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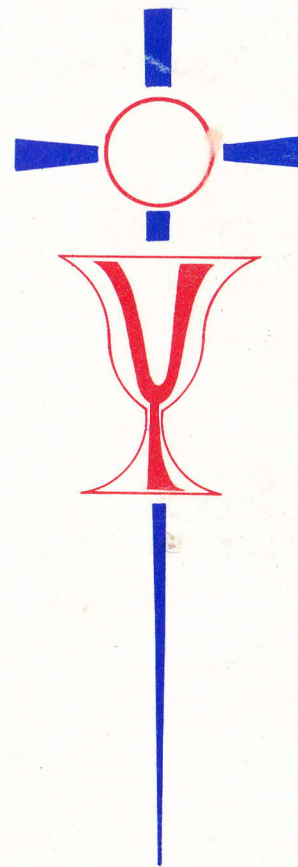


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15p

The Sacrifice of the Mass



David Knowles

⊕faith pamphlets

“Our Saviour at the Last Supper on the night He was betrayed, instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice of His Body and Blood whereby He might perpetuate the Sacrifice of the Cross throughout the ages until He should come, and moreover, entrust to the Church, His beloved Bride, a memorial of His death and resurrection: the sacrament of love, the sign of unity, the bond of charity, the paschal banquet, in which Christ is received, our mind and soul are filled with grace and a pledge is given us of glory to come.”

—*Vatican II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy.*

The Sacrifice of the Mass

DAVID KNOWLES

A nameless disciple wrote at the end of the Gospel of St John that if all the words and works of Christ were recorded, the world would be too small to hold the account of them¹. We cannot read these words without feeling a deep regret at the loss of all that might have been told us. Yet we have, in the words of Our Lord that have come down to us, deep wells of knowledge, of truth and of power that we can never exhaust. On less than twenty words of the Lord: “This is my body, which is for you; do this as a memorial of me”, more has been thought and written than on any other short saying in the world’s history. Those words expressed and instituted the Mass, the Holy Eucharist, Sacrifice and Sacrament, the central act of Christian worship, signifying and effecting the whole purpose of the Incarnation, the union of believers with God through the death and resurrection of his Son.

There is an old and accepted saying that the prayer of the Church is identical with its creed². In the Preface of the Mass for Holy Thursday and the Feast of the Holy Eucharist (Corpus Christi) the following passage occurs: “Christ the true and eternal Priest, when he established the sacrifice that is to last for all time, first offered himself as a saving victim, and then bade us offer it in memory of him, so that we, receiving the bread of life in the sacred feast, may announce his death until he come again.” And in the prayers of the Mass in the Roman church, dating from the age before St Gregory the Great, it is remarkable how often the Prayer over the Oblations refers to the Sacrifice, while the Prayer after Communion refers to the Sacrament. “Grant, we beseech Thee, almighty God,” so runs one prayer, “that this sacrifice which we offer may cleanse our weak nature and guard it from all evil.” And “We beseech Thee, almighty God, that we may be

¹ John xxi 25.

² Lex orandi, lex credendi.

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Nihil obstat: John M. T. Barton STD., LSS, Censor.
Imprimatur: David Norris V.G. Westminster, 8-1-1973.

The Nihil obstat and Imprimatur are a declaration that a book or pamphlet is considered to be free from doctrinal or moral error. It is not implied that those who have granted the Nihil obstat and Imprimatur agree with the contents, opinions or statements expressed.

numbered as members of him of whose body and blood we have partaken." And again on a saints' day: "We celebrate the death, precious in thy sight, of thy just servants, and offer the sacrifice from which all martyrs draw their strength." And: "May the salvation that comes from thy sacrament be assured to us, O Lord, when we ask for it assisted by the merits of thy martyrs."³

In the life of the Church these two aspects of the Eucharist are inseparable, and neither must be stressed at the expense of the other. Essentially, the sacrifice takes first place, for without it there could be no sacrament, but it is through the Sacrament that the end is reached for which Our Lord established his Memorial, that is, the union of the believing Church, the people of God in every age, with Him in His offering of Himself and mankind to the Father. Without a Consecration there could be no Communion; without a Communion the Mass would be essentially incomplete. Hence if a priest dies or is incapacitated after the Consecration but before the Communion another priest must complete the Mass.

Yet though sacrifice and sacrament make a single whole, each is a tremendous subject that can be treated apart from the other and in this pamphlet we shall not be directly concerned either with the Eucharist as a sacrament or with the Real Presence of Christ under the appearances of bread and wine. The Catholic faith of the reader in these great mysteries is assumed throughout.

The meaning of sacrifice

What is a sacrifice? In everyday use the term often signifies the voluntary deprivation of something pleasurable or profitable. Its primary religious meaning, however, is the consecration, or sanctification, of some object, or the dedication of a living creature to God as its Creator and Lord, a dedication which involves, or at least expects, some kind of destruction that will make the gift complete and irrevocable. In the Bible it usually denotes the offerings of the Jewish Law of animals, fruits, foodstuffs and incense. The animals were slaughtered,

³ *Roman Missal* (pre-1969), Saturday and Thursday after Third Sunday in Lent. The Thursday commemorates SS. Cosmas and Damian.

and they and such offerings as flour and wine were destroyed, at least in part, by fire, as sign of the supreme dominion of God. Such Sacrifices appear in the very early chapters of Genesis, and they occupy a large place in the Law. But the Psalmist knew also of a sacrifice of Praise, and a sacrifice of a contrite heart.

In a place apart stood the yearly covenant-sacrifice of the Passover, commemorating the liberation of the children of Israel from Egypt after their firstborn had been spared through the blood of the paschal lamb. This was celebrated in every Jewish household annually.

All these were abolished by Christ, whose death on the Cross fulfilled all the ends for which the type-sacrifices were instituted. Our Lord, the lamb of God to St John the Baptist and St John the Evangelist⁴, the true paschal lamb, offered himself as a fragrant and sufficient sacrifice to the Father on the Cross; in this sacrifice He was both priest and victim. "Christ our paschal lamb is sacrificed," exclaims St Paul;⁵ He is the High Priest of the Letter to the Hebrews; and the action of Christ at the last Supper was accepted by St Paul as the Christian sacrifice par excellence.

The Last Supper: a sacrifice

In what way was the action of Christ at the Last Supper sacrificial? As we have seen the Last Supper was a Paschal Supper, and of itself a sacrifice. A lamb from every household was sacrificed in the Temple and eaten by the family gathering⁶. But at the Last Supper a far greater sacrifice was inaugurated. Our Lord accomplished that which the Passover foreshadowed, the final liberation of Israel from the captivity of sin, by being himself what the paschal sacrifice foreshadowed, the Lamb of God.

So far as we can gather from the scattered facts recorded by the evangelists and St Paul, the Last Supper took the following course. First came a draught of wine with the prescribed herbs and wild lettuce⁷. This was the cup which

⁴ John i 29; xix 37.

⁵ I Cor. v 7.

⁶ Exodus xii 14-17.

⁷ Exodus xii 8.

our Lord said he would not drink again on earth⁸. Then by custom came the breaking of bread and its distribution by the head of the house. It was here that Our Lord, giving praise to God (*eulogesas*, say Matthew and Mark), said: "This is my body," and broke and gave it to the disciples. Then followed the meal of the flesh of the lamb, accompanied by another cup of wine. After this came the cup of blessing, over which Our Lord gave thanks to God (*eucharistesas*, say Matthew and Mark) and said: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (St Paul); "This is my blood of the covenant that is poured out for many" (Mark); "This is the blood of the covenant which is poured out for the remission of sins" (Matthew); "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke)⁹.

How was this a sacrifice? It may help us if we remember that in any spiritual action the essence of the act—the intention and the will to do it—is invisible, and that actions and words are only external signs. We may say then, first of all, that the paschal meal itself, with the victim previously slain, and with the psalms and prayers of praise and thanksgiving, was itself a sacrifice, at once a memorial of a past event (the saving of the children of Israel by the sign of blood) and an earnest of the continual and future protection by God. Next, the use by Our Lord of bread, symbol of the human body, and wine, symbol of blood, show his sacrificial intention. Above all, his words, "my body which is (broken, given) for you"¹⁰ and "my blood, the new covenant, which is poured out for you", show that he was presenting the species as representing his death on the Cross. Christ, after accomplishing fully the legal rite, as the hymn of St Thomas Aquinas tells us¹¹, replaced it for all time by the historical action it had always foreshadowed,

⁸ Luke xxii 18.

⁹ I Cor. xi 25; Mark xiv 24; Matthew xxvi 28; Luke xxii 20. These four accounts are given in the probable chronological order of composition.

¹⁰ Luke has "given" (xxii 19); Paul, according to some manuscripts, has "broken" (I Cor. xi 24).

¹¹ *Observata lege plene/Cibus in legalibus/Cibum turbae duodenae/Se dat suis manibus.* "He complies fully with the Law in regard to the legal foods and then gives Himself with his own hands as food." (Hymn *Pange lingua* of Office of Feast of the Eucharist).

the shedding of the saving blood of the Lamb of God. The Eucharist does not repeat the Last (Paschal) Supper; it replaces it with the new Paschal sacrifice.

Not even the greatest saint or theologian could begin to comprehend the depth of the love and union with the Father that filled the soul and mind of Christ at the Last Supper. But it would be an intolerable impoverishment to suppose that when he spoke to the apostles of his body and blood that were to be offered for them in a few hours on Calvary, and were presented to them now as both a pledge and the reality of their union with him, he would not have offered himself with them in total spiritual submission to the Father. We know from the gospels that his passion was always before the eyes of his soul, that he was straitened until it should take place, and that he had intensely desired to take the Supper with his disciples before he suffered. Long ago in his discourse with the Jews at Capernaum, he had significantly proclaimed, as he developed his theme, that the bread he was giving them was his flesh that was to be given for the life of the world, and in the face of protest had added the gift of his blood to what had hitherto been the gift of his body only¹². And so at the Last Supper he shed his blood for his disciples and mankind sacramentally and (to outward view) symbolically, but also truly and effectively in the realm of spirit and reality. He the Head, gathering his disciples into union with himself, offered mankind in anticipation of Calvary to the Father, commanding them to perform the same action and offering in perpetual representation thereafter.

Saint Paul's witness

This was seen at once by the apostolic church. St Paul, shortly before his account of the last Supper, warns his converts not to eat the meat of pagan sacrifices. We see, he says, that both Jews and pagans take part in the sacrifice of their altars by eating what has been sacrificed at a special meal. We Christians also have a special meal, at which we eat sacrificial meat, the body and the blood of Christ, thus taking

¹² John vi 54.

part in his sacrifice. Shall we then eat also the sacrificial meats of pagan gods, who are, as we know, evil spirits?¹³

Later, in his account of the Last Supper, St Paul warns his readers that in our repetition of Christ's actions we announce the death of the Lord and therefore whosoever eats the bread and drinks the chalice of the Lord unworthily is answerable for the body and blood of Christ. His implication is that the Crucifixion had a twofold aspect. Regarded on the human level, it was a judicial murder by sinful men. Seen with the eye of faith, it was a blessed sacrifice to the Father by Christ. Just so with the Eucharist; those who fail grossly to recognize its transcendent character as a sacrifice, and treat it simply as a communal meal, act like the priests and soldiers at the Crucifixion, causing Our Lord's death, not sharing in his sacrifice¹⁴.

The Fathers of the Church

The Fathers of the early Church are unanimous in regarding the Eucharist as a sacrifice¹⁵. The so-called *Didache*, or *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (Syria or Egypt, possibly earlier than 100 A.D.) has the passage: "Coming together on the Lord's Day, break bread and give thanks, after you have confessed your sins, that your sacrifice may be a pure one . . . For this is the word of the Lord: 'In every place and time let a pure sacrifice be offered to me'"¹⁶. This may be the earliest

¹³ I Cor. x 16-22. St. Paul uses the sacrificial words *thysia*, *thysiasterion* and *thyo* of the pagan rite which is contrasted with the Eucharist, just as he contrasts the 'table' (*trapeza*) of the Lord with the 'table' of demons. The Jerusalem Bible seems to regard the "cup of blessing" as a non-Eucharistic draught. But see Matthew xxvi 27.

¹⁴ I Cor. xi 20-29. The traditional English translation is "guilty of the body and blood" (Greek, *enocos*; Latin *reus*). Perhaps "answerable for" would convey St. Paul's meaning better. The Jerusalem translator softens the meaning to "behaves unworthily towards" as a rendering of both *anaxios* and *enochos*. This is surely to comment rather than to translate, and is not easily justifiable.

¹⁵ "(The Fathers) are of special authority when they teach a doctrine by unanimous consent, for then they can be unreservedly taken to be transmitting and bearing witness to the teaching of the Church." K. Rahner and H. Vorgrimmler, *Concise Theological Dictionary*, under entry *Fathers*.

¹⁶ xiv 1. The *Didache* may well be a later document, but this does not affect the unanimity of tradition.

extant reference to words of Malachi as a prophecy of the Eucharist, but only a little later St Justin the Martyr (Asia Minor and Rome, about 155) quotes Malachi, identifying "the sacrifices which in every place are offered to God by us gentiles"¹⁷, as those of the eucharistic bread and cup¹⁸. The same identification is made by St Irenaeus (Asia Minor and Gaul, about 200), with the comment that both the pagans and the Church have their sacrifice¹⁹. St Cyril of Jerusalem (about 348) writes that "after the spiritual sacrifice, the unbloody sacrifice of worship, we pray to God over the victim of atonement for peace in all the churches, &c"²⁰. Among the Greek Fathers St Gregory Nazianzen (Cappadocia, about 383) begs a friend not to be slack in prayer for him "whenever you sever the body from the blood of the Lord, and bring down the Word with a word, using your voice as a sword"²¹. St Gregory of Nyssa, brother of St Basil the Great (Cappadocia 380), writes that Christ "without waiting for the sentence of Pilate . . . anticipated it by his design, and by means of a secret form of sacrifice, which could not be seen by man, offered himself a victim for us, and slew that victim, himself both priest and lamb of God. When he proposed his body to be eaten as food, he openly declared that the sacrifice of the lamb had been perfected . . . his body had been sacrificed in a secret and invisible way"²². St John Chrysostom (Syria and Constantinople, about 400) writes: "We always offer the same victim, not now one lamb, now another. Wherefore our sacrifice is a single one . . . for as in many places it is one body and not many bodies that are offered, so it is one sacrifice"²³.

¹⁷ Malachi i 11. "From farthest east to farthest west my name is honoured among the nations, and everywhere a sacrifice of incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering too." We are not concerned with the contemporary or Jewish interpretation of this passage; we are simply recording the acceptance by the Fathers of the Eucharist as the sacrifice foretold by the prophet.

¹⁸ *Apology* i 41 (Migne Pat. Graec. 6.564).

¹⁹ *Against the Heretics* 4, 17, 5 (MPG 7 1023).

²⁰ *Catacheses* 23, 8 (MPG 33. 1116).

²¹ *Letters* 171 (MPG 37. 280).

²² *Prayers, The Resurrection*, 1 (MPG 46. 612).

²³ *On the Letter to the Hebrews*, 17, 3 (MPG 63. 131).

St Cyprian (Africa, about 250) had made the familiar comparison of Christ with Melchizedek: "For who is more a priest of the most high God than our Lord Jesus Christ, who offered a sacrifice to God, and offered one the same as Melchizedek, that is bread and wine, body and blood?" And he adds: "If Christ Jesus, our Lord and our God, is himself a high priest of God the Father, and offered himself a sacrifice to the Father, and commanded that this should be done in his memory, then surely he who imitates the action of Christ takes his place and offers a true and full sacrifice in the Church to God the Father"²⁴. This is taken up by St Augustine (Africa and Italy, about 420): "Christ is the priest: he it is who offers and he is the victim. He willed the mystery of this offering to be the daily sacrifice of the Church, and since the Church is the body of which he is head, it learns to offer itself through him"²⁵. Augustine, indeed, throughout the *City of God*, a work directed to the non-Christian imperial administrators, repeatedly alludes to the great sacrifice that is offered throughout the Christian church. "This is the sacrifice which the Church continually celebrates in the sacrament of the altar, a sacrament well known to the faithful, in which it is shown to the Church that she herself is offered in the offering which she presents to God"²⁶. Christ Jesus . . . in the form of a servant, chose to be himself the sacrifice rather than to receive it . . . Thus he is both the priest . . . and the oblation . . . This is the true sacrifice; and the sacrifices in earlier times were so many different symbols of it . . . This was the supreme and the true sacrifice, and all the false sacrifices yielded place to it"²⁷. Finally, St Gregory the Great (at Rome and Constantinople, about 600) sums up the teaching of the past: "This victim in a most special way saves the soul from eternal death, for it represents in a mystery the death of the Only-Begotten . . . (who) himself living in himself immortal and incorrupt, is immolated for us again in the mystery of this offering"²⁸.

²⁴ *Letters* 63, 4 (*Migne Pat. Lat.* 4. 376).

²⁵ *City of God* x 20 (*MPL* 41, 298).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, x 6.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, x 20.

²⁸ *Dialogues* 4, 58 (*MPL* 77. 425).

Our Lord, in the words used from time immemorial in the Latin Mass, offered his sacrifice "for you (the apostles) and for many", and the Church has always offered the Holy Sacrifice for the living and dead, and in thanksgiving. "We make our offering for the dead," says Tertullian (Africa, about 211), "and in honour of the martyrs"²⁹. St Cyril of Jerusalem gives a long list of those for whom the sacrifice is offered. "We pray over that atoning victim" for the living, and then for the dead, "believing that this will be of the greatest help for their souls, as it is a prayer made while the holy and august victim lies before us"³⁰. St John Chrysostom writes: "Not in vain was it decreed by the apostles, that in the sacred and awe-inspiring mysteries commemoration should be made of the departed . . . for at that time, when . . . the tremendous sacrifice is in progress, our prayers for them will be heard by God"³¹. And St Augustine: "The universal church observes this tradition of the fathers, that mention of those who died in union with us in the body and blood of Christ shall be made daily during the sacrifice, and that this sacrifice shall be offered for them"³².

The development of the Eucharistic Liturgy

When we consider how little the apostles can have understood the fulness of Our Lord's words and actions at the Last Supper, so soon to be followed by what seemed to be the loss of all their hopes and then by the wholly new experience of Christ's risen presence and final departure to the Father, it is truly striking that in the very first days after Pentecost they began to keep the Lord's commandment of remembrance. The first converts, we are told, "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayers . . . attending the temple together and breaking bread (i.e., the Eucharist) in their homes"³³. The two consecrations and the solemn thanksgiving

²⁹ *De corona militum* 3 (*MPL* 2. 79).

³⁰ *Catacheses* 23, 9 (*MPG*, 1116).

³¹ *Homily on Ephesians* 3, 4 (*MPG* 62. 203).

³² *Sermons* 172, 2, 2 (*MPL* 38. 936).

³³ *Acts* ii 42, 46.

were very soon taken out of the context of an ordinary meal to become the Lord's Supper. The Eucharist of apostolic times was never modelled on the full paschal meal of the evening before the Passion. That meal could occur only on its annual date, and it had been superseded and replaced by one of another kind. Nevertheless, the Eucharist, at least for a time and in some places, was preceded by a meal. St Paul's Corinthians clearly assembled for one to which each brought his own food and drink, but these were consumed before the Lord's Supper, with which they had no liturgical connection³⁴. This previous meal soon disappeared. The Eucharist was shifted to the early dawn, the presumed hour of the Resurrection of Christ, the true Sun of the world, precisely with the intention of isolating it from a profane meal, and the eucharistic fast was instituted in very early times. From the first, after a confession of faults and words of praise, the double consecration was woven into a short narrative. To this was added a commemorative thanksgiving, short or long, inspired by Our Lord's actions and commands, and Sunday soon became a special day for celebration. The first non-Christian reference to the Mass is that of the younger Pliny, the Roman governor of Bithynia (about 112), who places it at dawn, and notes the antiphonal singing of a hymn to Christ as to a god. The *Sanctus* with its previous acclamations, and probably the *Gloria in excelsis* in a primitive form, were early compositions, and also an elementary Liturgy of the Word, adapted from Jewish practice when Christians finally abandoned worship in the Temple.

The original prayer of thanksgiving after the words of institution gave the name Eucharist both to the liturgy (as in Ignatius) and to the Sacrament (as in Justin Martyr), and until the fourth century this simple form of service would seem to have been universal. Then very soon a short Communion rite was formalized, and later the Lord's Prayer joined the canon to what followed. In the fourth century marked differences in the eucharistic rite appeared in different centres. Speaking generally, the western (Latin) church kept to a single basic form, with a few regional variations, while the eastern liturgy

³⁴ I Cor. xi 17.

evolved into several different forms. The western, and especially the Roman, rite remained open to view and austere in tone, while the eastern rite was performed by the clergy behind screens, with chant and ceremonial.

The canon of the Roman Mass was fixed in the fourth century. The collects before the Lesson, over the oblation and after the communion, date in their original Roman form from the late fifth to the eighth century. The *Kyrie* and *Agnus Dei* were introduced by Pope Sergius I (about 700), together with the fraction of the host, after Greek models. The Roman liturgy was accepted in Gaul (modern France) in 751, and received a number of additions which two centuries later were adopted in the Roman church and finally became part of the western rite. In the proper of the Mass many later additions came from various sources, such as the sequences, the occasional rite of Candlemas, Palm Sunday and the Rogation days. The elevation of the host became general only by about 1200. The last gospel was a still later addition. The name Mass became current in the fourth century, and was used by St Ambrose of Milan. The Latin form *missa* (= *missio*), "dismissal", was taken from the final words of the service.

Recent reforms of the Mass

The recent reforms, besides the important changes into the vernacular, have eliminated many of the medieval additions, and the framework of the Roman Mass has been almost completely restored to that of the Roman Church in the sixth century. Much of this, long desired by liturgical scholars, and directed by the documents of Vatican II, has met with general approval. Thus, for example, the last gospel, magnificent in itself, had no relation to the eucharistic liturgy, and the psalm *Judica* and the long *Confiteor*, originally merely preparatory prayers, were too often mangled by both priest and ministers, and inaudible to the congregation. Other changes of form secured the integration of all the assistants, both clergy and layfolk, into a single body of the people of God at worship and communion. Some of the further changes, however, were not specifically ordered by

the Council, such as the optional forms of the Canon, and the rearrangement and in some cases the original composition of portions of the Masses of the liturgical year, and the elimination of traditional seasonal periods, such as the Ember Days and the Septuagesimal weeks, almost all octaves (including that of Pentecost) and many vigils. On some at least of these changes, opinions have varied, and in particular the intention of modifying what was thought to be a negative outlook in some of the traditional prayers, and of emphasizing the communal rather than the sacrificial aspect of the liturgy has not given universal satisfaction, and while there is a very wide acceptance of the vernacular as standard practice, approval of the accuracy and style of the translations has been less than warm. It is probably true to say that the casual observer and the normally devout but not liturgically-minded assistant at Mass, whether in Latin or English, would not observe a notable difference between new and old. But one nurtured for years on the liturgical expression of the Church's seasonal year must notice innumerable small changes and displacements, not always for the better. He must also feel regret at the loss, for doctrinaire rather than pastoral reasons, of some of the masterpieces of liturgical and musical composition, such as the Masses of Septuagesima and the two following Sundays, and of the Whitsun octave. Many will regret also the total loss of the liturgically indefensible *Dies irae*. More important than these are the changes or omissions that have been made from 'ecumenical' rather than from spiritual or liturgical motives.

The Eucharist: a community act

Besides the two great themes of sacrifice and sacrament, there is another aspect of the Mass that springs from their combination. This is the union and unity of the people of God, the Catholic church, effected by both sacrifice and sacrament constituted by, and sharing in, the one, and symbolized, as well as affected by, the other. The Eucharist, whether as sacrifice or sacrament, is a community act, the union of Christ's members with their Head, whether visibly, as in a congregational communion in a solemn Mass, or spiritually,

as in every Mass, even if offered by a priest alone, for even then he is acting for, and with, the whole Church. But primarily the Eucharist is a community activity, seen in its clearest form when bishop, clergy and people join together at a celebration.

Nevertheless, the early gathering of the infant or persecuted church, and the later city-church with its bishop, priests and other orders, became rare after the Constantinian age in comparison with the numberless village churches all over western Europe and the East. In the agrarian, servile and peasant society, in which more than nine-tenths of the population were illiterate labourers, the typical priest was a man of the same class, with only a minimal education, who said his Mass in a Latin that was now barely understood by the people. They, for their part, received the Eucharist more rarely than before, in Masses at which they assisted but in which they did not visibly take part. At the same time, the spread of monasticism, with its daily programme of liturgical prayer and its near monopoly of education, led to the custom of ordaining all monks after a number of years in monastic life. When, in the central Middle Ages, the reformed secular clergy became an organized body apart, and in certain respects sharply distinguished from lay folk, whose duty it was to pray, and to offer Mass, for those who were regarded as at least in some ways less spiritually favoured. Such an outlook, however, was not universal. Medieval theology and spiritual writing, the growth of devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and to the Mass itself, the construction of the cathedrals and urban churches, and the rural church which was the only notable building in numberless villages, are all witnesses to a religious devotion among the people which has never been surpassed. Nevertheless, the Mass came to be regarded as a memorial of the Passion rather than as a Paschal mystery, and as a means of drawing upon the infinite merits of Christ as a satisfaction for sin and as a protection against temporal ills, rather than as a sharing in the life of the Lord by receiving him into the soul. At the lowest level, the materialization of outlook led to the appearance of a proletariat among the clergy who did little but serve the chantries and altars endowed with Masses 'for all time', and to the same kind of mercenary piety as was visible in the traffic of indulgences.

Against these tendencies, and against theological opinions that seemed to countenance them, the Protestant reformers reacted drastically, by denying or modifying the Catholic doctrine of the Real Presence and by denying or minimizing the sacrificial character of the Mass. Instead, they emphasized Holy Communion, shared by all present, and the conception of the Eucharist as a meal, the Last Supper of Our Lord, to be reproduced as such. The sacrificial terms of altar and priest were banned. The Communion service became a less frequent, even if still a central, rite. Services of psalmody, prayer, bible reading and above all preaching, took a larger place in worship, and the private Mass disappeared. A table replaced the altar, and any kind of ceremonial adoration of the Sacrament was barred.

Sacrifice and sacrament

The Catholic reaction to this, apart from a renewed devotion to the Mass and to frequent and fervent Communion, was the body of decrees on the Mass at the Council of Trent, defining its sacrificial character, the Real Presence, the propitiatory nature of the Mass, and the lawfulness of Masses said without a congregation. With this, and with the contemporary and subsequent discussions and revivals, we are not concerned, but our conclusion must be that Catholic thought, devotion and practice should take full account of every aspect of the Eucharist that has enriched Christian life.

The Eucharist is both a sacrifice and a sacrament, offered by the Church in union with its Head, Christ, but offered also in a special way by the celebrant, a validly ordained priest, It is a public act of worship, and also a means of personal sanctification and of the remission of sin for the living and for departed souls not yet in the beatific vision. Its essence, as a memorial of Christ, is to be found in the consecration and communion, enlarged by prayers expressing praise to God and thanksgiving for his gift to us of his Son as Redeemer, with whom we are united by his death and resurrection. Any form of the rite which contains these elements and expresses absolute faith in Our Lord's gift of himself to us and of his sacrificial offering of himself with

us to the Father, is a valid Mass. Within this framework, and that of a proper sense of tradition, the Church is free to shape the form of service.

Pope Paul VI: (A.D. 1965)

From the Encyclical Letter *Mysterium Fidei*.

“It is Our pleasure, Venerable Fathers, to recall to mind the doctrine which the Catholic Church holds from tradition concerning the Eucharistic Mystery and teaches with unanimous agreement. The first point which it is useful to recall is, as it were, the summary and the summit of this doctrine. It is that, by means of the Eucharistic Mystery, the Sacrifice of the Cross achieved once on Calvary is marvellously made present, continually recalled to the memory and its saving virtue is applied to the remission of the sins which are daily committed by us. (Council of Trent, D.S. 1739-42) For, when He instituted the Eucharistic Mystery, Christ the Lord, who is the Mediator of the New Covenant, ratified that Covenant with His Blood, as Moses once had ratified the old covenant with the blood of oxen (cf. Ex. 24:8). For the Evangelists tell us that at the Last Supper He took bread and gave thanks and broke it and gave it to them saying: ‘This is my body which is given up for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ And likewise the cup after supper, saying: ‘This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.’ (Lk. 22:19; cf. Mt. 26:26-28; Mk. 14:22-24) When He instructed the apostles to do this in remembrance of Him, it was His wish that it should be capable of constant renewal . . .”

Pope Paul VI: (A.D. 1968)

From the *Credo of the People of God*.

“We believe that the Mass which is celebrated by the priest in the person of Christ in virtue of the power he receives in the Sacrament of Order, and which is offered by him in the name of Christ and of the members of his Mystical Body, is indeed the Sacrifice of Calvary sacramentally realized on our altars. We believe that, as the bread and wine consecrated by the Lord at the Last Supper were changed into His Body and Blood which were offered for us on the Cross, so likewise are the bread and wine consecrated by the priest changed into the Body and Blood of Christ now enthroned in glory in heaven. We believe that the mysterious presence of the Lord under the appearance of those things which, as far as our senses are concerned, remain unchanged, is a true, real and substantial presence.”

Sacred Congregation for the Clergy: (A.D. 1971)

From the *General Catechetical Directory*.

“ . . . This (Eucharistic) Sacrifice is not merely a rite commemorating a past sacrifice. For in it Christ by the ministry of the priest perpetuates the Sacrifice of the Cross in an unbloody manner through the course of the centuries . . . ”

Professor David Knowles, Litt.D., F.B.A., F.S.A., had honorary doctorates from the universities of Oxford, Bristol, Leicester, London, Cambridge, and York. Fr. Knowles, a Benedictine, was successively Professor of Medieval History and Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge, and from 1956-60 was President of the Royal Historical Society. He is the author of *The Religious Orders in England* (3 vols.), *The English Mystical Tradition*, *Thomas Becket*, *The Evolution of Medieval Thought*, and other books.

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