

tery of man's defilement, it cannot be made more than it is without being thereby despoiled. Raised to a formal sharing in that inner-Trinitarian life proper to Deity alone, man is not thus transformed entitatively into God. This is the prerogative of Christ alone; the blessed, too, "become" God but only in the order of knowing and loving. Anything savoring of theological pantheism or a kind of monophysitism ultimately demeans the splendor which is grace. The doctrine of Father Rahner must involve either an unthinkable fusion of God with creature, or a transformation of the creature into the divine by way of hypostatic union or glorious vision. Grace is none of these. The most disquieting feature of this theory (and its variants) is that it is impossible to see that it does not slight the transcendence of God.

Faith is at once a need to understand. The deep things of God suggest a constant dynamism (if not always objective progression) in the striving for such understanding. We should not rest satisfied with mere re-statement of the formulae which arose out of the vitality of the faith in the past. The metaphysics of grace surely can be furthered, rendered more profoundly illumined for us. But the directions which Father Rahner here suggests do seem to break continuity with the rich traditions of the past, even to come close to overstepping the norms of orthodoxy.

WILLIAM J. HILL, O.P.

*Dominican House of Studies,
Washington, D. C.*

The Thomist 27 (1963)

THE SACRIFICE OF THE MASS AS AN ACT
OF THE VIRTUE OF RELIGION

A STUDY IN MORAL THEOLOGY

Carleton Williams S.P.

IN recent years many theologians have shown grave dissatisfaction with the method of presenting and expounding the truth of revelation as it is found in the vast majority (if not indeed in all) of theological manuals. These theologians demand a more vital theology, a more vivid way of presenting divinely revealed truth, a manner more adapted to the mentality and training of the modern man. Such reactions are found among theological writers everywhere and it must be sincerely admitted that they are not altogether without foundation. His Holiness, Pope John XXIII, in his inaugural address to the assembled conciliar fathers, insists that there is urgent need for re-thinking our theology and for expressing it in a new and more modern way. In the same breath, however, he insists that there can be no question whatever of changing in any way the ancient truths, or of "accommodating" them to the whims and fancies of modern man. It is much more a question of presenting the ancient truths in a new garb, as it were, of freeing them from the dust of the past.¹ It is not, I think, out of place to quote the

¹ It is not the first time in the history of the Church or in the history of theological discussion that the need of a new formulation of the ancient truths of our faith has been felt, a formulation more suited to the mentality of our adversaries; it is not the first time that such a new expression of divine truth has been urgently called for. We find examples of that in almost every age. Thus we find in the 16th century a renowned theologian, Melchior Cano, who took an active part in the discussions of the Council of Trent on the Blessed Eucharist, the Sacrifice of the Mass and on the Sacrament of Penance, expressing his ideas most candidly on the question. He writes in his famous work, *De Locis Theologicis*, Pt. XII, *chapter 11*, the following: Dixit in Concilio Tridentino vir eloquens sane ac facundus, sed parum theologus tamen, qui id suadere vellet audientibus, adversum haereticos, praesertim Lutheranos, non esse magnum usum scholasticae concentrationis, oratorio potius more cum illis disserendum: nostrum enim spiritus esse ac per-

Supreme Pontiff's own words in their full context, for there is an inclination at times to cite his words out of context, and therein lies a grave danger. Here are his solemn words which set down succinctly and clearly the principles governing every theological investigation:

What is needed at the present time is a new enthusiasm, a new joy and serenity of mind in the unreserved acceptance by all of the entire Christian faith, without forgetting that accuracy and precision in its presentation which characterized the proceedings of the Council of Trent and the first Vatican Council. What is needed, and what everyone imbued with a truly Christian, Catholic and apostolic spirit craves today, is that the doctrine shall be more widely known, more deeply understood, and more penetrating in its effects on men's moral lives. What is needed is that certain and immutable doctrine, to which the faithful owe obedience, be studied afresh and reformulated in contemporary terms. For

molestum. Quae si vera essent, exempla in Theologia disputandi non ab his, quos arte dixi, meliora peterentur. Equidem etsi non sum nescius, quam sit, non scholae dico in disputando mos, sed tota omnino scholae Theologia haereticis invisa, sed eo magis existimo, scholasticam disserendi formam ad haereses refellendas efficaciorum, quo magis haereticis invisa est. Quod si Lutherani academia subtilitate minime capiuntur, ne oratione quidem ad rhetorum leges artificiose composita capi poterunt, quoniam grandiores sunt et callidiores effecti, quam ut orationis artificii apprehendantur. Verum si eo loco res sit, ut adversum Lutherana dogmata certare cogar, eligant alii (nihil enim impedit) suave orationis genus, quo mollis et familiaris homines isitumodi ad ecclesiae benevolentiam alliciant, dummodo mihi relinquunt scholae ossa seruosque ac pressam disserendi soliditatem. . . . Quum oratorum more quasi torrens fertur oratio, quamvis multa cuiusque modi rapiat, nihil tamen fere teneas, nihil apprehendas. Cum autem ad scholae normam certa via et ratione premitur, contineri amplectique facilius potest. Itaque praeclearum a Divo Thoma acceptum morem disputandi, si eum teneremus. Nemo vero a viro gravissimo orationis delicias quaerit, pigmenta muliebria, fucum puerilem, sed veras gravesque orationis sententias, argumenta solida et propria, sermonem rei, de qua disseritur, accomodatam. . . . Equidem non Divum Thomam modo, sed scholae auctores quosdam alios existimo, si humaniores litteras coluissent, et quae in schola didicerant, eloqui voluissent, ornatissime splendidissimeque potuisse facere; et viros eloquentiae studiosos, si ab scholae instituto non abhorruissent, sed theologiam hanc didicissent et tractare voluissent, gravissime et copiosissime dicere potuisse. . . . Verum si *aliterum sit optandum, malum quidem indiseram scientiam, quam inscitiam loquacem*. Nam exempla illa disputationis theologicae suis omnibus numeris absoluta is solum suppeditare potest, qui eloquentiam sapientiae coniunxit. Age tamen, qualis-cumque nostra sunt, et ea ipsi afferamus, quae etsi non meliora erunt quam vetera, erunt temporis fortassis aptiora.

this deposit of faith, or truths which are contained in our time-honored teaching, is one thing; the manner in which these truths are set forth, with their meaning preserved intact, is something else. This then, is what will require our careful, and perhaps too our patient, consideration. We must work out ways and means of expounding these truths in a manner more consistent with a predominantly pastoral view of the Church's teaching office.²

When reading much of modern theological writing one gets now and again, unfortunately, the impression that there is an urge to change not only the manner of expressing ancient truths but even of modifying the 'depositum' itself. It is not surprising that the effect of such writing should be felt amongst the young theologians pursuing their theological studies. These frequently show a great lack of sympathy for traditional methods and demand from their professors a more vital, a more *existential* approach to revealed truth. This is true both in the field of dogmatic theology and in that of moral theology. In the domain of moral theology there is a certain amount of confusion of thought in the writings of the moralists themselves and then, of necessity, in the minds of the students. The net result is that the students fail to distinguish between what we may call moral catechesis, that is, simple instruction in the rules governing Christian living as found in the sources of revelation, and formal theological science, which deals with the reality of the supernatural Christian life and strives to expound and analyze scientifically its principles, its structure and its functioning. What the young theologians most often ask for and welcome in this field is a kind of biblical moral theology, which is more immediately applicable in the work of the sacred ministry—preaching and confessional. The reaction here is seen to be double: on the one side, against the casuistical moral teaching of the moral manuals (which most unfortunately reduce all moral theology as such to a science of sin) and on the other side against the speculative moral teaching of St. Thomas and the scholastics.

² AAS 1062, p. 791-792.

A very clear example of reaction against the method of the manuals is to be found in the matter of sacramental theology and in this case we are forced to admit that the reaction is most justified indeed. Prof. K. Rahner, for instance, laments the fact that, with the sole exception of the Sacrament of Penance (in which there is an insistence on the acts of the penitent receiving it) "all the sacraments are monotonously discussed according to one and the same pattern" (necessity, institution, structure, that is, matter and form) while "the existential side of the sacrament is given no place by right."² In this we agree with him whole-heartedly. Some time ago I had occasion to insist precisely on this point in the context of a series of articles on the role of the sacraments in the Christian life.³ There I pointed out that the sacraments as used or received by the Christian people pertain to the virtue of religion: they are *external* religious acts. The two fundamental religious movements of the soul are the *movement of giving* to God an oblation of self or our possessions (corresponding to the internal attitude of devotion or devotedness to God, our Creator), and the *movement of receiving from God as supplicants* in humble dependence (corresponding to the internal attitude of prayer or supplication). In our sacramental life we find these very same acts of worship flowing from the Christian and supernatural or infused virtue of religion: the giving to God through Christ, our High Priest and Mediator between us and God the Father, and the receiving of divine life through Christ's sacraments in a spirit of religious submission and deep humility.

In this present article I should like to set down some reflections on the existential character of the greatest of all the external acts of Christian worship, the sacrifice of the Mass. These thoughts have been suggested not so much by a dogmatic study of the sacrament of the Blessed Eucharist as by

² Karl Rahner, S. J., *Theological Investigations*, I, p. 18, note 1.

³ *Doctrine and Life* (Dominican Publications, Dublin, Ireland) 12 (1962) 71-78, 128-137.

a close study of the notion of sacrifice in so far as it is an external act of the virtue of religion, to be placed by all those who either offer or take part in the sacrifice of Christ. And in this I think I am correct in maintaining that I am emphasizing the so-called existential character of the Mass and the vital role it should play in the life of every Christian.⁴

The 22nd Session of the Council of Trent was devoted to the Church's teaching on the sacrifice of the Mass. As it is the most solemn and completely authentic statement we possess on the matter I think it well to quote it in full—in spite of its length—before proposing my theological reflections on its true meaning in the Christian life.

The holy, ecumenical, and general Synod of Trent lawfully assembled in the Holy Spirit with the same legates of the Apostolic See presiding, has decreed that the faith and doctrine concerning the great mystery of the Eucharist in the holy Catholic Church, complete and perfect in every way, should be retained and, after the errors and heresies have been repudiated, should be preserved as of old in its purity; concerning this doctrine, since it is the true and the only sacrifice, the holy Council, instructed by the light of the Holy Spirit, teaches these matters which follow, and declares that they be preached to the faithful.

Since under the former Testament (as the apostle Paul bears witness) there was no consummation because of the weakness of the Levitical priesthood, it was necessary (God the Father of mer-

⁴ The literature on the Sacrament of the Blessed Eucharist in general and on the Sacrifice of the Mass in particular is immense. However, I should like to quote the following works that have been of special help in the working out of the present essay. Bernhard Dursi, O.S.B., "Das Wesen der Eucharistiefeier und der christlichen Priesterturns," Herder, 1953 (*Studia Anselmiana* 32); Charles Journet, *La Messe, Présence du sacrifice de la Croix*, Desclée de Brouwer, 1957; Antonio Prolanti, *Il mistero Eucaristico*, Libreria editrice Fiorentina; Florence, 1958; Anton Vorbichler, S.V.D., *Das Opfer auf den uns heute noch erreichbaren ältesten Stufen der Menschheitsgeschichte*. Eine Begriffsstudie, St. Gabriel-Verlag, Mödling b. Wien, 1956; Ansgar Vonier, O.S.B., *A Key to the Doctrine of the Eucharist*, London, 1925) (still one of the best studies on the matter); and the special number of the French review *Lumière et Vie* 7 (1952).

It is of interest to note that Melchior Cano in chapter 12 of Book 12 of the above-mentioned and quoted work, *De Locis Theologicis*, gives a most penetrating theological analysis of the Catholic doctrine on the Blessed Eucharist both as Sacrament and as Sacrifice.

cies ordaining it thus) that another priest according to the order of Melchisedech [Gen. 14:18, Ps. 109:4; Heb. 7:11] arise, our Lord Jesus Christ, who could perfect [Heb. 10:14] all who were to be sanctified, and lead them to perfection. He, therefore, our God and Lord, though He was about to offer Himself once to God the Father upon the altar of the Cross by the mediation of death, so that He might accomplish an eternal redemption for them [ed.: *ilic*, there], nevertheless, that His sacerdotal office might not come to an end with His death [Heb. 7:24, 27] at the Last Supper, on the night He was betrayed, so that He might leave to His beloved spouse the Church a visible sacrifice (as the nature of man demands), whereby that bloody sacrifice once to be completed on the Cross might be represented, and the memory of it remain even to the end of the world [I Cor. 11:23 ff] and its saving grace be applied to the remission of those sins which we daily commit, declaring Himself constituted "a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech" [Ps. 109:4], offered to God the Father His own body and the blood under the species of bread and wine, and under the symbols of those same things gave to the apostles (whom He then constituted priests of the New Testament), so that they might partake, and He commanded them and their successors in the priesthood in these words to make offering: "Do this in commemoration of me, etc." [Luke 22:19; I Cor. 11:24], as the Catholic Church has always understood and taught. For, after He had celebrated the ancient feast of the Passover, which the multitude of the children of Israel sacrificed [Exod. 12:1 ff] in memory of their exodus from Egypt, He instituted a new Passover, Himself to be immolated under visible signs by the Church through the priests, in memory of His own passage from this world to the Father, when by the shedding of His blood He redeemed us and "delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into His kingdom" [Col. 1:13].

And this, indeed, is that "clean oblation" which cannot be defiled by any unworthiness or malice on the part of those who offer it; which the Lord foretold through Malachias must be offered in every place as a clean oblation [Mal. 1:11] to His name, which would be great among the gentiles, and which the apostle Paul writing to the Corinthians has clearly indicated, when he says that they who are defiled by participation of the "table of the devils" cannot become partakers of the table of the Lord [I Cor. 10:21], understanding by table in each case, the altar. It is finally, that [sacrifice] which was prefigured by various types of sacrifices, in the period of nature and the Law [Gen. 4:4; 8:20; 12:8; 22; Ex. pas-

sim], inasmuch as it comprises all good things signified by them, as being the consummation and perfection of them all.

And since in this divine sacrifice, which is celebrated in the Mass, that same Christ is contained and immolated in an unbloody manner, who on the altar of the Cross "once offered Himself" in a bloody manner [Heb. 9:27], the holy Synod teaches that this is truly propitiatory, and has this effect, that if contrite and penitent we approach God with a sincere heart and right faith, with fear and reverence, "we obtain mercy and find grace in seasonable aid" [Heb. 4:16]. For, appeased by this oblation, the Lord, granting grace and gift of penitence, pardons crimes and even great crimes. For, if in one and the same Victim, the same one now offering by the ministry of the priests as He who then offered Himself on the Cross, the manner of offering alone being different. The fruits of that oblation (bloody, that is) are received most abundantly through this unbloody one; so far is the latter from being derogatory in any way to Him. Therefore, it is offered rightly according to the tradition of the apostles, not only for the sins of the faithful living, for their punishments and other necessities, but also for the dead in Christ not yet fully purged. (Denz. 937a-940, trans. R. J. Deferrari).⁶

Such is the Church's official and authentic teaching on the Mass. Every explanation of the Mass, either as a sacrament or as a sacrifice, must take these decisions of the Council of Trent into account and never depart from them. According to this teaching the Mass is: 1) first of all, a real and proper sacrifice; 2) secondly, the same sacrifice as that of Calvary and the Supper Room; 3) differing from Calvary only in the manner of offering the same victim; 4) and fourthly, the only sacrifice of the New Law.

The Mass, then, is a real sacrifice, the only real one of the New Law. That being so, it follows that what is true of sacrifice as such must be true also of the Mass, and what is true of priesthood as such must be true too of our Christian priesthood; and before we can determine how the Christian people should best take part in the sacrifice of the Mass and through it in that of Christ on Calvary, we must first of all under-

⁶ In the latest, fully revised edition of Denzinger's *Enchiridion* this text is to be found n^o 1738-1743 (Herder: Barcelona 1963).

stand how sacrifice is offered and how one offers or takes part in it. That is the only sound manner of procedure in a theological analysis of the Mass as a sacrifice (and this aspect takes precedence over it as a sacrament) and of the part the faithful should play in the offering of it. Sacrifice is essentially an *external* act of the virtue of religion, and as such it is the sign of an internal sacrifice, of some internal act or attitude of mind of the person who offers it, and in the persons for whom it is offered or in whose name it is offered. This internal sacrifice is nothing else than what theologians call "*devotio*" or devotedness. This is defined by St. Thomas as "a ready will to do what pertains to the service of God."⁷ It is the principal *internal* act of the virtue of religion and is an act of submission to God and to God's will in everything. It is a readiness to do God's will no matter what it may be and no matter how it may be made known to us. This complete submission of the creature to God is called by St. Thomas the "interior spiritual sacrifice"; it is the interior spiritual giving or oblation of self. A sacrifice which is offered exteriorly signifies an interior spiritual sacrifice by which the soul offers itself to God.⁸ When man submits himself wholly to God he is drawn to manifest this submission in a sensible, tangible way. His nature tells him to offer something to God as a sign of his interior readiness to submit to God in all things.⁹ In other words, nature, or better natural reason, tells him to offer some kind of external sacrifice. Now this external sacrifice, which consists essentially in the giving of something to God in a sensible and visible way, in relinquishing ownership of something, presupposes an internal act of giving, an internal "*oblatio*," quite distinct from "*devotio*," while flowing from it and being informed by it. This internal oblation bears directly on the object to be sacrificed, that is, on the object which is to be given over to God. If the external thing to be offered should be oneself (as in the case of self-sacrifice) then this internal oblation could rightly be called an act of self-

⁷ II-II, 82, 1.

⁸ II-II, 85, 2.

⁹ II-II, 85, 1.

oblation, and it would be altogether distinct from the act of devotion "*quo anima seipsam offert Deo*."

Now Christ's sacrifice on Calvary was, in fact, a sacrifice of self, demanded of Him by His Eternal Father for the redemption of sinning mankind. In offering this sacrifice Christ elicited an internal act of self-oblation and carried it into effect by allowing himself to be killed by the Jews. In the Old Law God demanded the killing of an animal, for instance, as a sacrifice (this being the most expressive manner of relinquishing ownership of a living thing and of giving it over to God), that is, an external sign of the people's subjection to and dependence upon Him. In offering this sacrifice the priest of the Old Law, already conscious of his and the people's dependence upon God, had to elicit a special act of giving this thing to God. This internal act, moving to the external action, is essential to sacrifice. Both together make up one complete external human act, the act of sacrifice. In speaking of sacrifice, then, we must be careful to distinguish three elements or acts. 1) First, the act or attitude of "*devotio*," which, as we saw, is a readiness to submit to God in all things, the fundamental act of the religious man, and is signified here by some external action of giving. It is the "*interius spirituale sacrificium*," or the "*principale*"¹⁰ or "*verum*"¹¹ *sacrificium*" of which St. Thomas so often speaks. 2) Secondly, there is the internal act of the mind by which the priest relinquishes ownership of some external object and thus gives it over to God, consecrates it or makes it sacred. This is the internal oblation and is an act of the practical intellect.¹² 3) Thirdly, there is the external effective giving of the object to be sacrificed. This is, in the most formal sense of the term, sacrifice: the external carrying into effect of the internal oblation. It is clear that without "*devotio*" sacrifice can have no meaning, since it would then be an empty sign, a sign without anything being

¹⁰ II-II, 85, 3 ad 2.

¹¹ *Summa contra Gentiles*, III, 120.

¹² Cf. III, 102, 3 for the meaning of the different types of sacrifice in the Old Law.

