

THE MASS AND THE MYSTICAL BODY¹

One of the most interesting and fruitful developments of Eucharistic theology in the past fifty years or so has been the re-integration of the Mass into the doctrine of the Mystical Body. When Père de la Taille's *Mysterium Fidei* first came out in 1921, the reactions were shock and amazement that he should speak of the Church offering the sacrifice of the Mass. From the time of Bellarmine onwards it had become common form to say that Christ offered the Mass—of course through the ministry of his priests (with the part of the laity reduced to a hardly visible minimum), and the implication was that the Church as such hardly intervened at all. And it is significant that the content of the liturgy was allowed little or no influence in building up the theology of the Mass. Similarly, Protestant controversy forced the emphasis onto questions concerning the Real Presence (*sacramentum-et-res*), and the *res sacramenti*, the ultimate effect (the unification of the Mystical Body, to quote St Thomas), was all but ignored.

The *Mysterium Fidei* marked the end of a theological epoch and the beginning of a new one. It was a great work, perhaps the greatest single theological treatise of our age, not because it expounded a definitive thesis compelling agreement, but rather because its thesis compelled disagreement and demanded that ideas should be thought out again.

It was, and remains, a great work for other reasons. De la Taille was a *savant*, exercised in many tongues, ancient and modern, with an infinite respect for Holy Scripture, a strong critical sense, an awareness of the importance of liturgical data, but above all, with a wide vision of the place of the Mass in the economy of redemption. This alone raised his work out of the rut of the text-book and brought back to theology the *grandes thèses* of Catholic thought that have been so powerful an influence in the modern renewal of Christian life. The very Latin of the book struck a new note (though for all that, it is a little cumbersome) and its format, type and illustrations went beyond anything seen in a theological treatise since the seventeenth century. Certainly a great book, a broad and generous book, inclusive rather than exclusive, showing a desire to come to terms whenever possible with theologians of other views and different traditions, it gave a decisive impetus to theological speculation on the Mass and the Mystical Body.

Yet, the demands of scholarship are inexorable, progress remorseless,

¹ *The Mystery of Faith; The Sacrifice of the Church, Book II.* By Maurice de la Taille, Eng. trans. (Sheed and Ward, pp. xii and 473, 25s.). *Le Sacrifice du Corps Mystique.* By E. Masure. (Desclée de Brouwer, pp. 206, n.p.)

and much that de la Taille had to refute in 1920 (for instance the aberrations of 'liberal' theologians) has fallen into the bottomless pit of a well-deserved oblivion. Parts, then, of the book have now a slightly faded air. Moreover, since 1920 the liturgy has come into its own, it is better understood, and a wealth of theological discussion has ensued which has materially affected many of de la Taille's positions. One wonders, then, about the advisability of translating *Mysterium Fidei*, *tel quel*, with all its heavy burden of notes and without even so much as a suggestion that anything has happened since the third edition.¹ As the translation proceeds slowly and is obtainable only at great cost, one's doubts increase. The translation itself is heavy-footed (though in this volume after the first thirty-six pages—in which there are ten errors, misprints or slips²—it improves), and to be sure of catching de la Taille's exact meaning one often needs to have recourse to the original. More valuable, surely, would have been a shortened version of the book with an account of subsequent discussions and perhaps an attempt, by a sympathetic disciple, at an assessment of de la Taille's permanent value.

Some of this can be gathered from Masure's books³, a 'syncretist' theologian if ever there was one. What he owes to de la Taille, he himself is the first to admit, and in reading *Le Sacrifice du Corps Mystique*, one has at times to exclaim, 'But this is de la Taille'—only to go on a few pages to find that, set in a different, a 'sacramental' context, it has become something quite different. For that is one of de la Taille's weaknesses (owing perhaps to a hang-over from destructionist theories of sacrifice which he himself was largely to destroy), namely, that he still tended to go outside the sacramental sphere to find the reality of the Mass sacrifice. Yet it was his restoration to theology of a true idea of sacrifice (one of the most serene and satisfying parts of *Mysterium Fidei*) that set Masure on the right lines and led to his elaboration of the theory in *The Christian Sacrifice*. This theory—surely it is more—must now be regarded as an acquired position and its importance for the whole theology of the Mass can be seen even more clearly in *Le Sacrifice* than in his earlier book. It was the one weakness that underlay Billot's view, for instance, and led him to neglect or ignore his colleague's great work.⁴

Masure, always keenly sensitive to the currents of thought around him, has of course benefited from all the subsequent development of

1 In which de la Taille incorporated the main discussions up to that time.

2 Part of a footnote on p. 24 is omitted altogether; and can 'Ausdrücke' ever mean 'settings'? (p. 18.)

3 *The Christian Sacrifice*, Eng. trans., Dom Illtyd Trethowen; *Le Sacrifice du Corps Mystique*.

4 Though it must be recognised that Billot was already an old man when *M.F.* appeared and he had long finished his own creative work.

the theology of the Mystical Body and of liturgical studies, and their influence is very apparent in his books. He takes a wide canvas, and it is no accident that in *The Christian Sacrifice* he reviewed the whole theology of the Incarnation and Redemption to establish what he wanted to say on the Mass. If he has a fault it is that he has an exaggerated dislike of categories and schematisation, an affection for blurred edges which is reflected in his allusive and leisurely style. It is difficult to grasp his thought at a first reading and one is rarely confident that one has done so beyond a doubt. The new book, *Le Sacrifice*, is welcome because it does clear up one or two points.

I have always been a little puzzled by Masure's language about the *victim* of the sacrifice *being* the sacrifice—which surely is an action. Almost *en passant* Masure reveals his mind: showing (on page 49) that the Mass is not just the possession by the Church of an inert Victim (*Christum passum*, to use St Thomas's phrase). The 'state of victim' implies and involves the *act* of the making of the Victim—*sacrum faciens*—the offering which our Lord made of himself on the Cross and which remains, which has in the eyes of God a permanent value, irrespective of time and place, and the sacramental sign renews this too; 'Our Saviour, at the Last Supper, made his Passion inevitable, so to say; he as it were set it in motion.¹ The Church and her priests, by renewing this action (*geste*) every morning in his name and under his influence (*impulsion*), set in motion the whole *economy* of our redemption. As the untranslatable secret prayer of IXth Sunday after Pentecost so rightly says: *quoties huius hostiae commemoratio celebratur, opus nostrae redemptionis exercetur*. So the Mass is not just a rite, distinct from its content, that can bring this latter in from outside. It is an action which is one with the mystery of which it is the sign; once, at the Supper, it caused and set in motion the sacrifice of Calvary by making it inevitable. Every morning on our altars that same action continues not only to represent but to make the sacrifice, at the behest of the same spiritual forces, human and divine, which it bears within itself because they emanate from Christ.' (pp. 24-25.)

It is true that this passage is really an account *à la mode* Masure of de la Taille's theory, but on the next page he accepts it as substantially true with this proviso, 'The great law of the sign dominates all the concatenation of events: if men depend upon a sign to participate in the mystery, it is because the sign begins by attracting to itself the mystery which is independent of it and exists without it'. (p. 27.) 'The sign has not anything to invent, since everything existed without it. Yet it is in no way an empty image; it is efficacious because if it has

¹ The word is 'embrayer', used perhaps more often nowadays for 'letting in the clutch' of a motor car.

nothing to create, it must contain the whole mystery to be able to communicate it'. (pp. 29, 30.) This, too, it seems to us, should be regarded as an acquired position, for 'if the Mass made Christ undergo another essential immolation different from that of the Cross, it (the Mass) would not be the sacrifice of the Cross'. (p. 30.)

The last passage but one, speaking of the sign *containing* the mystery seems to be evidence of the influence of Dom Odo Casel's thought. He has certainly forced Masure to think about the *Mysterium Christi* which the Mass presupposes, and this is Masure's way of incorporating it—alongside de la Taille! One feels that Masure might have attempted a deeper synthesis.

What led Masure to write *Le Sacrifice* is the passage in *Mediator Dei* about the separate consecrations of the bread and wine being 'external signs symbolic of death' showing forth the Redeemer's sacrifice (M.D. §74—C.T.S. trans.). In his earlier book he had written down the symbolism of the separate consecrations, largely owing to his fear of 'destructionist' theories of sacrifice as applied to the Mass. Masure remarks that the Encyclical uses the traditional language without however wishing to decide a theological discussion, and this is surely the practice of the Church. Further, this language is associated with Billot's name but Masure observes that the Encyclical nowhere endorses his whole teaching on the Mass, much less what Masure holds as his wholly erroneous view that the Mass and the Cross are not only numerically but specifically distinct. (p. 34, n. 1.) On the other hand, Masure regards the encyclical as giving the *coup de grâce* to the 'destructionist' theories of Lugo and Franzelin; in this we agree with him.

For his own part, Masure, after a careful examination, now sees his way to incorporate the traditional symbolism of the separate consecration into his own system, and devotes quite a large part of his book to doing so in his own characteristic way. He clears away the unfortunate associations connected with the symbolism; it appears to be solidly traditional and it is vivid. One cannot help but feel that it was *intended* by our Lord.

At the same time it would be interesting to discover whether the elaboration of the doctrine of transubstantiation in the thirteenth century had not something to do with the way it has since been regarded. What precisely did the separate consecration signify to the men before that time? In the latter part of his book Masure works out an earlier way of looking at the symbolism and finds support for it in St Thomas himself. The consecration of the bread and the consecration of the wine each separately signifies the death of Christ. There seems to be much in this view and it would, we think, be worth further investigation.

One does not look for completeness in Masure—he dislikes system, and the illusory *idées claires* of the text-book—and there are several matters still requiring definition. Mgr H. F. Davis in the *Downside Review* (Winter 1948-49) acutely observed that Masure had not set out with all the clarity desirable the respective functions of the Church and the priest in offering the Mass, and though Masure in *Le Sacrifice* makes clearer exactly what the Church brings to the sacrifice, he does not throw any further light on the question. In fact, now after more than twenty years of constructive discussion, it is time someone undertook the vast task of setting out the whole theology of the Mass and the Mystical Body. There are innumerable references and assertions in modern books on the subject, many of us are constantly talking about it, and indeed think we know what we mean, but much remains vague. It was one of Père de la Taille's great merits to bring the whole matter of the Mass back to its classical context, and it remains for someone now to complete his task.

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REVIEWS

MARRIAGE. A GREAT SACRAMENT. By Canon Jacques Leclercq. Translated by the Earl of Wicklow. (Clonmore and Reynolds; 8s. 6d.)

Le mariage chrétien, of which this volume is a translation, has already been introduced to LIFE OF THE SPIRIT readers in an earlier number. It would be superfluous to repeat a description of the book's merits. Taking all this for granted, let us venture the following observations in the hope that they may prove of some use in discussing this very delicate subject.

Canon Leclercq says that men in our climate only attain maturity at the age of twenty or even later (p. 22). This may prove to be untrue if the investigations made in Germany are confirmed, which suggest that there has been a biological change in recent years, and that young people are maturing two or even three years earlier. If the German investigations prove correct then this change is obviously going to demand the most drastic revision of our present curriculum of education. It would be simply fantastic, for instance, to impose the strain of important examinations upon a youngster who is already living through a most critical period of physical and mental development. There is plenty of evidence that this is happening.