

THE CHRISTIAN SACRIFICE

By

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Anyone who undertakes an impartial appraisal of the book of Canon Eugene Masure "The Christian Sacrifice" recently translated by Dom Iltyd Trethowan, O.S.B., has a difficulty in deciding where he ought to begin if the work as a whole is to be viewed in due perspective. Perhaps the first step of the critic should be to eliminate altogether from his purview the section entitled "The Mystery of the Incarnation," which constitutes about a quarter of the book. From the Preface of the translator we infer that this section acquired *per accidens* a domicile in alien territory. We agree with the translator that it would be a pity to abridge this section of Christology. But as we also agree with him that its relevance to the main thesis is rather remote we may proceed to discuss the great variety of material that falls within our scope.

The climax of the author's thoughts is reached in Book Three which treats of the Sacrifice of the Mass. The liturgical element though introduced for its bearing on theology calls for no special comment. The main purpose of the entire volume, so far as I can interpret the intention of the writer, is to give an answer to the question: In what consists the metaphysical essence of the Mass? or in other words: How is the scientific concept of sacrifice realised in the double consecration? Has the author shed light on this controversy on which the ingenuity of learned and holy men has been exercised for centuries? I would answer "yes." I would not claim that he has expounded his view with a sequence of thought that enables the reader to follow his exposition without effort. But the book does, in my opinion, contain nearly all the elements of the correct answer.

What, then, do I conceive to be the best line of approach to the controversy about the metaphysical essence of the Mass? I see the key in the following words of the translator's Preface "Masure's view effectively rules out any supposed special act of Christ's in the Mass-Sacrifice. That (as Dr. Moran showed us recently) is a quite modern theory." As a preliminary to the vexed question of the metaphysical essence we may ask what is the true import of the words of Trent, *Nunc offerens sacerdotum ministerio*.

That Christ is the Principal Offerer of the Mass and that this is the teaching of Trent is not denied by those theologians who maintain that Christ whether as he exists in Heaven or as he exists in the Mass makes no fresh oblation act when the second-

ary minister is celebrating Mass. Masure is amongst the number of those who rule out a distinct personal act of Christ in the Mass-Sacrifice. I quote one passage: "The two formulas, *the Church offers the sacrifice of Christ at the altar and Christ offers himself on the altar by the ministry of priests*, are identical."⁽¹⁾

The metaphysical essence of the Mass is a rich spiritual harvest that has attracted many sickles. The author gives a tabulated summary of views that, in his opinion, erred whether by excess as, e.g., in the case of Vasquez. He knows quite well that a synopsis of this kind conveys very little except to readers who are already acquainted with these views. He knows that for a full discussion of these various views we can consult De La Taille (*Elucidatio* XXIV). So we can pass over his strictures (couched in language of superfluous vigour) of the views of the great theologians who preceded him. It may, however, be interesting to inquire whether and how far he dissents from De La Taille whom (with Billot) he hails as the victorious leader in the return to Tradition.

(a) *The Supper*: De La Taille holds that the Supper and the Cross are two constituent elements of the one Sacrifice of Redemption. Does Masure accept this? No. He says "Perhaps the author comes into collision with the first chapter of Trent's Twenty-second Session. It is difficult to believe that the constitution of the Holy Eucharist, though a means for the revelation of the doctrine of the Redemption and necessary for the application of its fruits, was necessary to it in itself."⁽²⁾

(b) *The Mass*: From the fact that Masure refuses to accept the teaching of De La Taille on the Supper it does not follow that he must refuse to accept De La Taille on the Mass. So we may ask does Masure agree with De La Taille's theory about the explanation of the Mass? The material for an answer to this question is not well developed in Masure's book. But I think the answer is "no." I do not profess to see clearly what defect Masure claims to discover in the explanation of De La Taille. Perhaps we may take the liberty to pursue the subject briefly.

The two writers agree (a) that Christ the victim of Calvary, after Calvary and because of Calvary, becomes a perpetual victim. De La Taille says: "He is a victim apart from us; it is for us to make Him *our* victim." This assertion is expressly endorsed by Masure. The two writers agree (b) that Christ makes no new act of offering when the priest is saying Mass.

(1) Those who wish to read a more elaborate defence of this view of Masure are referred to the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, Nov. and Dec., 1942.

(2) This view of De La Taille has been discussed at length in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, and Masure is in harmony with many distinguished writers, Dr. Moran, Dr. Ryan and others.

It is concerning a third point that Masure regards De La Taille's theory as inadequate. According to De La Taille the Mass is the same Sacrifice as that of the Cross because in the Mass we have (a) the Priest of Calvary (b) the Victim of Calvary (c) an outward portrayal (by separate consecrations) of the sacrificial and redemptive act of Calvary. This (c) De La Taille calls symbolic immolation.

Masure admits that the Mass possesses these elements. But he denies that they furnish an adequate proof of the identity of the two sacrifices. According to Masure, symbolic immolation in the sense of De La Taille merely *represents* the sacrificial act of Calvary whereas the redemptive act itself (persevering in virtue) is in reality contained in the Mass; not of course as an historical event but in sacramental existence.

In other words Masure regards the symbolic immolation of De La Taille as the equivalent of a speculative sign which does not effect what it symbolises. So Masure's theory returns to the formula of St. Augustine "*Missa est sacrificii invisibilis visibilis sacramentum id est sacrum signum.*"

As this theory is liable to be misunderstood it will not be irrelevant to state with greater precision what the Church teaches about the Sacrifice of Calvary. As Masure, though accurate, is diffuse I would prefer to give an extract from Pohle-Preuss. "The Sacrifice of the Cross is the one absolute sacrifice offered for the salvation of the world, and this in a double sense: (a) in so far as among all the sacrifices of the past and future it alone stands without any relation to, and is independent of any other; (b) because all graces, means of grace, and sacrifices, in the present economy derive their power and efficacy from the sacrifice of the Cross. The Sacrifice of the Cross is the one absolute sacrifice also in this sense that in it the Redemption of the human race was once for all accomplished and consummated." On Good Friday the Redemption was accomplished. How were its fruits to be applied to individual souls? It all depended on the free choice of the Man-God. *De facto* it pleased him to institute a number of efficacious signs; and amongst these stands the Mass as the crown of the whole sacramental organisation. The essence of this theory, then, consists in applying to the Mass the doctrine of the sacraments. So abundant is the vocabulary of Masure that it is difficult to know what passage to select. "The sensible signs instituted by the Saviour contain what they represent. But they first represent their content and do it well. So the Mass, which gives us the victim of Calvary and the Cross's sacrifice begins by a superlative picturing of them both. The sign was chosen by the Saviour with the greatest care; the distinction of the two species, solid and liquid, gives us a delicate and

expressive image of the dreadful separation of the Blood from the Body when Jesus commended His soul on Golgotha to His Father's hands." After that beautiful description of what he calls elsewhere "a reality beneath a sign" he notes a point that has escaped many writers namely that the sacramental sign is efficacious not because it symbolically resembles the sacrifice of Calvary but because it was instituted by Christ to contain the whole reality of the Cross-Sacrifice.

The sign will be ours in the sense that it is we who provide the materials, perform the actions and pronounce the words; but the reality will be the body of Christ himself, and the results obtained those of the sacrifice of the Cross itself.

"We say unhesitatingly," says Masure, "that Christ is immolated in the Mass." He cites the words of Trent "incruente immolatur" and "sub signis visibilibus immolandum." We may sum up his views about immolation in general. Here he deserves credit not so much for an orderly arrangement as for the data he supplies.

Pre-Christian sacrifices and the sacrifice of the Cross have this in common: namely, Immolation is the renunciation of property (the negative element) with a view to offering it to God (oblation). Both may be facets of the same act. A patriarch, for example, immolated a lamb by depriving himself of its ownership. The slaying, which was not the formal element, was utilised only as the most effectual means of deprivation. This was done that the lamb might be offered to God and become God's property. (The victim does incarnate the adoration, etc., of the offerer but I am not here concerned with this point). The immolation on the Cross consisted in this, that Christ renounced his most valuable possession his human life by the inward and outward acceptance of a cruel death. The immolation included, besides the *voluntas morientis*, the death itself with all its tragic bloodshed. The immolation contained also the oblation by which he offered his life to the Father for the redemption of the world.

As regards the Mass, which is the same sacrifice as that of the Cross and therefore a true sacrifice, but is also a sacrifice of application (Trent: *virtus applicaretur*), the word "immolation" is retained though the concept mentioned above is somewhat altered. Anyhow St. Thomas tells us what he understands by saying that Christ is immolated in the Mass. Briefly it is this. Christ is immolated in the celebration of Mass because it enables us to participate in the fruits of the Lord's Passion. Masure (page 217) gives and expounds a long passage of St. Thomas. He also quotes from St. Thomas the words "what Christ's Passion did

in the world this sacrament operates in individual men."⁽³⁾

The language in which the author makes the Resurrection, Ascension and Glorification in some sense a part of the sacrifice of Redemption is rather vague here and there but he is, I think, quite accurate. He says (page 159): "Christian thought fixes upon the ninth hour of Good Friday as the hour of sacrifice" and "The Resurrection in virtue of its vivifying and regenerating character is the principle of our new life." These mysteries he regards as the extrinsic consummation of the Cross somewhat as we say that the priest's communion pertains to the integrity of the Mass.

I suppose a vigilant eye would discover minor defects here and there. The one thing that struck me as a serious defect is the almost total omission of any reference to the *ratio latreutica* of sacrifice. The fact is that even in our fallen state where propitiation enters so largely into sacrifice, still the primary purpose of every sacrifice is to proclaim the glory of God. Of course the writer views sacrifice chiefly from the standpoint of its utility to the human race. And he is entitled to do this provided he paves the way by a short preliminary chapter dealing with the strictly latreutic aspect of Sacrifice. In the absence of such a chapter and under the heading "Sacrifice in General" his definition on page 78 cannot be accepted as adequate.

Notwithstanding certain defects, which could be remedied had the author lived to revise successive editions, we regard the work as the product of a man who, in addition to high literary attainments, may claim to be a profound theologian. We are of opinion that the book is a notable contribution towards the solution of sacrificial problems. And we congratulate the translator on the discriminating faculty that induced him to place it at the disposal of English readers.

(3) The suggestion that the word "celebration" in the above extract does not refer to the Eucharist considered as a sacrifice is refuted by the whole passage. The words of the Secret "we set in action our redemption" point to sacrifice rather than sacrament.