

THE EUCHARISTIC SACRIFICE IN THE CAROLINE DIVINES

(by the Revd. Dr. R. J. Halliburton)

When the Council of Trent declared that the sacrifice of the Mass was not only a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, nor a mere commemoration of the sacrifice accomplished by Christ on the Cross; but that such sacrifices as were offered on Christian altars were indeed propitiatory, benefiting not only the communicant but being offered for the living and the dead, for sins, punishments, satisfactions and other needs; and further that in the Eucharist, one and the same victim (as on the Cross) was offered, and that it was the same One who offered the sacrifice by the ministry of priests as once offered Himself on the Cross - when such a theology was propounded, the Council Fathers undoubtedly had in mind not only the Reformers' sensibility that, in catholic teaching, something further was added to Calvary by the sacrifice of the Mass, but also their varied attempts at expressing the association, found so clearly in Scripture and the tradition, between the Eucharist and the Passion of Christ. "Propitiatory" was undoubtedly one of the words which might be thought to stick in any self-respecting Reformer's throat, as would indeed the notion of a sacrifice offered to secure "benefits" for the living as for the departed, or which might secure "satisfaction" or "remission of sins". One can imagine therefore the surprise of a certain J. Barclay, Esq. (a devout Catholic) when during his stay at the court of King Charles, he met a Protestant, Isaac Casaubon, who claimed "I freely admit and contend that it is plain from the rites of the ancient Church that the Eucharist is a sacrifice; and not merely a sacrifice of praise, as many of our divines maintain, but a propitiatory and hilastic sacrifice". "I was transported with joy", writes Barclay, and no small wonder for not many would have judged such a statement as expressive of the temper of Anglican thought at the time.

It is important to remember, however, that though on the one hand the Reformers' notions of the Eucharist as a "sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving", of "ourselves, our souls and bodies", and as a means of presenting the passion of the Lord before the believer in order that his penitence, faith and love may be increased are preserved in the writings of the seventeenth century divines (see Henry Hammond for the first two of these notions and Thomas Ken for the third), there is in seventeenth century theology a distinct echo of the Prayer of the 1552 Book which requests (after the communion of the people) that God accept "this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving", and to grant that "by the merits and death of Thy Son, Jesus Christ, and through faith in His Blood, we and all thy whole Church may obtain remission of our sins and all other benefits of his passion". It is this note of "impetration", this prayer

that God may be propitious to us on account of the sacrifice offered by his Son which makes itself heard among some of the 17th century writers. William Forbes, for example, finds common ground with some of the more moderate Romanists who assert that the Eucharist can be called "hilastic" or "propitiatory" in a sound sense; "not indeed" he notes, "as if it effected the propitiation and forgiveness of sins, for that pertains to the Sacrifice of the Cross, but as impetrating the propitiation which has already been made, as prayer, of which this sacrifice is a kind, can be called propitiatory". Hence, he concludes, "The Sacrifice which is offered in the Supper is not merely of thanksgiving, but is also propitiatory in a sound sense, and is profitable to very many not only of the living but also of the departed." Earlier in the same treatise, he notes that the Fathers of the Church speak of the Eucharist as a sacrifice but "not in such a way that all the properties of a sacrifice are properly and actually preserved (i.e. the death of a victim is not actually perpetrated); "but by way of commemoration and representation of that which was performed once for all, in that One Only Sacrifice of the Cross, whereby Christ our High Priest consummated all other sacrifices, and by way of pious prayer whereby the Ministers of the Church most humbly beseech God the Father on account of the abiding Victim of that One Sacrifice who is seated in Heaven on the right hand of the Father and is present on the Holy Table in an ineffable manner, to grant that the virtue and grace of this perpetual Victim may be efficacious and healthful to his Church for all necessities of body and soul."

Two comments must be made here. First, with regard to the doctrine of the Atonement. The notion of "satisfaction" is one which clearly commends itself to some of the 17th century divines. Thomas Ken, for example, asks the Christian (at the Eucharist) to look on Christ as the sacrifice offered for his sins, "for the appeasing of God's wrath, and procuring His favour and mercies towards thee". And further that he "believingly, yet humbly beg of God to accept of that satisfaction made by his innocent and beloved Son, and for the merits thereof to pardon thee whatever is past and to be fully reconciled to thee". So too James Ussher notes that "He (sc Christ) must satisfy our debts by justice.... In the law must be considered two things - 1. strict obedience, sound payment, 2. the penalty due to the breach of the law", and goes on to add that both these are fulfilled by Christ, who taking our human nature, satisfies whatever might be exacted from us by the law, and applying this to us, "sendeth forth a ... spring of His merits, obedience and righteousness satisfaction and the like, which outrunning ours and being of so infinite a value and perfect, standeth betwixt God's wrath and us, making perfect atonement and peace, being as it were a 'mirror through which God beholdeth us and our actions (though note) whom He also by degrees transformeth into His image little by little.... until we be fully glorified'". If then the Eucharist is an occasion on which we seek the saving grace of God, then small wonder that we

should pray at the Eucharist that the salvation which has been won for us by Christ may be applied to us with all its benefits. In this "sound sense" the Carolines would therefore be anxious that Calvary should be remembered at the Eucharist; in this "sound sense" their Eucharist may well be called propitiatory, for man can in no way approach God save through the person of His Son, his advocate who pleads with the Father for his forgiveness, and who at the same time is the agent of his transformation and glorification.

The second comment concerns the presence of Christ in the Sacrament. Forbes, it will be remembered, says that we must beseech God the Father "on account of the abiding Victim of that One Sacrifice who is seated in Heaven on the right hand of the Father and is present on the Holy Table in an ineffable manner." The approach to Christ in the sacrament is an approach to Christ crucified, to Christ the Victim (and indeed Thomas Ken would say that one's devotion at the Eucharist is aroused by the contemplation of Christ in His Passion). From Lancelot Andrewes it seems clear that some Roman theology was concerned to say on occasions that "Christ made bread is sacrificed there (sc. on the altar)". The tendency that Andrewes seems anxious to refute is the opinion that he thinks Cardinal Bellarmine to hold, namely that Christ, once made present by the words of consecration, is then offered to the Father in sacrifice. So he says "do take away from the Mass your Transubstantiation, and there will not long be any strife with us about sacrifice... (for) willingly we allow that a memory of the Sacrifice is made there." Earlier, he has said, "The Eucharist was instituted by the Lord for a memorial of Himself, even of His Sacrifice, and if it be lawful so to speak, to be a commemorative sacrifice, not only to be a sacrament and for spiritual nourishment". That is to say (we might suggest) that if once the notion is dropped that the Eucharistic Sacrifice is performed in a mechanical or even carnal manner, then we can approach the "abiding Victim" (as Forbes says)... "present on the Holy Table in an ineffable manner", and really start talking of the manner in which the Eucharist really is a sacrifice. For there, on the Holy Table is the crucified Lord, proclaimed in the service He has instituted, represented by the eucharistic action, in the midst of His People, pleading for salvation for themselves as for all Christians living and departed.

In all, one has the sense that when the 17th century divines went to church to take part in the Eucharist, they had a very real sense that they were going to seek for themselves the benefits of Christ's Passion, not simply to offer praise and thanksgiving due to God, nor simply to offer themselves, their souls and bodies, nor indeed only to receive Christ under the forms of bread and wine. Somehow at the Eucharist, they entered into the very mystery of their redemption, effected once for all on Calvary and now applied to them in the Eucharist. Perhaps John Bramhall sums up their attitude most concisely:

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"We acknowledge" he writes, "an Eucharistical Sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving (as did many of the divines before him); a commemorative Sacrifice, or a memorial of the Sacrifice of the Cross; a representative sacrifice (I think by representation the 17th century Fathers may mean "typification"), or a representation of the Passion of Christ before the eyes of the Heavenly Father; an impetrative Sacrifice or an impetration of the fruit and benefit of His Passion by way of real prayer; and lastly an applicative sacrifice, or an application of his merits unto our souls." And he adds: "Let him that dare go one step further than we do; and say that it is a suppletory Sacrifice, to supply the defects of the Sacrifice of the Cross. Or else let them hold their peace and speak no more against us in this point of sacrifice for ever."
