifice of the Cross was the one sufficient sacrifice for sin; and for that reason it was also the final propitiatory sacrifice, acceptable to God. It was not of course merely a propitiatory sacrifice i.e., a sacrifice for sin. It was equally perfect as a sacrifice of adoration, of thanksgiving, and of impetration (prayer).

From what I have just said, it is clear that in the New Law there is no room for any propitiatory sacrifice except the sacrifice of Christ. One might hastily conclude that there can be no sacrifice, or at least no propitiatory sacrifice, in the Mass. This is precisely what Luther and his associates said in the sixteenth century. If the celebration of the Eucharist were a propitiatory sacrifice, they argued, then the doctrine of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* about the all-sufficiency of Calvary must be false. The objection would be perfectly valid if the Mass were conceived as a different sacrifice from the sacrifice of Calvary—if it were conceived as a complete sacrifice in its own right, having a separate propitiatory value independent of Christ's passion and death on the Cross. But the Church, as we shall see presently, does not take that view of the Mass: hence there is nothing in the objection.



## THE RELATION OF THE MASS TO THE CROSS

There are two errors to be avoided, therefore. At one extreme is the error of Luther, who denied that the Mass is a true sacrifice at all. At the other extreme is the error of exaggerating the sacrificial character of the Mass to such an extent that the Mass would become a new and complete sacrifice of propitiation in its own right, independently of any connection with Calvary. Between these two extremes the Church steers a middle course. As she understands it, the Mass is not a second sacrifice standing, so to speak, side by side with the sacrifice of the Cross. The Mass is the same sacrifice as the sacrifice of Calvary. It has no new redemptive value, no independent power to satisfy for sins; whatever propitiatory power it exercises is derived from the Cross. You will probably feel inclined to ask at this point—How then can the Mass be truly called a sacrifice at all? How especially can it be truly called a propitiatory sacrifice? Might not a person just as truly call the sacrament of Baptism a propitiatory sacrifice, since it applies to our souls the effects of Christ's passion and death.

The answers to these questions will take us through the most difficult portion of the theology of the Mass. It is difficult because the Mass as a subordinate or dependent sacrifice is unique among the sacrifices of history; and we are unconsciously tempted to try to make it comply with a definition of sacrifice that has been framed for independent sacrifices, and is fully applicable to such sacrifices only. Just as we had to take into account the special characters of the sacrifice of Calvary itself, when we considered how it fulfilled the conditions of a true sacrifice, so we have to take into account the special characteristics of the Mass, especially its relation to the sacrifice of the Cross. We have to base our solution of what is really a scientific problem on the data supplied by revelation, and not (as we may be tempted to do)

try to make the data square with a preconceived theory of sacrifice.

The Council of Trent, in its condemnation of the Protestant error already referred to, issued an authoritative exposition of the Catholic doctrine on the subject. The following are the chief points of the Council's statement. Although Our Lord was to offer Himself once by His death on the altar of the Cross for the redemption of mankind, yet He offered His body and blood at the Last Supper under the appearances of bread and wine. He moreover commissioned the Apostles and their successors in the priesthood to offer likewise,\* by giving them the command: "Do this in commemoration of Me."

The reason for this course of action on Our Lord's part at the Last Supper is also mentioned by Trent. Christ's priesthood was not to be brought to an end by His death; it would continue through the ministry of His priests. He wished to provide for the wants of our human nature, by leaving His Church a visible sacrifice, by which the bloody sacrifice to be enacted on the Cross would be re-presented and commemorated, by which its saving power would be applied to our souls for remission of our daily sins. These few words about Our Lord's purpose in carrying out the celebration at the Last Supper are very instructive. His purpose was not the redemption of the world†; that purpose He put before Him on the Cross, according to Trent. In the supper-room, His purpose was to leave to the Church a visible sacrifice, namely, the Mass. Notice, too, what Trent says about the

\* The offering to be made by the Apostles (and successors) was to be like that of the Last Supper in the manner of making; but it was to commemorate Calvary and not the Supper room; it was to be our offering of the victim not as He was at the Supper, but as He was on the Cross.

† Hence the Supper celebration did not constitute the formal oblation of the sacrifice of Redemption.



continuance of Christ's priesthood. It was to continue after His death; but it was to continue through the ministry of His priests, not, as on the Cross, through His own personal ministry. In other words, the Mass is our sacrifice—the Church's sacrifice—but offered by us through the medium of the priesthood delegated to us by Christ.

The essential elements in this sacrifice are next touched upon by the Council. In this sacrifice, which is enacted at Mass, the same Christ, Who once offered Himself on the Cross in a bloody manner—that same Christ is offered in an unbloody manner. The victim is one and the same in the Mass and on the Cross. The principal offerer is likewise the same, the only difference in this respect being that Christ personally offered Himself on the Cross, whereas He offers Himself through His priests in the Mass. The same idea might be expressed by saying that Christ, the head of the mystical body, offered Himself personally on the Cross; whereas we, the members of His mystical body, offer Him in the Mass through the medium of His delegated priesthood. The manner of offering is different: on the Cross, the victim was offered in a bloody manner; in the Mass, the same victim is offered in an unbloody manner.

Lastly, in regard to its propitiatory effects, the Mass, according to Trent, is a propitiatory sacrifice, in the sense that through it the saving power of the sacrifice of the Cross comes down to us; so that we can obtain through the Mass the graces and mercy won for us on the Cross, provided we approach God with the proper dispositions.

It is interesting to compare the teaching of Trent with those passages of the *Epistles to the Hebrews*, on which the Protestant leaders based their objections to the Mass. In *Hebrews*\* the word "once" is distinctly emphasised: Christ

\* Note, however, that *Hebrews* is discussing the priesthood of Christ from one point of view only, viz., in relation to the sacrifice of Redemption. It clearly implies that Christ made only one *redemptive* offering of Himself: it neither affirms nor denies that He made any other offering of Himself.

was offered only once; He was immolated only once; He offered the sacrifice of Himself only once; and by that sacrifice of Himself, once offered, He completely satisfied for human sin. A similar set of statements is found in the exposition of Trent, but these statements are all qualified by the word "bloody." Christ was immolated once in a bloody manner; Christ was offered once in a bloody manner, and so on. The reference, of course, is to the sacrifice of the Cross. Where *Hebrews* is silent, however, Trent teaches that there is a sacrifice, in which the same victim (Christ) is immolated and offered in an unbloody manner; and that this unbloody sacrifice is a representation and a memorial of the bloody sacrifice, and a means of applying its fruits to our souls.

Trent does not discuss the scientific question—How exactly does the Mass fulfil the conditions of a true sacrifice? The Council tells us that the Mass is a true sacrifice; but it allows us to solve the scientific question for ourselves from the data that it gives us. Catholic theologians are not unanimous in their answer to this scientific question; and different solutions have been put forward from time to time. In concluding, therefore, with a brief explanation on how the Mass is a sacrifice, I wish it to be understood that I am merely giving one of several alternative explanations tolerated by the Church.

### THE SACRIFICE OF THE MASS.

The notion of sacrifice already discussed has led some of our theologians to seek in the Mass itself a real and independent immolation and oblation (offering) of Christ—not indeed carried out by actual shedding of His blood, but yet equally real, equally absolute—an immolation and oblation carried out by some mysterious change effected in the person of Christ during Mass. Such explanations are based, for the most part, upon the assumption that something has to be done to the person of Christ at Mass, in order to place Him



in the condition of victimhood. According to some writers, for instance, Christ is reduced to such a state of helplessness in the sacrament that He is as really immolated in the Eucharist as He was on the Cross. Explanations of this kind, while they provide at first sight an easy defence of the sacrificial character of the Mass, yet inevitably lead to trouble in other directions. They logically imply that Christ offered two complete and independent propitiatory sacrifices,\* a conclusion that cannot easily be harmonised with the *Epistle to the Hebrews*.

Reason is at one with revelation in telling us that Christ was really and effectively offered only once. Christ was immolated on the Cross. He can never be really immolated again; for though He rose from the dead after the tragedy of Calvary, He rose immortal and impassible: He can neither die nor suffer any more. Nor is it necessary that He should die or suffer again, in order that He may be a true victim in the Mass. By His one real immolation He was made a victim for the sins of mankind, and He retains that state of victimhood for ever. The victim of Calvary, once immolated and presented to God, passed into God's possession, and remains forever—glorified indeed since the Resurrection, but nevertheless eternal victim for the sins of mankind.† In order to have a true sacrifice in the Mass, it is not necessary to reduce Christ to a state of victimhood all over again. When the bread and wine are consecrated they are changed into the body and blood of Christ already in victim condition—

Docti sacris institutis  
Panem, vinum in salutis  
Consecramus hostiam.

(We consecrate the bread and wine into the victim of salvation). Real immolation of a living thing means the slaughter of that thing. It is of necessity bloody. Unbloody immolation

\* i.e., one at the Last Supper and the other on Calvary.

† Cfr. *Hebrews* IX 24-28.

is not a real, but a merely figurative immolation—an immolation in image or effigy. In the Mass we immolate Christ in an unbloody manner by consecrating His body and blood separately, this sacramental separation representing the real separation which took place on Calvary. We do not actually shed Christ's blood again; we merely act His death sacramentally—we represent by sacramental signs the shedding of His blood.

Just as the divine victim was only once really immolated, so He was only once really and effectively offered to God. As I do not want this statement to be misunderstood, I ask you to note carefully the sense in which it is made. Christ was only once really and effectively offered in the sense that He (as victim) was only once actually transferred to God's possession and ownership. He still remains, and will for ever remain, in God's possession, an eternal victim for the sins of mankind. Consequently, He can never be actually transferred again. You cannot transfer to a person a gift which you have already transferred, and which still remains in his possession. There is, however, a sense in which we really offer the divine victim at Mass; but I shall explain that point later on.

The one real immolation and the one real oblation of Christ were made on Calvary by the shedding of His blood unto death. When we represent Christ's death at Mass, therefore, by the double consecration, we show forth *both* His immolation and His oblation. We thereby, as Trent explains, both commemorate the sacrifice of Calvary, and we re-present it, i.e., make it present again. We make it present again in two senses, first, in as much as the same victim is made present, and made present in the image or representation of His immolation and oblation on Calvary—in the image, therefore, of His complete sacrifice. Secondly, we make present again the sacrifice of Calvary in as much as this representation of Christ's immolation and offering becomes for us a real offering of that same sacrifice. In the Mass,



therefore, we have a representation of Calvary, but not a mere representation, such as, for instance, a passion play. In the first place, the victim Himself is really present, and is sacrificed symbolically, i.e., in a sign or image. But that is not all; the Mass is much more than a mere symbolical sacrificing of Christ here and now present. The symbolic representation of Christ's sacrifice, which we enact at Mass, is the means whereby we make a *real* offering of that same sacrifice; or to put it in another way, *the representation of Christ's immolation and offering becomes in the Mass a real offering on our part*. As this point requires some explanation, I shall return to it presently.

In the meantime we turn to the third point mentioned by Trent. The Mass is not merely a commemoration and a re-presentation of the sacrifice of Calvary; it is also a means of applying to our souls the fruits of that sacrifice. In discussing this last point, we are really discussing how the Mass fulfils for us, Christians, the functions of a sacrifice—that is to say, how it is an outward sign of our inward submission and self-dedication to God; how the victim we hold in our hands at Mass is offered to God as *our* victim, to manifest *our* attitude of will; and how, therefore, the Mass procures for us mercy and graces that have been already paid for, so to speak, on Calvary.

The oblation of Himself on Calvary was Christ's personal act. He alone offered; no one else had any sacrificial part with Him in the offering. As yet we were not incorporated with Him in one mystical body; and consequently we did not take part even as sleeping members in what He did as our head. We had yet to be made members of Christ. But having paid the price of our redemption on the Cross, He has also instituted means for bringing individual souls into union with Him, so that the fruits of redemption may actually reach them. He has linked us up with Himself to form a body, of which He is the head and we are members. He did that for most of us while we were still children—when we

were baptised, and the saving grace, won for us on Calvary, was poured into our souls. But our duties as members of Christ do not end there; we are not to be mere passive receivers of gifts. As members of Him, Christ would have us take an active part even now in that one great sacrifice of Himself, by which He redeemed us. *He would have us become offerers with Himself.\** For that purpose He has instituted the Mass, and delegated to the Church His own priesthood, to enable us to associate ourselves sacrificially with Him (and through Him) in the offering of Himself as a sacrificial victim to God. He wishes to incorporate in His own offering of the sacrifice of redemption our offering of it too, and thereby make His sacrifice to God our sacrifice also. It is the same sacrifice, therefore, that we offer in the Mass, and that Christ offered on Calvary. He offered it alone and by His own personal act on the Cross; we, His members, offer it in the Mass through the priestly power of Christ, our head. The sacrifice is the same; the victim is the same; the real immolation† is the same; the mode of offering alone‡ is different. He offered by actual shedding of His blood; we offer through the unbloody rite that He has instituted for the purpose. He places the same victim in our hands; He extends to us His own priestly power; He shows us the way to associate ourselves sacrificially with Him in offering the victim to God.

No example that I could give would worthily illustrate the great mystery of our participation in the sacrifice of Christ.

\* "In order that the world may have the honour and advantage of working at its own redemption, by paying out of its own hand the more than sufficient price put at its disposal by Christ the Redeemer." (Fr. De La Taille).

† The "*real* immolation" is the same, i.e., the immolation that constitutes Christ a real victim. We do immolate Christ *symbolically* at Mass by the double consecration; but that symbolic immolation serves, not to make Him victim, but to make our offering of Him (the victim already in victim condition) to God.

‡ "*Sola offerendi ratione diversa*"—The sacrifice of the Mass differs from the sacrifice of the Cross only in the manner of offering. Trent, 22, 2.



Yet perhaps an imperfect illustration would serve to throw light on it. In the courts of law it sometimes happens that several persons are prosecuted for an act that was performed by one of their number only. One defendant alone is primarily responsible for the act; nevertheless, the court holds the others responsible also, in so far as they become accessories after the fact. In a somewhat similar fashion we, through the Mass, associate ourselves with Christ as accessories after the fact in the offering of the sacrifice on Calvary. And we do so, not merely as a token of our approval of what He then did, but also as a token of our present submission and self-dedication to God. We associate ourselves with Christ's offering of the victim, not only by way of moral approbation, but also by way of sacrificial offering of the same victim. We cannot, it is true, transfer the victim anew to the possession of God, for the victim is already in God's possession. But using the priestly power that He has given us, and the sacrificial rite that He has instituted for the purpose, we can and we do really offer, by associating ourselves sacrificially\* with Christ our head in the one effective offering, by which He once for all transferred the victim to God's possession. We might compare His offering and ours to the signing of a document affecting the estate of some family. The father of the family alone signed, and signed in his own blood on Calvary; and that was the essential signature. The children, born since then, add their signatures in the Mass, signing not in their blood, but with the copying pencil their father presents to them.

There remains one point, which I have already promised to explain. At Mass we have a symbolic representation of Christ's sacrifice on Calvary. How does this representation enable us to take a real part in the sacrifice represented? How does the enacting of an image of Christ's immolation and

\* That is, we not merely associate ourselves approvingly with the offering by Christ of *His* victim to express *His* sentiments to God; but we associate ourselves so as to make the victim *our* victim also, to express to God *our* sentiments of adoration, thanksgiving, etc.

offering become a real offering of the same victim on our part? In short, how does our commemoration of Christ's sacrifice make us co-offerers with Him? Briefly, the answer is—because the whole Eucharistic celebration was instituted by Christ after the manner of a sacrament, i.e., after the manner of a sign that effects what it signifies. You are familiar with the notion of practical (or effective) signification in so far as the sacrament signifies the *real* presence of Christ; and you could explain intelligently what takes place at the consecration of the bread and wine. The priest pronounces over the bread certain words that signify (i.e., are a sign of) the body of Christ; and forthwith the thing signified is also accomplished; the bread is no longer bread; it is the Body of Christ. Similarly, the words spoken over the chalice signify the presence of Christ's blood in the Chalice; and forthwith, instead of wine, the Blood of Christ is present in the chalice. How does it all happen? The change is made, of course, by the power of God, but not by the power of God acting in a purely arbitrary manner. The power of God is bound, so to speak, to the words in question (provided the necessary conditions are fulfilled); so that as often as they are employed, so often they are effective. And how does the power of God come to be attached in this way to the words of consecration—or, if you like, how do the words of consecration come to have such a claim on God's power? The answer is—because Christ instituted them as a sacramental sign, to carry out what they signify. You are probably less familiar with the notion of practical signification in regard to the sacrificial aspect of the Eucharist. Yet, Christ did not institute the sacrament of His body and blood merely, or even primarily, for the purpose of giving us His real presence. He could have done that without a double consecration. No; He instituted the sacrament of His body and blood, as Trent teaches, "that He might leave to His Church a visible sacrifice." The sacrifice He left was the sacrifice of Himself—a sacrifice to be offered by us in a manner that would represent and commemorate His own offer-



ing of the same sacrifice on the Cross. He Himself offered, as already explained, by the shedding of His blood unto death. The separate consecration of His body and blood is the sign He has instituted to represent and commemorate that offering. And it is assuredly a most appropriate sign, since body and blood are symbolically separated on the altar in imitation of the real separation, that constituted His immolation and offering on Calvary. Now, this sign has been instituted by Christ not merely as a commemorative sign of His own offering, but also as a practical and effective sign of our offering of the same victim. What the priest does and says at the double consecration signifies, therefore, not only the presence of Christ's body and blood, but also the *offering* of Christ's body and blood as a sacrifice. And just as it effects or accomplishes the presence of Christ's body and blood, because it signifies it; so also it effects or makes the *offering* of Christ's body and blood because it signifies it.\* The effectiveness of the sign presents no greater mystery in the second case than it does in the first. In both cases the sign owes its efficacy to its institution by Christ.

\* The reader should not misunderstand the efficacy of the sign. The Mass is not a sacrifice merely because it is the divinely appointed sign of the sacrifice of Calvary. The efficacy consists in this, that the sign provides us with *one* of the two elements (oblation) required for a real sacrifice. The other element (immolation) is provided by Calvary, not by the sign. As already explained, two elements go to make up the sacrifice of the New Law, namely, immolation (killing) and oblation (offering). The former element is required for the purpose of placing the victim in the necessary condition of victimhood. The second element is the actual offering of the victim to God. In our offering of this sacrifice we have no need to provide a *real* immolation; Christ is already a victim. The Mass borrows, so to speak, from Calvary the necessary immolation. We have, however, to supply the second sacred element, oblation. And this we do (according to Christ's instructions) by consecrating bread and wine separately, thus immolating Him in figure. Unless, however, it had the real immolation of Calvary to complete it, the double consecration would remain a mere representation of a sacrifice. It would give us indeed the body and blood of Christ, but not as victim of sacrifice. At least our victim would be victim only in figure, not in reality; and hence our sacrifice too would be only a figurative, not a real sacrifice.

By giving us the Mass, therefore, Our Lord enables us to associate ourselves not only morally but also sacrificially with Him in His offering of the one great sacrifice of redemption. Because He is our head, and we are His members, our offering (made through His priesthood) is taken up and incorporated in His offering, making our sacrifice to God His sacrifice also—an acceptable sacrifice in the sight of God, and a fruitful source of spiritual favours for ourselves.

Membership of the mystical body of Christ does not make us priests of the New Law; but it makes us members of that body, on whose behalf the validly ordained priest acts when he celebrates Mass. The Mass is the people's sacrifice as well as the priest's, because He is their representative. Try to realise what that means—that each one of us is enabled to offer in union with Christ the sacrifice by which we were redeemed. If it is an amazing privilege for the priest to be able to celebrate Mass, is it not almost as great a privilege for the faithful to be able to assist at Mass, since it is their sacrifice as well as the priest's?

There is one point already mentioned to which I would like to call your attention. The ritual (or outward sacrifice) is the visible sign of the invisible sacrifice of the will. In other words, we offer sacrifice to God in token of our submission to His will, and of our dedication of ourselves to His service. Now, this inward disposition of the soul—this submission of the will of God—has to be cultivated by each individual Christian for himself: no one else can supply it on his behalf. If a person in his inmost heart refuses to serve God, even the Mass, in so far as it is offered by him, is only an empty token of a submission that he is not prepared to make. He may benefit by the Mass, in so far as it is the sacrifice of his fellow-worshippers or the Church at large, but as offered by himself it will produce no fruit because of his bad dispositions. There is only one thing that is altogether incompatible with the dispositions necessary to



make our offering acceptable to God, namely, mortal sin unrepented. If you are conscious of that unfortunate condition of soul when you assist at Mass, try to elicit an act of contrition. The grace of God will not be wanting; and the thought of the great mystery that is being enacted will make contrition easy. When you turn to God by repentance, you supply the condition necessary to make your offering acceptable in His sight: and that offering (incorporated with the offering of Christ and His saints), may be the means of bringing you graces and blessings of inestimable value for your spiritual welfare.

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