THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST

By JOHN ASHTON

THE purpose of this article is to show how the sacrifice of Christ transcends the sacrifices of the Old Testament and at the same time accomplishes their central aims. These were three in number: to offer a gift to God, to make atonement for sin, and to establish a union with God in the framework of the covenant. Accordingly, each of these themes, gift, expiation and communion, will be treated inside a theological reflection inspired directly from the New Testament. Each section opens with a sketch of Christ's fulfilment of one of the three aims. This is followed by a brief exegetical reference to the Old Testament, which shows mankind's fumbling attempts to reach this goal on his own: man acting without Christ, but nevertheless in a direction inspired by God with a view to the incarnation. Finally Christ's achievement is seen to be that of the whole of mankind; he acts with man, for man and ultimately in man.[1]

Being found in human form he humbled himself, become obedient unto death . . .

The first purpose of all sacrifice is to give honour and glory to God, to acknowledge his supreme sovereignty over the world and all that is in it, including man himself. Sacrifice is the external expression of an inner attitude: we can acknowledge God's sovereignty in other ways, notably by prayer; but if we want to show our submission, to display it publicly, we must choose some form of rite. And the rite evolved for this purpose we call sacrifice. Taken at the beginning of its long and complex history, it is not, at least not primarily, a gift we make to God, but rather a recognition of the fact that we can make no gift to God which is not in some sense his already. 'But who am I and what is my people that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from thee and of thy own have we given thee'.[2] Rather falteringly, King David puts into words a

[1] This method will help to convey the development of the Old Testament themes within the New, and to bring out the dynamic structure of the great events of our redemption, the death and resurrection of our Lord. The movement is that of the christological hymn in Philippians (Phil 2, 8–9) and also, though this is less immediately obvious, of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

[2] 1 Chr 29, 14.

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paradox that gave rise to a good deal of bewilderment and apparently contradictory behaviour in primitive cultures: man needs to give something, yet he is conscious of having nothing to give. The tension between these two conflicting sentiments finds expression in one of the psalms.[1]

Since God is the source of all that lives and all that is, we can offer him nothing that we have not received from him. And were it not for the mystery of the Trinity, we should have to say that God could never receive an adequate response for all that he gives. For his gift is absolute: it is the gift of life, of understanding, of being itself; and no creature can make an absolute response. So it is that only one person has ever responded fully to God's gift, Christ our Lord. His response is perfect because it is the expression not just of an inner attitude of submission to the will of the Father, but of his very being: 'Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise'.[2] Since all that the Son is he receives from the Father, it is only natural for him to show this in all he does. This is one of the dominant themes of the Gospel of St John, who stresses time and time again that Christ owes his whole authority to the Father, and that his only mission is to fulfil his Father's will. St Luke too tells us how, as a child of twelve, Jesus warned his mother that he must be about his Father's business; and this was to be the pattern of his life. Word of God, uttered by the Father from all eternity, Son of God, born of the Father from all eternity, and shining with that light whose source is the Father, Christ sums up in his Person that attitude of total recognition of the Father's sovereign authority which is the most fundamental motive in our desire to offer sacrifice. All the Father has he gives to the Son; the Son gives back to the Father all he has, and this mutual gift is the Holy Spirit,[3] who is therefore in himself the divine prototype of all sacrifice, a gift given and a gift returned. The Father's gift to the Son is the divine life; the Son's return to the Father is the life he is given. So intense is their love that it results in their giving their life one to the other: the love is identical with the life: it is the Holy Spirit.

No wonder that man, made in the image of God, should feel the need to return to God the most precious of his gifts. No wonder that his sacrifices should so often take the form of an immolation. No

[1] Ps 50, 9–11; cf *supra* p 98 [2] Jn 5, 19.

[3] Gift is a traditional title of the Holy Spirit; e.g. Augustine, *De Trinitate* V, 13–15; XV, 17–19: he cites Acts 8, 20.

doubt, looked at in the dazzling light of the mystery of the Trinity revealed by Jesus Christ, Israel's attempt to give a human response to God's continuous invitation may seem a pale thing beside the total self-surrender of the Son. But the holocaust, the complete immolation of the sacrificial victim, was at least a gesture, however inadequate, of unreserved return. The blood that is life was given back to the God from whom it came; the rising smoke symbolised the offering made and accepted: man had relinquished all claim over the victim, which passed upwards into God's invisible domain.[1] Rightly motivated, such a sacrifice is the fullest acknowledgement man can make of God's overlordship, and we should respect it for what it is. The jews themselves were conscious that they could offer at best but an imperfect tribute to God, and the more sensitive spirits among them, notably the prophets, often voiced their uneasy awareness of the abuses to which their holocausts were subject. One of the last of them, with truly remarkable insight, foretold the abandonment of the old-style sacrifice for something purer and more universal:

> Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire upon my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand. For from the rising of the sun to its setting, my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering.[2]

As time went on, the sacrifices of Israel became more and more hollow until the rite was little more than an empty shell. The sham and its spiritual consequences are underlined for us in the terrible parable of the pharisee and the publican; and the Son of God came in person to give us the true perspective:

> When Christ came into the world, he said, Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired, but a body hast thou prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings thou hast taken no pleasure. Then I said, 'Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God' as it is written of me in the roll of the book.[3]

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[1] The hebrew word for burnt offering means literally 'that which goes up' or 'that which ascends'.

[2] Mal 1, 10–11. This prophecy was later to hold a central place in the teaching of the Council of Trent on the mass.

[3] Heb 10, 5–7.

The Son of God acknowledges from all eternity in an unbroken paean of praise that all he is he owes to the Father; but in order to give human expression to this truth – and this point cannot be emphasized too strongly – he had to become Man: 'Son though he was, he learned obedience in the school of suffering'.[1] The incarnation, whereby the Son of God 'emptied himself, taking the form of a slave'[2] was necessary if mankind was ever to make a perfect return for God's gifts. From now on, man's gift to God would be absorbed into the eternal thanksgiving of the Son. Christ incorporates us all in his offering to his Father, and in associating ourselves voluntarily with his sacrifice we too can make a perfect return to God for all his gifts.

Once the divine decision had been made, it was carried through with inexorable logic. God was not only born as a man, he lived and died as a man. Immortality, at least in the sense of immunity from physical death, is a pagan dream. To become man, the Son of God had to become mortal man, had to expose himself to death. Even if the barrier of sin had not been there to break down, he must have passed through some form of death to rise again in his glorified body and to merit, as man, his supreme title of Son of God. Death is the final submission of the finite human creature to the authority of God, the final acknowledgement of his utter dependence, the supreme sacrifice. Paradoxically enough, it is in his act of dying, the one moment of utter abandonment, that Christ gave fullest human expression to his divine relationship with the Father.[3]

. . . even unto the death of the cross

Christ, then, would have died, somehow, whatever had been the outcome of Adam's temptation: but not, surely, the brutal and violent death of crucifixion. The cross adds a new dimension to Christ's death; the dimension which is the mystery of sin and redemption. The incarnate Son of God entered a world still permeated and ruled by sin. The flesh he assumed was sinful flesh, in the sense that it brought him into contact with and even subjected him in

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[1] Heb 5, 8. [2] Phil 2, 7.

[3] The *tradidit spiritum* of St John (Jn 19, 30) contains a profound truth that goes far beyond the simple announcement of the death of Christ. For the first time Christ had fulfilled as man the function which was his as God to perform: the mission or the breathing-out of the Holy Spirit. This is why it was good for us that his life on earth could not be indefinitely prolonged, good for us that he took his leave: because only in this way could he carry out his promise to send us the Holy Spirit. Similarly, the bestowal of the power to forgive sins 'he breathed on them, and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit' – finds its logical place in John after Christ's death and resurrection (Jn 20, 22).

some sense to a world estranged from God. The horror this caused him is summed up and symbolised in the cross. In a verse which has exercised the ingenuity of commentators throughout the ages, St Paul wrote: 'For our sakes God made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God'.[1]

In this perspective the sacrifice of Christ is no longer just the perfect act of submission: it is a sacrifice of expiation.[2] In assuming our human nature vitiated by sin, Christ took on the task of reconciling man with God, a task which was accomplished on the cross. By accepting this painful death he offered himself, in a real sense, to his Father: 'He has no need to offer sacrifices, first for his own sins and then for those of his people; he did this once and for all when he offered up himself'.[3] Once and for all: unlike the jewish sacrifices of expiation, designed to remove or cancel the guilt of sin, Christ's sacrifice achieved its purpose of reconciling men with God, and there was no need, nor any possibility, of repetition: 'Where there is forgiveness of sins there is no longer any offering for sin'.[4]

To avoid all misunderstanding, it should be added that though it is Christ who offers the sacrifice of expiation, he does so on his Father's initiative: 'God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us'.[5] There is no question here of an uneasy attempt to propitiate an angry god, such as we find occasionally in the history of religions. Such an attempt would be doomed to frustration from the outset, since man, unaided, cannot regain God's favour. No: 'all this is from God (the Father), who through Christ reconciled us to himself'.[6] The pattern of action here has nothing in common with the jansenistic picture of an angry god thirsting for vengeance. God in his love sends his Son on a ministry of reconciliation, and the Son, in an act of complete abandonment, offers to his Father the acceptable sacrifice. 'For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from the Father'.[7] The timeless and motionless interchange of love within the Trinity is thus exhibited on earth in the act of our redemption, for, as we have seen, this mutual gift of love is the Holy Spirit.

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1 2 Cor 5, 21.
2 Cf THE WAY, 'Spiritual Vocabulary' Vol 2 (Jan 1962), p 73.
3 Heb 7, 27. 4 Heb 10, 18. 5 Rom 5, 8.
6 2 Cor 5, 18. 7 Jn 10, 17–18.

There would perhaps be no need nowadays to draw attention to the undoubtedly outworn symbolism of the bloody sacrifice of expiation, were it not for the central role it plays in the liturgy. For the words of consecration the Church has selected the version of St Matthew, the only one to speak of Christ's blood as 'poured out for many for the remission of sins'.[1] To the jew, for whom 'the life of the flesh is in the blood', it seemed natural that their expiatory sacrifices should entail the shedding of blood, 'for it is the blood that makes atonement by reason of the life'.[2] Life is the most precious of God's gifts; and the symbolism of the shedding of the blood, crude as it may seem to a modern mind, fitted in perfectly with the jewish religion. But, as the author of Hebrews saw, 'it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins'.[3] Christ's blood can do so, for it represents the rendering to God of a life that is God's: the perfect act of submission, as we have seen, but also – and this is where the new dimension of the cross radically alters the perspective – the perfect act of human love: 'Greater love than this has no man, that a man lay down his life for his friends'.[4] Christ's sacrifice looks upward to his Father and outward to mankind. He is merciful to man and faithful to God.[5] He is the living link between man and God, the *pontifex*, the high-priest, whose role it is 'to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins'.[6]

We should therefore be able to see the precious blood as a life offered indeed to God but laid down for men, and in this second respect there is one Old Testament figure who speaks to us in terms we can immediately understand: the suffering Servant.[7]

> Surely he has borne our griefs
> and carried our sorrows;
> yet we esteemed him stricken,
> smitten by God and afflicted.
> But he was wounded for our transgressions,
> he was bruised for our iniquities;
> upon him was the chastisement that made us whole
> and with his stripes we are healed . . .[8]

This was the passage that made such a profound impression on the ethiopian eunuch, minister at the queen's court; he invited the deacon Philip to come and sit beside him in his chariot and asked

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1 Mt 26, 28. 2 Lev 17, 11. 3 Heb 10, 4. 4 Jn 15, 13.
5 Cf Heb 2, 17. 6 Heb 5, 1.
7 Cf THE WAY, Vol 2 (Jan 1962), pp 121–34. 8 Isai 53, 4–6.

him to whom the prophet was referring: 'Then Philip opened his mouth and beginning with this scripture told him the good news of Jesus'.[1] It is truly remarkable how perfectly, yet at the same time unforeseeably, Jesus fulfils this sublime prophecy. One can well understand that the ethiopian asked for baptism on the spot, having grasped that it is Jesus Christ who is 'the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world'.[2]

The sacrifices of expiation were sacrifices in the true sense, ritual acts; but the victim did not choose to assume the sins of the people. The suffering Servant, on the other hand, chose to suffer for the people; yet, for all the religious depth and beauty of his act, his was not a sacrifice in the fullest sense: there was no priest, and no sacrificial victim. To appreciate how startling the combination of these two figures (i.e. the rite and the person) really is, we should reflect for an instant how abominable, in the strict sense of the word, is any notion of human sacrifice. The very idea of ritual murder of a human being, however willingly the victim accepts his death, fills us with horror. Christ's offering of himself on the cross is easily seen as the fulfilment of the prophecy of the suffering Servant; but what of the ritual element? Briefly, we can say that the ritual element emerges from the last supper and from the so-called sacerdotal prayer,[3] which, in the words of Père Guillet, 'is the very heart of the passion, Jesus' supreme act of self-offering whereby he gives his life, as both priest and victim, in a sacrificial gesture without which the various stages in the drama, including the final crucifixion, would be not more than a barbarous execution'.[4] The key-words in this prayer are accomplishment and glory. Jesus' last words on the cross were 'It is accomplished',[5] and this is what he means when he says, addressing the Father, 'I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do'.[6]

This work was, of course, the redemption of mankind. Sin and death had been conquered at last. Christ, and with him all humanity, 'passed over' from death into life.[7] When Christ chose to die in

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[1] Acts 8, 35. [2] 1 Jn 2, 2. [3] Jn 17.

[4] *Jesus-Christ, hier et aujourd'hui* (Collection Christus 1963) p 138. An english translation will be published shortly in THE WAY SERIES.

[5] Jn 19, 30. [6] Jn 17, 4.

[7] The passover was the celebration of the exodus, the constitutive event of the people of Israel. The exodus theme is so central to revelation that it displays what may be called without irreverence part of the very pattern of God's thought. For this is how he acted: he led the israelites out of Egypt across the Red Sea, and after concluding an alliance with them re-established them, truly his people now, in the promised land.

the middle of the paschal festival, himself figuring as the paschal lamb, he did so because he too was to redeem his people by his death and to re-establish them by his resurrection. The parallel is underlined by the Council of Trent, which concludes a chapter on the institution of the mass with a quotation from St Paul: 'He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son'.[1] From darkness to light, sickness to health, slavery to freedom, from the rule of sin to the rule of grace – the biblical images abound. They all express the same reality, but the most fundamental passage of all, for the christian as for Christ, is the passage from death to life.

Christ's sacrifice is indeed representative and vicarious, but it is much more than that. He did not merely suffer on our behalf and in our stead. 'With us Christ's love is a compelling motive, convinced as we are that one man died for all; therefore all have died'.[2] In the world we live in it is hard to understand how the power of the Godhead reaches out in Christ's humanity to include all humanity in his single act. But unless we grasp this truth, in however fumbling a way, we shall never be able to see why it was good 'that one man should die for the people'. Caiaphas prophesied 'that Jesus should die for the nation; and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad'.[3] According to traditional Catholic doctrine the Church was founded on Calvary: Jesus had to die in order to release the Spirit, who is at once the Spirit of unity and the Spirit of life. The voluntary sacrifice of his human life, the stripping of the last vestiges of human dignity and honour, were the accomplishment of the *kenosis,* which cut so deep into Christ's being that he could say, in one of the most mysterious phrases of the gospel, 'the Father is greater than I'.[4] And this was necessary if Christ was to become, not merely an individual human being, but the head of the Church, leading many sons into glory.[5] As sinners we are raised up on the cross with Christ and win with him the final battle over sin and death: to be raised up is also to be exalted, for by the same action, at the same moment, we are redeemed from sin and made sons of God, caught up into the life of the Blessed Trinity. The Father bestows upon us the sonship to which the Son alone has a right: the Son bestows upon us the Spirit which is properly the gift he returns to the Father.

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[1] Col 1, 13. [2] 2 Cor 5, 14. [3] Jn 11, 50–52. [4] Jn 15, 28.
[5] Cf Heb 2, 10.

That is why God has raised him to such a height, given him that name which is greater than any other name . . .

Though in dying Christ conquered death, his victory was not fully exhibited until his resurrection and ascension, mysteries which we may provisionally consider together.[1] For St John, the cross is the exaltation of Christ, the suffering is the glory; and we shall never properly understand his theology unless we see, as he does, the Christ of glory raised up on the cross.[2] And for St Paul too the life of the christian touches that of Christ through and across the single mystery of the death and resurrection, the pivot of his teaching. Christ, he tells us, probably quoting an ancient christian hymn, 'was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification':[3] and he takes up the same theme on his own account a little further on: 'If while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life'.[4] It is a theme which ought to be familiar to us from the Easter preface;[5] but it is to be feared that often we think of Christ's sacrifice too exclusively as 'the sacrifice of the cross', losing sight of the fact that if Christ was put to death in the flesh, he was made alive in the spirit.[6] For the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, to whom we owe the profoundest and most fully-articulated theology of sacrifice to be found in the New Testament, Christ's work is not complete until he is back at the right hand of God.[7] The carefully constructed opening sentence of the letter proclaims the theme in its simplest form: 'when he had made purification for sins,

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[1] As do the very earliest strands of New Testament theology: cf Acts 2, 36; 13, 33; also Rom 1, 4 and this quotation from Philippians.

[2] When Christ says 'I, when I am raised from the earth' (Jn 12, 3) he is alluding in one and the same breath to the crucifixion and the resurrection, two aspects of what is essentially the same mystery. To take an example from poetry: when Hopkins speaks of St Francis as 'drawn to the life that died' he succeeds in referring not only to the attraction exercised by Christ upon St Francis but also to the physical stigmata which made him in a more concrete sense a portrait 'to the life' of his Master. To follow Christ means to imitate him, carrying one's cross in his footsteps: following and imitation are simply two facets of a single reality, the discipleship of Christ. St John's gospel is full of such double-edged words as 'raise'; they are one of the literary instruments he uses to realise his central aim: to exhibit the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth in his public life through the Church's sacramental practice, and so to display his identity with the risen Christ whom we worship.

[3] Rom 4, 25.

[4] Rom 5, 10.

[5] *qui mortem nostram moriendo destruxit et vitam resurgendo reparavit.*

[6] Cf 1 Pet 3, 18.

[7] This epistle mentions the resurrection as such only once, right at the end (13, 20); but the ascension represents here at least part of what the resurrection meant for St Paul: the final accomplishment and rounding-off of Christ's saving work.

he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high'.[1] Later on, the author develops it in a number of wonderful variations. Reflecting, for instance, on the annual Day of Atonement, he sees that just as the high-priest completed the sacrifice by taking the blood of the victim and sprinkling it inside the Holy of Holies, so the sacrifice of Christ is followed by his entry 'not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf'.[2] The ascension of Christ also fulfils in a striking way the eloquent but inadequate symbolism of the holocaust, for which the hebrew word, as we have seen, was 'that which ascends': the sacrifice was complete only when it was totally transformed and when the smoke mounting up to heaven informed the watching throng that it had been accepted.

In the resurrection/ascension, then, considered as the crown and accomplishment of the passion, God 'made us alive together with Christ . . . and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus'.[3] When Christ had broken down the barrier of sin there was no further obstacle to a true union with God; and it was to effect this union that he rose from the dead.

For the purpose of sacrifice is not merely to acknowledge God's sovereign authority by giving him back what he has given us, not merely to efface guilt and remove sin, but also to establish a real union with the divinity. St Augustine saw this as the primary aim of all sacrifice.[4] It was, at all events, the aim of the covenant sacrifice,[5] the last jewish rite that we shall be considering. There are many covenants in the Old Testament, but the most important, the one which gives its name to the bible, was that signed by God with Moses on Mount Sinai. In the middle of the desert, when the jews, though freed from the egyptian yoke, had not yet entered the promised land, God concluded an alliance with Israel. After recalling all his benefits to the people he had chosen, he gave them the charter of the alliance, the Ten Commandments, which was then sealed and celebrated by a sacrifice. Unlike the expiatory sacrifices, this terminated in a solemn meal, in which the israelites shared the sacrificial offerings with their God.[6] This was a genuine communion, for it

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[1] Heb 1, 3. [2] Heb 9, 24. [3] Eph 2, 5–6.

[4] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* X, 6.

[5] This is the second of the two sacrifices recorded in the Book of Exodus, the other being the passover. They are united by Christ, who established the new covenant during the paschal meal.

[6] There are two traditions running through Exod 24: according to one, the ceremony

symbolised and ratified an authentic covenant between God and his people. God had committed himself and he would not go back on his word.

Of all the ideas and all the events recorded in the Old Testament, that of the covenant between God and man is possibly the most central: without it we cannot hope fully to understand the new covenant either. Christ's words at the last supper ('This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins') are considerably illuminated by their Old Testament background. For the one part of the sacrificial victim that the people never shared was the blood. The blood is life and sacred to God. At the covenant sacrifice it was sprinkled on the people – an act which already represents a remarkable degree of union with God – but this was the nearest the people ever got to a full communion in the blood. All life belongs to God, but the new covenant would be sealed by drinking the blood and sharing the life that was God's very own. No closer communion than this is possible. Communion is an integral part of Christ's sacrifice, and that is why the mystery of his death and resurrection cannot be fully understood without reference to the sacramental life which it made possible and inaugurated. Christ delivered himself up to death for us so that he could become our food. He implies as much at the last supper, which in this respect anticipates the outcome of his passion.[1] Unless the sacrifice is seen in the light of the sacrament, the extent to which it was offered for us remains obscure. St John tells us that when our Lord's side was pierced by the lance 'out came blood and water'.[2] Generations of patristic commentators are agreed in seeing in these words a reference to the central christian sacraments, baptism and the eucharist. For it is in these sacraments that we seize Christ in the central act of our redemption. That is why after Easter there is still room for Whitsuntide. True, for St John there is already a sort of Pentecost on the cross *(tradidit spiritum)*, and he says of the three witnesses, the Spirit, the water and the blood, that 'these three are one'.[3] but Christ had

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was concluded by a public banquet (v. 11); according to the other by a sacrifice (v. 5). But the word translated 'peace offerings' (Revised Standard Version) is in fact a technical term for the kind of sacrifice which was rounded off by the communion of the people.

[1] And if Christ has offered himself for us, we as christians have still to offer ourselves for him. Certain french theologians express this distinction by saying that Christ's death took place on the cross *en-soi et pour-nous*, whereas by the sacraments it becomes *en-nous et pour-lui*. This is perhaps more precise and more accurate than the traditional distinction between objective and subjective redemption.

[2] Jn 19, 34. [3] 1 Jn 5, 6.

to die in order to send us the Paraclete, and his sacrifice still had to be sacramentalised. This is the work of the Church and the era of the Spirit.

'Consider the sacrifices of Israel', St Paul told the corinthians in his instruction on the eucharist, 'are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the alter?'[1] Partners, yes, and united in a real sense with God; but the new covenant was to be more permanent and more intimate, its charter was to be written in the hearts of men and not upon stone,[2] its priest and victim were to be united in the single person of the Son of God, its communion was to be a sharing in the life of God himself. Finally, the partners in this covenant were to be 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people'[3] in a fuller and more definitive sense than the israelites of the exodus:[4] 'If the first covenant had been faultless there would have been no occasion for a second'.[5]

St Paul is proud to be a minister of this new covenant, which consists 'not in a written code, but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life'.[6] 'A new heart I will give you', the prophet Ezekiel had said, 'and a new spirit I will put within you, and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh'.[7] The Ten Commandments, written upon stone tablets, were all very well for hearts of stone, but for hearts of flesh the only suitable charter was the law of the Spirit of life.[8] We have seen that on Calvary Christ yielded up his Spirit to his Father; risen and exalted at the right hand of God, he in his turn receives the Holy Spirit from the Father, this time not for himself alone but to pour out on mankind, as he did at Pentecost.[9] The gift Christ makes to his Father is returned in abundance; and in his new existence, no longer confined within the narrow limits of Palestine, he can effectively establish the new covenant in the hearts of men. 'If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you'.[10] What Christ was unable to achieve alone on earth becomes possible now that he has called in another to help him. He died and rose again to bring many sons to glory,[11] to sanctify them,[12] to perfect those who are sanctified:[13] in a word 'to

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[1] 1 Cor 10, 18.
[2] Cf Jer 31, 31–34, of which a slightly adapted version is quoted in Heb 8, 8 ff.
[3] 1 Pet 2, 9. [4] Cf Exod 19, 5–6. [5] Heb 8, 7. [6] 2 Cor 3, 6.
[7] Ezek 36, 26. [8] Cf Rom 8, 2. [9] Acts 2, 33. [10] Rom 8, 11.
[11] Cf Heb 2, 10. [12] Cf Jn 17, 19; Heb 10, 10. [13] Cf Heb 10, 14.

bring us to God';[1] and this work of perfection, of sanctification and of re-creation is traditionally that of the Holy Spirit.

But above all the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of love: of love and of union. 'Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold thy glory which thou hast given me in thy love before the foundation of the world . . . that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them'.[2] What else can this love be but the Holy Spirit in person? And once this love is truly in us then we too, like the Son, will be able to offer to God the perfect sacrifice, no longer as an external rite but as the living expression of our true selves; 'conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren'.[3]

Gift, expiation, communion: the three aims of the sacrifices of Israel are achieved in the single sacrifice of Christ, where, though still distinguishable, they are no longer distinct. The high-priest of the Epistle to the Hebrews makes his offering to God, but he does so on behalf of men. The vertical relationship which links Christ with his Father makes no sense in terms of his sacrifice apart from the horizontal relationship that links him with mankind. Upright and cross-piece make one cross, on which Christ looks up to his Father whilst stretching out his arms to embrace the world. For he does not act alone: his sacrifice, offered in the name of us all, is intended to transform us all. 'For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified'.[4] His gift to God was his own life and ours, and his death gives meaning to ours.

God planned from all eternity to give man a share in his own life, to make us truly his sons. The dynamism of this plan, centred upon Christ, has never faltered; but man's sin introduced a new strand into the design, so that we are now not just sons but pardoned sons. Sonship and pardon remain the warp and the woof of a web in which the Church sees Adam's sin as 'a happy fault'. *O felix culpa*! *O certe necessarium Adae peccatum*![5] Woven into a single glorious pattern, pardon and sonship are held together in the outcome of Christ's saving work. The English word atonement, which now means propitiation, originally meant at-one-ment – union. Language, aware that the union depends upon the pardon, strives to re-weave the pattern of divine revelation; and so, through grace, does the life of the christian, who makes Christ's sacrifice his own.

[1] 1 Pet 3, 18. [2] Jn 17, 24–26. [3] Rom 8, 29.
[4] Heb 10, 14. [5] The *Exultet*.