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AT THE THIRD world conference of Faith and Order, held at Lund in August 1952, an agreed statement was drawn up concerning the problem of the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist, and the importance of this has probably not been sufficiently emphasized. It is true that "two very divergent tendencies" were noted in the answers given to this question, which has divided Christians since the sixteenth century: is the Eucharist a sacrifice? However, a line of research was suggested at this conference which could possibly lead to a solution.

"Whatever may be our various opinions on the nature and efficacy of ritual acts, we are all agreed that *Deus non alligatur sacramentis*, and that (in the words of the Gospel) 'the wind bloweth where it listeth . . . so is every one that is born of the Spirit' (St. John 3: 8). We record in thankfulness that we have reached in our discussions a measure of understanding, which none of us could ever have anticipated, on the problem of the sacrificial element in Holy Communion. The mystery of the love of God, which we celebrate at the Lord's Table, surpasses human expression. But in our attempts to describe that mystery we have the warrant of Holy Scripture for using sacrificial language. 'Behold the Lamb of God. . . .'

"Our Lord Jesus Christ in all His life on earth and chiefly in His death and resurrection has overcome the powers of darkness. In His one perfect and sufficient sacrifice on Calvary He offered perfect obedience to the Father in atonement for the sin of the whole world. This was an act of expiation made once and for all and is unrepeatable. In His risen and ascended life He ever makes intercession for us.

"Our response in worship, then, is the praise, prayer, thanksgiving and offering of ourselves in faith and obedience made to the Father in the name of Jesus Christ. We make the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. It is at this point that our greatest difficulties arise as we seek to express just how our worship on earth is related to the eternal intercession of Christ in heaven. We all agree that there is an element of mystery here which can scarcely be expressed (Rom. 8: 26).

"Some believe that in the Lord's Supper, where they enter into com-

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munion with the crucified and risen Lord, they only offer a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving and obedient service as a response in faith to the benefits the Lord gives us. Others would like to insist, however, that in the Holy Eucharist the Lord Jesus Christ as our Great High Priest unites the oblation made by His body, the Church, with His own sacrifice, and so takes up her own adoration into the *Sanctus* of the company of heaven. Between these two views there are others to which a brief reference may not do full justice.

“It is felt, however, that a deeper understanding of the meaning of ‘unites’ in the above paragraph, particularly in the light of biblical eschatology, might help to resolve real divergence and misunderstanding at this point.”¹

Since this statement was issued, several interesting and important works have been published on the sacrificial character of the Eucharist.² But the two tendencies analysed at Lund can be brought closer together only by careful study. The most fruitful line of research, from the ecumenical point of view, is likely to be that which is based upon biblical theology, as the report suggests.

But a note appended to article 5 of Chapter IV, quoted in full above, reveals a difficulty already encountered at the conference, as indeed it is in the whole sacramental theology of the Lutheran and Reformed churches, and this difficulty is the very slight interest that there is in this aspect of eucharistic doctrine:

“N.B.—There are those among us who regret that the discussion of the Eucharist has concentrated on this sacrificial aspect. In their opinion the main issue is the real bodily presence of the crucified and risen Lord and our receiving of His body and blood.”

In this statement the unfortunate role of anti-catholic polemic is evident. It has prevented and still prevents the most well-disposed of theologians from considering this problem, which is so important for unity, with an open mind freed from prejudices.

¹ *The Third World Conference on Faith and Order*, ed. O. S. Tomkins, 1953, pp. 42 f.

² See the extensive bibliography (mainly German and Lutheran) provided by V. Warnach, “Das Messopfer als oekumenisches Anliegen”, *Liturgie und Moenchstum*, 1955, XVIII, pp. 65–90. In this address, given at the Herwegen Institute in August 1955, this Benedictine monk gave a very complete survey of the various Protestant views of the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist. See also R. Prenter, “Das Augsburgische Bekenntnis und die roemische Messopferlehre”, *Kerygma und Dogma*, 1955, I, pp. 42–58; G. Aulén, *Foereder utgiven* (Given for you), 1956.

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The Reformation took place at a period when an ultra-sacrificial theology of the mass was to the fore. In this situation a reaction was inevitable; the simple Lord's Supper, as it was first celebrated, was re-discovered. But we must seek to understand further the reaction against the idea of sacrifice at the time of the Reformation, and in order to set this study within its context, it must be emphasized that the somewhat variable basis of this reaction was both biblical and pastoral. The Reformers discovered afresh in the Gospels and in the writings of St. Paul that the Eucharist was first of all a meal and that it was therefore necessary to lay emphasis upon communion, as much from a dogmatic as from a pastoral point of view. But they were faced with a liturgical practice which emphasized above all the sacrificial and priestly aspect of the mass, while the communion of the people was regarded as entirely secondary.¹ To be present at mass, as if at a sacrifice offered by a mediating priest, was alone obligatory. It was possible to be a good Catholic and to communicate only once a year at Easter. In the light of this one can understand Luther's insistence on the real presence of the body and blood of Christ, not in relation to a repetition of the sacrifice of the cross, but in relation to the act of communion which is an essential comfort for the people of God. Calvin himself laid the same emphasis upon the act of communion, although in his thought the doctrine of the real presence received a different expression.

The Eucharist is a communion; it is a meal of which one partakes; and it is not a sacrifice at which one is present or even in which one participates. So strongly did Calvin share this conviction that he fought against misunderstanding in an attempt to establish frequent communion or at least a weekly one.² Church people, however, were no longer accustomed to communicating regularly; it was sufficient to be present at the sacrifice.

The position adopted by the Council of Trent was quite clear and precise. At the twenty-second session, canon 1 was affirmed: "If anyone says that in the Mass there is not offered to God a true and proper

¹ The word "practice" should be noted, because there may well have existed before the Reformation certain theological currents which supported a more evangelical and patristic doctrine of the Eucharist than that opposed by the Reformers. They were concerned above all with the reformation of a practice which had the support of common belief.

² One of the preliminary notes to the liturgy of the Eglise Reformée de France quotes from Calvin, as follows: "So it is essential to see that no gathering of the Church takes place without the Bible, without almsgiving, without sharing in the Eucharist, or without prayer."

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sacrifice, or that 'to be offered' means no more than that Christ is given to us as food, let him be anathema."¹ And canon 3: "If anyone says that the sacrifice of the Mass is only a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving or a simple commemoration of the sacrifice accomplished on the cross, and not rather a propitiatory sacrifice; or that it profits only him who partakes; or that it should not be offered for the living and the dead, for sins, penalties, satisfactions and other things needful, let him be anathema."²

It will be necessary to come back to these statements and in particular to examine the meaning of the word "propitiatory", which is not immediately clear. But notice should be taken of the short phrase *vel soli prodesse sumenti* ("or profits only him who partakes") which places the mass in a sacrificial perspective where communion has no important part to play. It is possible to receive the fruits of this sacramental sacrifice without communicating and even without being present. The Roman position has here been hardened against that of the Reformers.

The post-Tridentine theologians, in a way new to Christian thought, proceeded to work out certain of the cardinal points set forward by the Council and frequently the most polemical of them. Cajetan, in his defence of the eucharistic sacrifice, directed consideration to the "state of immolation" (*status immolatiuus*) of Christ on the altar. He saw in the separation of the body and blood of Christ a symbol of the sacrifice of the cross, a bloodless form of immolation, "a representation of Christ offered on the cross, in a form of immolation under the figure of bread and wine".³ Ruard Tapper, a doctor of Louvain, took up this idea, propounded it at the Council and gave a further explanation of it in his *Explicatio articulorum*. It was during the ten years' interruption of the Council, between the numerous deliberations and the decisions taken in 1562, that Tapper developed the idea of Cajetan. He affirmed that "the death of the Lord is represented by the blood separated from the body", and he went on to state that Christ Himself underwent some change by the celebration of the Eucharist: "In the holy Eucharist, not only do the bread and wine pass into (*transeunt in*) the body and blood of Christ, but Christ Himself acquires there a new sacramental being

¹ "Si quis dixerit, in Missa non offerri verum et proprium sacrificium, aut quod offerri non sit aliud quam nobis Christum ad manducandum dari: A.S." H. Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum*, 1951, 948.

² "Si quis dixerit, Missae sacrificium tantum esse laudis et gratiarum actionis, aut nudam commemorationem sacrificii in cruce peracti, non defunctis, pro peccatis, poenis, satisfactionibus et aliis necessitatibus offerri debere: A.S." Denzinger, 950.

³ *De missae sacrificio*, VI, in *Opuscula*, III p. 428.

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which He does not have in heaven.”¹ Although his point of view was at first entirely personal, Tapper later became the founder of a school.

These new theories, born out of the concern to defend the doctrine of sacrifice against the Reformers, were so developed as to issue in systems far removed from those which the Reformers themselves believed they had to oppose. It will be seen later that there were perhaps at the time of the Reformation certain areas of agreement on this particular point. But at this juncture it is to be noted that the fact that polemics issue in greater estrangement and that the Catholic theories developed so rapidly meant that the Lutheran and Reformed theologians considered themselves to be all the more justified in their opposition to the sacrifice of the mass.

In the seventeenth century the most representative theories were to the effect that the mass is a sacrifice because Christ is represented in it as crucified in the fraction (Melchior Cano, died 1560), in the communion (Dominicus Soto, died in 1560) or in the twofold consecration (Salmeron, died in 1586; Peter de Ledesma, died 1616, etc.), this last being the view of Cajetan which was the most favoured.² Another theory saw the sacrifice in the change which occurred either to the species by transubstantiation (an idea ascribed to Suarez, died 1617) or to Christ Himself, by the consecration and especially by the act of communion when the victim was consumed (an idea ascribed to Bellarmine, died 1621) or by the consecration “insofar as it places Christ Himself in a state of diminution”³ (an idea ascribed to De Lugo, died 1660).

All these theories tend finally, despite their avowed intention, to separate the sacrifice of the cross from the mass, making the latter a more or less distinct and autonomous sacrifice. The Lutheran and the Reformed criticism was all the more justified. In the seventeenth century, thanks especially to the French school, the theory of the oblation began to come to the fore. This is to be recognized as a happy return to a purer and more genuine tradition. It was no longer a question of seeing in the mass the offering of a victim to God, immolated in His honour. The oblation had already been accomplished on the cross;

¹ *Explicatio articulorum*, XVI, in *Opera*, II, p. 253: “*In sacra eucharistia non solum panis et vinum tanquam verum sacrificium transeunt in corpus et sanguinem Christi, sed et Christus accipit ibi novum esse sacramentale quale in coelis non habet.*”

² M. Lepin, “*L'idée du sacrifice de la messe d'après les théologiens,*” 1926; A. Michel, “*La Messe chez les théologiens postérieurs au Concile de Trente*”, *Dict. théol. cath.*, X, I, col. 1143 f.

³ *Dict. théol. cath.*, art. cit. col. 1185.

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Christ entered upon it at the incarnation and He had continued it during His life, and He continues it eternally in heaven. The mass sets upon the altar, under the form of a rite of immolation, the eternal oblation of Christ. The immolation is no longer real; the separation of the species only symbolizes an immolation; the sacrifice of Christ consists in the oblation of Christ which is an historical, eternal and sacramental oblation. At mass, Christ—as at His incarnation, throughout His life, on the cross, and in heaven—gives Himself, offers Himself to the Father for the salvation of the world. Here the unity of the sacrifice of Christ and of the mass is strongly emphasized.

In the eighteenth century there was controversy between the immolationists and oblationists.¹ Some of the latter went so far in the idea of a mere representation of the immolation that they were considered to be heretics. Father Pierre-François Le Courrayeur (died 1776) saw his theories condemned; his ecumenical concern to draw closer to the Church of England compromised his thought in the eyes of the French episcopate. His position will be reviewed below. The bishop of Marseilles, de Belzunce (died 1755), declared that “the Faith teaches the children of the Church that there is offered to God in the sacrifice of the mass and there is immolated the same Jesus Christ who died on the cross and who lives and reigns in heaven”.²

There was no way out of this polemical impasse, to which the Reformers too had made their contribution, until the biblical and liturgical movement had found a home in the Roman Church. Popular piety in the nineteenth century, despite the continuation of the oblationist school, was above all immolationist. De Pressy, bishop of Boulogne (died 1789), recalling the Plowden-Rivière controversy,³ wrote that the consecration “immolates Jesus on the altar because it sets Him in a state of death, since the body is separated from the blood by virtue of the words”.⁴ Although he upheld the unity of Christ’s sacrifice, the expression “to immolate Jesus on the altar” can only suggest a new or repeated sacrifice. And this was the way in which Catholic people finally came to understand the mass, sometimes adding a rather distasteful and “bloody” imagery. After a statement by Father Roguet on “The mass, memorial of the Lord”⁵ in 1946, Father Chenu gave his

¹ *Dict.théol.cath.*, art.cit.col.1213 f.

² *Instruction pastorale contre les erreurs du P. Le Courrayeur*, 1727, p. 22.

³ *Dict.théol.cath.*, art cit. col. 1217.

⁴ *Instruction pastorale sur l'eucharistie* in *Oeuvres*, I, 1240-2.

⁵ Printed in *La messe et sa catéchèse*, 1947, pp. 115-32.

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support and stated: "I was brought up amongst the old anti-protestant and sanguinary theories, and it was a real liberation for me when Dom Vonier's book¹ was published. This book represented a theological return to the simplicity of the Gospel. I think that the developments which came out of the obsession with the need to oppose protestantism, together with a process of scholastic refinement, had succeeded in completely displacing the centre of perspective and in emptying the whole field of symbolism on which sacramentalism should develop. Indeed one did not dare to use the word 'symbol'! We must now initiate a process of purgation, and this purgation should be accomplished by a return to the biblical and liturgical sources presented to us in the history of the Church. If we do not do this quickly, the situation could become very grave. The sap of the Holy Spirit is flowing, we must tap it."²

In the same discussion, M. Rauch, curé of Ottersthal, stated: "I wish to insist on the necessity of establishing an exact terminology. For example, let us say not 'renewing of the sacrifice of the Cross', but instead 'representation of the sacrifice of the Cross', which is after all the expression in the Preface of the Most Blessed Sacrament. One single word is sometimes sufficient to change our method of approach to a subject and the expression that I am suggesting would assist our understanding of what it is to celebrate the mass."³

According to the words of Father Chenu, it is "a return to the biblical and liturgical sources" that will allow contemporary Catholicism to disengage its doctrine of the eucharistic sacrifice from the matrix of the immolationist or oblationist systems.⁴

In the sixteenth century there was no agreement on this matter and controversy progressed rapidly; it even found a home within Catholicism itself. It will be shown later that at the time of the Reformation

¹ *A Key to the Doctrine of the Eucharist*, 1925.

² *La messe et sa catéchèse*, p. 133.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁴ In this renewal of Catholic eucharistic doctrine, in addition to the work of Dom A. Vonier already mentioned, notice should be taken of the important studies of De la Taille, *Mysterium Fidei*, 1915, and of E. Masure, *Christian Sacrifice*, 1944, and *The Sacrifice of the Mystical Body*, 1954. A slightly different approach is to be seen by Dom O. Casel, *Le mémorial du Seigneur*, 1945; see also "Dom Casel et la doctrine du mystère chrétien", *Maison Dieu*, 14. J. A. Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite*, 2 vols., 1951-5 (one volume edition 1959), provides the most complete modern study of the Roman liturgy and also bears witness to the renewal of eucharistic doctrine.

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certain points of view, which appeared to be opposed, could have been reconciled if the climate of opinion had not been so unfavourable. The widening of the gulf continued throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries until an impasse was reached in the nineteenth. Nevertheless, during the course of this process of separation, certain attempts were made to reach an understanding. The ecumenical concern of Le Courayer led to his condemnation, but we cannot deny the influence of Anglican thought on the orthodox Abbot of Buckfast, Aschaire Vonier, whose decisive role in the renewal of eucharistic doctrine is recognized by Father Chenu.

Controversy, with its reciprocal influence, is not the means of affirming truth or of preparing the way for unity. It would of course be an over-simplification to say that the division at the Reformation was based either on misunderstandings or on men's lack of patience, and then the gulf was formed by controversy and that now, after four centuries of skirmishing, it is time to come to some agreement: that each side has developed, prejudices have been removed, and unity can easily be rediscovered! The unity of Christians cannot be achieved by the study of history and its unfortunate lapses, nor by an ecclesiastical policy motivated by a generous charity, nor even by ecumenical gatherings at which an attempt is made to arrive at a compromise. Above all we must listen together to the Word of God, with the assistance of the earliest interpreters and doctors of the Church from the period when, though persecuted, she still enjoyed a more living and wider unity. Ecumenical gatherings should be biblical if they are to achieve any result and so prepare the way for that visible unity that God will reveal when we are ready to recognize it.

The problem of the eucharistic sacrifice, like all other problems, must first of all be studied at the biblical level.

We have already noted that the report of the third world conference on Faith and Order at Lund recorded the regret of some "that the discussion of the Eucharist has concentrated on this sacrificial aspect". Indeed, as we have seen, since the Reformation the emphasis has been placed upon the meal, upon the act of communion and upon the real presence. All this is quite right, but the almost exclusive insistence upon these aspects has tended to rivet the attention of theologians in the tradition of the Reformation, on the problem of the mode of Christ's presence, as long as they have not been led astray into a spiritualizing symbolism, thus avoiding the central problem. The fact of the real presence is set in a new light if it is considered within the context of the

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Eucharist's relation to the rites of the paschal meal and to the Jewish understanding of sacrifice fully accepted by Christ and His apostles. The more or less static conception of a sign of the presence of Christ is then abandoned in the recognition that the Eucharist is a liturgical action and a spiritual event which is the mystery of Christ's self-giving. The real presence is not something to be defined and made use of; it is the presence of Christ crucified, risen and glorified and acting on our behalf, now in heaven, in the Church, by Word and Sacrament. The Eucharist must therefore be considered as the action of Christ in His Church, and the problem of His presence is only a corollary of this. In order to act and give Himself, Christ is present in person, in His body and blood, as He was on the cross and is in heaven. The question of the mode of His presence is secondary. It is Christ who acts; it is Christ who is present, both Man and God.

In order to understand this action of Christ in the Eucharist, which involves His real presence, we must understand afresh His intention in instituting the sacrament, and in particular what He meant by His command to repeat the celebration until His coming again: "Do this in remembrance of me" (Lk. 22: 19; 1 Cor. 11: 24, 25).