

TWO VIEWS OF THE MASS: MEDIEVAL LINGUISTIC AMBIGUITIES

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THE PURPOSE of this article is to give a summary sketch and evaluation of some of the main Catholic theological explanations of the Eucharistic sacrifice from the time of St. Thomas and, in the second part, to relate the findings of this inquiry to the important question, just now so topical, whether there is any sound basis for the Anglican claim that the thirty-first of their Thirty-nine Articles of Religion was, on its negative side, directed less against the traditional orthodox doctrine of the Mass than against a rather confused and unsatisfactory popular theology of the Mass current in the late Middle Ages.

Both for priests and people "it is the Mass that matters," and it is rather surprising how comparatively rarely sermons are preached upon "this sacrament of our redemption," as it happens to be called in the Secret for this day¹ on which I unlimber my typewriter. One reason for this rarity may be the almost bewilderingly rich variety of theories about the Mass which have now prevailed for some considerable time. The preacher may even be uncertain which theory he favors himself; and even if he confidently holds one view, he may well feel diffident about combining in a sermon (which has its own kind of literary and emotional unity) both the Church's authoritative teaching and a particular theological explanation of it—especially as he knows that, whichever theory he chooses to enlarge upon to excite and satisfy devotion, there will be a considerable weight of theological opinion against it.

THE COUNCIL OF TRENT

In Session 22 (Sept. 17, 1562) the Council of Trent defined that at the Last Supper our Lord left to His Church a visible sacrifice by which the bloody sacrifice He was about to offer once for all upon the cross for the world's ransom (*a*) should be represented, (*b*) its solemn memorial (*memoria*) should endure forever, and (*c*) its saving power

¹ March 7, being the feast of St. Thomas Aquinas and the Tuesday after the third Sunday in Lent.

(*salutaris virtus*) should be applied unto the remission of our daily sins. To these ends Jesus Christ, intimating that He was made a priest forever in the succession of Melchisedech, offered to His heavenly Father His body and blood under the symbols of bread and wine and commanded His apostles and their successors in the priesthood to continue this offering (sacrifice?: *offerrent*). Thereby He instituted a new Passover festival and a new Passover Lamb: "seipsum ab ecclesia per sacerdotes sub signis visibilibus immolandum in memoriam transitus sui ex hoc mundo ad Patrem, quando per sui sanguinis effusionem nos redemit." In the same session the Council taught that the Mass is a genuine sacrifice, properly so called. Moreover, it is a propitiatory sacrifice, for in it the same Christ is contained and bloodlessly immolated who offered Himself once for all in the bloody sacrifice of the cross; and God, appeased by the Sacrifice of the Mass, grants the grace of repentance. Further, in the Mass both priest and victim are the same as on Calvary; only the manner of offering is different. Finally, the Mass is not a mere commemoration (*nudam commemorationem*) of Calvary, but is truly propitiatory.²

The first impression left by a reading of the Tridentine decrees is that the Council defined the question fairly stringently and left little room for speculation. But that, as we all know, has not proved to be the case. For the Council's teaching is presumably compatible with the doctrine of St. Thomas, and it has at least been judged compatible with the numerous theories which have flourished freely since. Notable among these theories are that of Fr. Maurice de la Taille, the "mystery-presence" theory attributed to Dom Odo Casel, those recent theories which place the main emphasis on the persevering dispositions of Christ's sacrificial will, and even the "quasi destruction" theories of St. Robert Bellarmine and Cardinal de Lugo—although most of us would probably subscribe to Masure's severe strictures on this last type of theory. Nevertheless, I believe that the Fathers of Trent would have been surprised if they had foreseen how very variously their teaching about the Mass was to be interpreted in succeeding centuries. And yet, paradoxically, this variety of theories is partly traceable to the language of the Council, which later theologians have found to be not free from ambiguity. For my part, although I think

² Cf. *DB* 938, 940, 948, 950.

that the Council's language about immolation and oblation is not perfectly clear, I can find no such ambiguity in its teaching as would justify the quite remarkably different ways in which it has been interpreted. As I read it, it simply restates and defines the doctrine of the Mass which was taught in the first Christian centuries and was repeated by St. Thomas, whose Eucharistic teaching summed and systematized the tradition of the Fathers and of the early Schoolmen.

ST. THOMAS SAYS YES AND NO

Indeed, St. Thomas, I suggest, provides the clue to the correct interpretation of the teaching of the Council of Trent. In a very important passage, which I suspect has played a large part in the subsequent history of the theology of the Mass, St. Thomas asks the question "whether Christ is immolated in the Mass" and gives an answer that is extremely interesting.³ His answer may be summarized: "Yes, and that in two ways. First, the Mass is a sort of representation or portrayal (*imago quaedam repraesentativa*) of the passion of Christ, and therefore may reasonably and rightly be called a sacrifice. For when we are shown two statues representing Sallust and Cicero, we rightly say of the one, 'This is Sallust,' and of the other, 'That is Cicero.' For it is linguistically correct to apply to *imagines* the predicates which belong to their originals. Secondly, with reference to the *effect* of the Passion; for in the Mass we partake of the fruits of the Lord's passion, and so *opus nostrae redemptionis exercetur.*"

What is remarkable about this passage is that, drawing inspiration from a passage of St. Augustine about *imagines*, St. Thomas, in affirming the Mass to be a *vera immolatio*, virtually confesses to using language in a way which, although idiomatically correct, would, if pressed as a literal statement, be highly misleading. And let us admit straightway that St. Thomas was right. In his usage, as in ordinary usage, *immolare*, in the case of a living victim, means "to slay." And it is certain, on the one hand, that the Mass is a true sacrifice, and equally certain, on the other, that in the Mass Christ is not slain. We may perhaps venture to say that in this matter traditional linguistic orthodoxy demands the use of language in a slightly Pickwickian sense.

³ *Sum. theol.* 3, q. 83, a. 1.

That, at least, is the way we naturally read the passage today, conditioned as we are in our ways of thinking and speaking by the Reformation and post-Reformation controversies and theorizing. *We* think of the question, "Is Christ (really, literally) slain in the Mass?" as a real question that could conceivably be asked (even if only by heretics) and answered. Consequently, since *immolare* throughout this article of St. Thomas clearly means "to slay" (not just "to offer"), we interpret his answer as "Yes, but meaning No." For St. Thomas' answer is that in the Eucharist Christ *is* slain, and that *duplici ratione*; but it turns out that neither of the ways or senses mentioned by him, nor both together, warrant our saying, in ordinary language, that Christ is (really) slain. To that question, in our ordinary speech conventions, the answer (if we have to give a yes or no answer) is "No."

But this, although important and illuminating, is probably slightly to misread the passage. For in the High Middle Ages the question whether Christ is literally slain in the Mass would not normally be asked in respectable theological circles. Probably, therefore, we should read St. Thomas' answer rather thus: "Of course, Christ is *not* literally slain or crucified in the Mass (if that is really your question)—God forbid! But in sacramental language—and I presume that you are speaking sacramentally—the answer is 'Yes,' since in the Mass Christ's historical death on the cross is shown forth, and we partake of the fruits of that death." Now, from the literalist standpoint this second consideration was felt to be quite irrelevant, since it clearly goes no distance at all to warrant the proposition that Christ is literally slain in the Mass; but in the characteristically existentialist approach of sacramental theory and language it is highly relevant. Consequently, the two considerations, when taken closely together, fully justify us in calling the Mass a sacramental immolation of Christ.

I believe that much subsequent thinking and puzzlement about the theology of the Mass is due to a failure to notice that it is for just these two reasons (though the real presence of Christ is also relevant) that St. Thomas says (repeating traditional sacramental language) that Christ is immolated in the Mass. He does not say that He is immolated because He is offered (as He is, literally), nor does he equate immolation with offering in this context.

THE HEILSGESCHICHTE

The New Covenant stands in sharp contrast with the Old. The Old Dispensation was a time of waiting and hope, of expectation and desire, of promise and prophecy. The New Covenant is a time of possession, joy, and fulfilment: no longer a time of shadows and figures, but of substance and performance. It is the fulness of time.⁴ This is marked by a change of tense: no longer "He will come," but "He has come: we have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote."⁵ Even after Christ's ascension the time of the New Covenant continues. We must not, therefore, depreciate the sacraments or the time of the Church. We must not think of this present stretch in the history of salvation in any Protestant way as a mere "time between the times," no more than a parenthesis period during which the Church looks wistfully back to her Lord's first coming and forward to His return. Nor may the sacraments be regarded as mere memorials of that past and pledges of that future.

But neither should we misconceive the nature of this "fulness" of which "we have all received."⁶ It is, for instance, true, and an important truth, that some of the key words in sacramental theory—notably, *imago* (Gk., *eikōn*), *repraesentare*, *memoriale* or *commemoratio* (Gk., *anamnēsis*)—have a richness of meaning far beyond their English counterparts. But it is equally important not to exaggerate this, nor to suppose that in the sacraments the mysteries of our Lord's life on earth are literally renewed and are present in their physical actuality. Such inflationary theories deviate from the truth by excess, just as the Protestant type of theory deviates by defect, and sin no less against St. Augustine's warning: "Distingue tempora." Imperiling the Christian understanding of time and of the history of salvation (*Heilsgeschichte*), such theories risk making the time of the Church and of the sacraments (which has its own peculiar glory) a mere duplicate of Christ's natural life on earth, and so of stultifying both. Such thinking derogates from the *ephapax*⁷ of the New Testament, the once-for-all character of the saving act of Christ.

⁴ Eph 1:10.⁵ Lk 7:34; Jn 1:45.⁶ Jn 1:16.⁷ Cf. Rom 6:10; Heb 7:27; 9:12; 10:10.

LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS AND THE HEILSGESCHICHTE

Yet the temptation to think in this way is no fiction. I remember myself having to preach upon the Mass shortly after my ordination and being uncomfortably conscious that the conservative Thomist-Tridentine theory which I had been taught by an admirable theologian hardly measured up to the sublimity of my theme and the expectations of my congregation. So I sought inspiration from a senior missionary who was something of a theologian, and accepted with gratitude and enthusiasm his comment: "I always explain the Mass as a 're-calling' of Calvary." This was illumination indeed; only a little hyphen and the whole theology was transformed. I had a viable idea for my sermon. But, alas, the little hyphen does transform the theory; and awe and bad theology compensate ill for lack of understanding. *Commemoratio* does not mean a re-calling, but a recalling, and the richness and pregnancy of this commemoration of Calvary in the Mass consists rather in the fact that the glorious "Hero of Calvary," He who is forever the Crucified and Risen One, is there really present amidst the Church which His passion and resurrection called into being, and there dispenses to His bride, with hands that still bear the scars of their piercing, the fruits of His passion.

Similarly with the little hyphen in "re-present." Nowhere, I think, in St. Thomas's discussion of the Eucharist, nor generally in patristic literature, does *repraesentare* bear this meaning in relation to the Passion. Even in classical Latin, when *repraesentare* means "bring back," it is commonly the thought or imagination or memory of the object, not the thing itself, that is revived.⁸

It is true that in Christian literature an *imago* or (particularly) *eikōn* is commonly thought of as being more than a mere mirror image, as, rather, either containing or partaking of the reality of which it is the image. But what is universally true of an *eikōn* is only that it is thought of as reproducing, in some manner or degree, the nature, features, or qualities of its original. The degree, however, of an *eikōn*'s participation, and the level of reality of its subject, depends upon the matter in which it is received (or of which it consists). And the range of variation is very great. Thus, Christ is several times in the New

⁸ Cf. Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford, 1958) s.v.

Testament spoken of as the *eikōn* of God, and Adam bore a son, Seth, after his own image and likeness. But, on the other hand, Adam was made in the image of God, and the coin which the Pharisees brought to our Lord bore the image of Caesar.⁹ It would appear, therefore, that we must first establish our sacramental theory and thence determine the precise force of *eikōn* and *imago* in the context of sacramental language, rather than the other way around.

Just as *eikōn* means far more than a bare symbol, so also *repraesentare* is a pregnant word in sacramental theology. In the case of both words, we should distinguish between their use in relation to a mystery of our Lord's life (and it is particularly the Passion that is relevant) and their use in relation to the grace-effect (*res*) as mediated in the sacrament by the saving power of the Passion and Resurrection. Clearly, both the grace-effect and the radiant energy of the Passion and Resurrection are literally realized or re-presented, as, for instance, in baptism. But I will be brave and hazard the negative generalization that there is no single passage in any first-class source which unambiguously speaks of the Passion-event, more specifically the historical slaying of Christ on Calvary, as being literally re-presented—and still less, of course, as being repeated.¹⁰ I take it that when in the liturgy, as in the Secret of the feast of Christ the King or of Sts. Chrysanthus and Daria (October 25), there is mention of the "immolation" of a victim, either *immolare* is being used as a synonym of *offerre* or it is being used, in a loosely rhetorical sense, of the commemorative sacrifice in which both the victim and the fruits of Calvary are really contained. Similarly, St. Cyril of Jerusalem (or possibly his successor John) speaks almost as if Christ lay slain upon the altar: *Christon esphagiasmenon . . . prosperomen*;¹¹ and no doubt there are other similar passages in the Fathers. But this passage can, and should, be translated: "We offer Christ who has been (i.e., was once) slain," or "We offer the Crucified One."

Finally, a word about the formula *immolatio mystica*. This is an attractive phrase when used to express St. Thomas' clearly defined

⁹ 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15; Gn 1:26; 5:3; Mt 22:20.

¹⁰ Not so brave; cf. Pius XI, *Mediator Dei*: "At the altar a real shedding of His blood is impossible" (*AAS* 39 [1947] 548).

¹¹ *Cat. myst.* 5, 10. The phrase establishes a link with Ap 5:6, 12.

concept of the Eucharistic sacrifice, but it is less desirable when it is used with overtones deliberately calculated to suggest, without definitely asserting, either the "re-presentation" theory or some theory midway between the traditional and the re-presentation theories. Such a midway theory appears to be liable to the following objections: (1) it is undefinable; (2) it becomes objectionable in proportion as it is inflated and approaches the re-presentation theory (cf. *infra*).

St. Thomas was sound on the *Heilsgeschichte*. He repeatedly emphasizes the pastness and once-for-allness of the mysteries of our Lord's earthly life, and he duly "distinguishes the times." In a notable passage he distinguishes between the *umbræ* of the Old Testament, the *imagines* of the New Covenant, and the reality, or "the things themselves" (*veritas*), the vision of which belongs to future glory.¹²

By His death and resurrection Christ conquered sin and death, and won for the world newness of life. His ascension inaugurated a new phase in the history of salvation. In this phase Christ, while withdrawing His visible presence, continues, through His Holy Spirit, His redeeming activity in the Church by the sacraments. There, by the virtue of His passion, He perennially renews this newness of life for every generation of His redeemed. It is the saving and sanctifying power of His passion and resurrection that is perpetuated forever. "Passio autem eius," says St. Thomas, quoting Heb 10:14, "non habuit temporalem virtutem et transitoriam, sed sempiternam."¹³ But as for the Passion itself, "temporaliter transivit, inducens nos in quietem sabbati spiritualis."¹⁴

¹² *Sum. theol.* 1-2, q. 101, a. 2. Though his terminology was different, St. Augustine was also sound on the *Heilsgeschichte*; he distinguished between (1) the promises, figures, or foreshadowings of the Old Covenant, (2) the fulfilment or reality (*veritas*) in Christ, and (3) the commemoration or remembrance (*memoria*) in the time of the Church: "huius sacrificii caro et sanguis ante adventum Christi per victimas similitudinum promittebatur; in passione Christi per ipsam veritatem reddebatur; post ascensum Christi per sacramentum memoriae celebratur" (*Contra Faustum* 20, 21, according to the Paris [1836-39], Venice [1729-34], Lyons [1664], and Basel [1542] editions; the Migne text (*PL* 42, 385) in the Paris 1900 edition (but not the 1865 version) garbles the passage and "confuses the times" by jumbling together the second and third clauses: "in passione Christi per sacramentum memoriae celebratur").

¹³ *Sum. theol.* 3, q. 52, a. 8 c.

¹⁴ *Sum. theol.* 1-2, q. 100, a. 5, ad 2m. Both Thomas and Augustine distinguish four "times"—for in "the fulness of time" there are three moments: (1) the *OT* prefigurement,

LESS SATISFACTORY THEORIES

In St. Thomas' doctrine, then, we have all the elements and distinctions necessary for a satisfactory theology of the Mass; and I believe that "deviationist" theories have sprung either from an unreasonable discontent with his doctrine or from a neglect of his distinctions. For St. Thomas, the Mass is a true sacrifice, and he defines it as a sacrifice commemorative and representative of the Passion—a commemoration, moreover, in which *Christus passus* (but not *patiens*) is actually present, the fruits of Calvary are applied, and God is appeased.

Some theologians (including perhaps the justly renowned Dom Odo Casel) elaborated the "mystery-presence" theory, according to which in the Mass the passion and death of Christ are really present in all their physical reality, though in a timeless moment. That is, the Mass is not a repetition of Calvary, it simply *is* Calvary brought to our present in a mysterious manner that transcends space and time. The objections to this view are that (1) it offends against the *Heilsgeschichte*, being incompatible with the Christian view of time and history; (2) it misconceives the sacramental economy by failing to distinguish between the salvation-event and its (really present) subject or "hero" and fruits; (3) it is incompatible precisely with this real presence of Christ taken together with the sequence of the Creed: "was crucified . . . rose . . . ascended . . . sits (i.e., is in glory)": just because Christ is *really* present, He must be the glorified Christ—and

(2) the *NT* fulfilment, which bases and inaugurates (3) the time of the Holy Spirit, in which the Church lives by the sacraments and already enjoys an effective foretaste of (4) the time of the final consummation and the spiritual sabbath. Cf. Augustine: (The *OT* sacrifices are the) "praedicamenta venturi unius verissimi sacrificii quod pro peccatis omnium credentium offerri oporteret. . . . Hebraei . . . prophetiam celebrabant futurae victimae, quam Christus obtulit. Unde iam christiani peracti eiusdem sacrificii memoriam celebrant, sacrosancta oblatione et participatione corporis et sanguinis Christi" (*Contra Faustum* 20, 18 [*PL* 42, 382-83]). The sacraments and their symbolism have reference to these three moments. Cf. the "O sacrum convivium" and the Corpus Christi and Benediction prayer "Deus qui nobis." While sacraments produce the grace-effect they symbolize, not all their symbolism is performatory. In an important passage (*Sum. theol.* 3, q. 60, a. 3) St. Thomas relates the symbolism of the sacraments in general to the three times or moments: "Unde sacramentum est et signum rememorative eius quod praecessit, scilicet passionis Christi [the cause of our sanctification]; et demonstrativum eius quod in nobis efficitur per Christi passionem, scilicet gratiae; et prognosticum, id est praenuntiativum, futurae gloriae." In q. 78, a. 3, he applies this to the form in the consecration of the chalice.

the crucified Christ can hardly be really present as well, except in the sense of the Crucified (and Risen) One; (4) (and this perhaps explains the origin of the theory) it unwarrantably extends to every aspect of the Eucharist a theory (the Thomist-Billot theory) originally framed to explain the manner of the glorified Christ's existence in the sacrament.

Like St. Thomas, de la Taille recognized that an immolation is necessary to the *idea* of the Eucharistic sacrifice, and, on the other hand, that the historical sacrifice of Calvary cannot be repeated or perpetuated. He failed, however, to see that a commemorative sacrifice, with a symbolic or sacramental immolation, an *imago repraesentativa*, is sufficient, and alone appropriate, in the time of the Church.

In consequence of pitching his theoretical (or verbal) requirements too high, he elaborated, in a great book, a theory in which neither the Last Supper nor the Mass nor even Calvary itself is, by his own definition, a sacrifice.

The theory which emphasizes almost exclusively the enduring nature of Christ's interior dispositions and sacrificial will, while it is saying something important, confuses the issue and distorts the pattern of Eucharistic theory. Since the Mass is the central act of Christian worship and the Passion-Resurrection group of events is the center of the world's history (and of the biblical *Heilsgeschichte*), the Mass consists essentially in some relation to these events. The question is: what relation? When the emphasis on dispositions is linked to the concrete biblical image of the Passover Lamb of the new Passover and the "Lamb standing as slain" of the Apocalypse, the theory makes a genuine contribution. But it is less satisfactory when it either plays down the past historical reference or, neglecting the distinction marked by Phil 2:7-11, obscures the glorified state of Him who comes in the Eucharist. For the best brief "word" or "device" of the Mass is the phrase from the Easter sequence: *Dux vitae mortuus regnat vivus*. Historically, this "sacrificial will" theory appears to have originated as a result of imaginary problems, and more particularly as a reaction against immolationist theories. Finally, the sort of emphasis it puts on dispositions is more appropriate to priest and people in their offering of the Church's sacrifice.

Both the theory of the Mass and the linguistic *usus fidelium* imply

that the notion of sacrifice is doubly analogical. When we view the Mass as a relative sacrifice, the *ratio formalis* of sacrifice includes the concept of immolation, and this concept is verified differently in the historical sacrifice and in its *imago repraesentativa*. This is the analogy of original and image. But it is only in this relation to Calvary that Calvary is the model, so that immolation belongs to the idea of sacrifice. In the Mass as the absolute, present sacrifice of the Church, there is oblation without immolation. This is the analogy of synecdoche.

It is important to observe that when I praise St. Thomas, I praise him, not for verbally affirming that Christ is immolated in the Mass, but for (virtually) denying it; not for asserting that the Mass is "one and the same sacrifice with that of the cross," but for denying it. The latter passage is worth quoting: "Sacrificium autem quod quotidie in ecclesia offertur non est aliud a sacrificio quod ipse Christus obtulit, sed eius commemoratio."¹⁵ "Its commemoration, and therefore the same!" This is a surprising use of language, to say the least. The editorial note in the manual Leonine edition provides an instructive commentary. It may be paraphrased: "Both the original sacrifice and its memorial are true sacrifices. They are 'one and the same' in respect of the victim, the principal offerer, and also *quantum ad virtutem et valorem*. They differ in manner, and as original and representation differ, and in that the Mass applies the satisfaction which the cross made." This is an excellent statement, except that the assertion of identity in respect of *valor* needs qualification. But how ambiguous and misleading it is to speak *tout court* of Calvary and the Mass being "one and the same sacrifice," when all these qualifications and distinctions, some of which go very deep indeed, have to be made to make the phrase true!

St. Thomas was a polite and peaceful man who would not readily quarrel with phrases consecrated by tradition and authority. And already by his time these two phrases were contained (with the appropriate qualifications) in Peter the Lombard's *Book of Sentences*, which was used by medieval professors of theology as a sort of class textbook.¹⁶ So St. Thomas, instead of protesting against the unsatis-

¹⁵ *Sum. theol.* 3, q. 22, a. 3, ad 2m. Cf. 3, q. 73, a. 4, ad 3m: "Hoc sacramentum dicitur 'sacrificium' in quantum repraesentat ipsam passionem Christi."

¹⁶ *Sent.* 4, d. 12, c. 5.

factory and dangerous ambiguity of the traditional language, adopted the phrases, while emphasizing that Christ is *not* actually immolated (slain) in the Mass, and that the Mass is *not* (in the obvious sense of the phrase) the same sacrifice as Calvary.

But, plain as St. Thomas made his real meaning, his refusal to protest against the misleading character of the traditional expressions appears to have had important consequences. For, clear as the real doctrine remained at the highest levels and in the limpid atmosphere of the schools, such linguistic ambiguities can hardly have failed to create confusion at the lower theological levels, and even more in the popular mind and the devotional thinking of pew and pulpit. And unfortunately, there was a time not so far away when precisely these questions—whether it could properly be said that Christ is immolated in the Mass, or that the Mass is the same sacrifice as Calvary—would be very actual questions indeed. These were merely linguistic confusions, doubtless, yet confusions on which Western Christianity was to be split asunder and (humanly speaking) all but founder. And not altogether owing to the perversity of the Reformers; for right up to our own day these same ambiguities have led even Catholic theologians to toy with “re-presentation” theories.

We also praise St. Thomas for distinguishing between “sacrifice” or “immolate” and “offer” in this context, and for refusing to save the two phrases just discussed at the price of introducing an additional ambiguity through the equating of sacrifice with offering (which is but one element in sacrifice).

ST. THOMAS AND THE COUNCIL OF TRENT

It has been suggested above that the teaching of the Council of Trent upon the Mass is objectively free from ambiguity in the sense that it is possible, by a careful study of it, to ascertain that it is substantially the same as the teaching of St. Thomas. Yet it would appear, in the light of Catholic post-Tridentine theological speculation about the Mass, that the Council’s choice of terminology has in fact sometimes misled theologians. The reason probably lies in the Council’s departure, in certain points, from the terminology of St. Thomas. The Council abstained—probably on account of the Reformers’ liking for the word “commemoration”—from the distinction, which goes

back at least to the Early Middle Ages, between the historical and the commemorative sacrifice, and used instead a distinction between the bloody and the bloodless sacrifice. Secondly, it blurred the Thomistic distinction between immolation and oblation by using *immolare* and *offerre* practically as synonyms (St. Thomas could hardly have used the phrase *incruente immolatur* of a human victim). The change of usage here comes out most clearly in the phrase *sola offerendi ratione diversa* (and what a world of difference is signified by that little word "only"!), which corresponds to St. Thomas' distinction between the bloody *immolatio* and its sacramental *imago repraesentativa*. For (1) the difference that it is natural to describe in English as a difference of *offering* has already been signalized in the same sentence (*sacerdotum ministerio*); (2) the Council proceeds immediately to specify the different *rationem offerendi* by distinguishing between the *oblationis cruentae* and *incruentam*.

Finally (and this change also had its reverberations in subsequent history) there is, by comparison with St. Thomas, a linguistic difference of emphasis where the Council, in its third canon, insists that the Mass is not a "mere commemoration" (*nudam commemorationem*) of Calvary—where, however, the operative word is *nudam*, for the following words, *non autem propitiatorium*, show that what the Council had in mind was any denial that the Sacrifice of the Mass is propitiatory. For in the Mass Christ comes in the saving power of His passion, which made Him a Victim, and in the glory of His resurrection, which made Him an acceptable Victim.

BEING FAIR TO THE ANGLICANS

We now approach the very actual question, whether there is any solid basis for the Anglican claim, advanced by many of the Tractarians, later by J. B. Mozley, and quite recently by F. C. N. Hicks and E. L. Mascall, that in the period leading up to the Reformation there was so much confusion about the theology of the Mass, and the traditional Catholic teaching had become so obscured, that the Anglican Reformers genuinely misconceived the character of medieval Catholic worship.¹⁷ What they rejected, therefore, it is claimed, was

¹⁷ Cf. J. B. Mozley, *Lectures and Other Theological Papers* (London, 1883); F. C. N. Hicks, *The Fullness of Sacrifice* (London, 1953); E. L. Mascall, *Christ, the Christian and the Church* (London, 1946) and *The Recovery of Unity* (London, 1958).

not the Eucharistic sacrifice itself, but certain extreme notions of it together with superstitious and unedifying practices connected with it. The contention is that at a time when the whole question of sacrifice, and particularly the question of the relation of the Mass to Calvary, was confused by ambiguous formulas, the Reformers justifiably returned to the expressions of the primitive Church and, pending the clarification of the theology of the Eucharistic sacrifice, took refuge in the more apophatic formulas.

It should already be clear that there is certainly *some* basis for this claim, even though the degree of its justification is a further question. The first part of this article has shown that at least from the time of St. Thomas there were, in connection with the Eucharistic sacrifice, quite profound ambiguities of language. The Church's official teaching, needless to say, never wavered in orthodoxy, but then there was little strictly official teaching on the subject before the Reformation; Denzinger shows no official documents relating to the Eucharistic sacrifice before the thirteenth century, and then the doctrine was couched in rather general terms.

Most spectacular among the anomalies cited above (and Part 1 needs to be read to appreciate the force and edge of the argument of this second part) is the really startling linguistic ambiguity revealed in the passage where St. Thomas, asking whether Christ is immolated (slain) in the Mass, answers "Yes," but immediately goes on to explain that in the ordinary, literal sense of the question the answer is "No." Later doctors continued this linguistic usage, and while they generally added the proper explanations and qualifications, it is easy to see that the use of a formula which, taken in its natural sense, carries a meaning so repugnant to a healthy and enlightened Christian feeling, could lead to most regrettable results. It invited misunderstanding, and the theologians would not always be there to supply the proper interpretation.

Again, there was the other current phrase, no less charged with dynamite at a time when, owing to the translations of Tyndale and Coverdale, the New Testament was coming to be more widely read and the implications of the *Heilsgeschichte* more widely appreciated. This phrase also, "The Mass is one and the same sacrifice with that of the cross," is perfectly orthodox when properly explained, but, if

taken in its natural sense, is offensive to pious ears. For the most conspicuous feature of the sacrifice of the cross is the crucifixion. If orthodoxy had expressed itself, not in the misleading language of identity, but by the rich, apophatic, and accurate concept of *koinōnia* (participation, fellowship, communion) and had explained that we—not perpetuate but—experience and appropriate Christ's sacrifice, would there ever have been a Reformation?

Thirdly, and probably stemming from these two ambiguities, there is the line of thought, discussed above, which constructs maximizing, inflationary theories of the Mass by interpreting *memoria* as "a recalling" and *repraesentare* as "re-present"—and the verbally slight change implies a rather radically new view. The most natural way for this theory to arise is as follows: Attempting an orthodox explanation of the formula that "Christ is immolated in the Mass," it is natural to say that He is immolated sacramentally, or *in sacramento*, or, using the Greek equivalent, "in a mystery." Now, in sound theology, all these (equivalent) phrases modify the verb internally, so that the requisite distinction between the historical event of the crucifixion and its saving power and fruits is duly made. But the last two of them can be confusing; for "in" is ambiguous. We say that we saw Peter in a looking glass, or in our mind's eye, or in the library; or even that he went off in a huff. Now it is tempting to interpret *immolatur in mysterio* in the third sense, then make a verbal connection with the mysteries of our Lord's earthly life, next establish a link with an inflated concept of *imago*, and finally conclude that the phrase (of St. Augustine) *immolatur in mysterio* means that the Calvary-event is, in some literal sense, though outside space and time, actually contained "in the sacrament"—all the more so since in actual fact Christ Himself is so contained. Perhaps this was why St. Thomas (at least in the article discussed above) did not adopt Peter Lombard's phrase *immolatur in sacramento*. Certainly, it is remarkable that even today Catholic theologians sometimes speak of the Mass as "the perpetuation of Calvary" (and I confess that I have in the past been guilty of this inaccurate expression myself), even after we have been alerted by the protests of the Reformation against such language.

These, then, are the "two theories" of my title: the sober Thomist-Tridentine theory and any form of the "re-presentation" theory.

And it is important to recognize that there is a very great difference, at least in certain respects, between the two theories.

What, then, of the Anglican P. G. Medd's contention that the Thirty-first Article's rejection of "sacrifices of Masses" is to be explained not as a rejection of basic Eucharistic orthodoxy, but as a revulsion against any notion that Christ is somehow slain in the Mass?¹⁸ Or of Dr. Mascall's view that certain aspects of Eucharistic doctrine had, by the Late Middle Ages, become so confused, especially in the popular mind, that the sixteenth-century controversy was largely a "battle in the dark"?

It is more than ever important at the present time to study this question dispassionately, setting aside, so far as is humanly possible, all natural partisanship. This, if ever, is a time for truth. At the outset, then, it must be allowed that it would be hard to conceive any theological situation more fertile in the possibility of genuine confusions and misunderstandings than the situation sketched above. For there we find, not merely a marked difference, but a contradiction, between orthodox thought and orthodox formulas, or between the canonized formulas and the natural expression, in ordinary speech, of the truths which they sought to convey.

These formulas were, of course, perfectly orthodox in themselves, as we have seen. St. Thomas himself spoke of the identity of the Sacrifice of the Mass and the sacrifice of the cross; Pope Leo XIII spoke of it in a letter to the Scottish Bishops in 1898:

That very same sacrifice [of the cross] is continued by the Eucharistic sacrifice . . . nor is it in any way another expiation, but the very same, that is present in the Eucharistic sacrifice. The sacrifice consummated once upon the cross . . . is made perpetual in the Holy Eucharist, which brings not merely a figure or empty commemoration (*nudam commemorationem*) of the reality, but the reality itself, although under a different appearance.¹⁹

But it is equally clear that this expression *could* easily be misleading, and consequently it is interesting to notice that the same formula was used by Gabriel Biel, whose influence was so great in the Late Middle Ages, and was a commonplace by the end of the fifteenth century, as

¹⁸ Cf. Medd's essay, "The Eucharistic Sacrifice," in *The Church and the World*, edited by O. Shipley (London, 1866).

¹⁹ Letter to the Bishops of Scotland, 1898; *Leonis XIII acta* 18, 110-11.

Fr. Clark shows in his recent book.²⁰ Orthodox as the phrase is, it urgently needs qualification and explanation; were these always supplied in popular theology? It is significant that even so intelligent a man as J. B. Mozley was genuinely mistaken about the true meaning of this phrase when he declared that popular belief before the Reformation led towards "the extreme and monstrous conclusion that the Sacrifice of the Mass is the very same with that upon the Cross."²¹

Was the situation further complicated by the rise, in the period preceding the Reformation, of the theory familiar in modern times as the "re-presentation" theory? Here again, Fr. Clark's book shows that it was. While saluting, however, the publication of this book, it would be disingenuous not to say frankly that, in the judgment of the present writer, the interesting material it contains, so far from leading to the conclusion which the author draws from it, points in the diametrically opposite direction. I venture this remark with respect, in the knowledge that Fr. Clark is too good a scholar not to agree that *magis amica veritas*, and in the not unfounded hope (for, after all, *et in Arcadia ego*) that he may even reconsider the question.

It would appear, therefore, that in the course of the Middle Ages there did emerge—though perhaps not at the higher theological levels—one development of the greatest importance in respect of the Eucharistic sacrifice. Namely, St. Thomas' admirable theology of the Mass underwent a subtle transformation—just as, given the terminological situation, could almost have been predicted—and became the very different "re-presentation" theory. Just such a type of theory, Fr. Clark tells us, was actually one of the two dominant theories of the Mass in the Late Middle Ages.²² According to this general type of theory, the Mass is not a mere representation of Calvary, but "its actual *re*-presentation. . . . As by transubstantiation there is brought about another 'real presence in place' of Christ's one glorious body in heaven, so by the sacramental separation of the species in the twofold

²⁰ Francis Clark, *Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Reformation* (London and Westminster, Md., 1960) p. 85. Cf. pp. 243-47, where Fr. Clark himself champions the "identity" of the Mass and the cross, and attributes this doctrine to the Council of Trent (DB 940, 950); but Trent here speaks of the same priest and victim, not of the same sacrifice.

²¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 216.

²² *Op. cit.*, pp. 264-65. Of course, "re-presentation" in the quite different sense of a reoffering or pleading of Calvary would be unexceptionable.

Eucharistic consecration there is brought about another 'real presence in time' of Christ's one redemptive sacrifice of Calvary."²³ This theory, therefore, clearly teaches that in the Mass Christ is, quite literally, crucified, that in the Mass there is a "bloody mactation." This theory of the literal identity of the Mass and the cross does not, of course, teach a *new* slaying of Christ; nevertheless, a sound Christian instinct rejects it. Moreover, the theory leaves no room for a proper theology of the Resurrection; indeed, it impairs the all-important function of the Risen Christ in the sacramental economy of salvation. There is also the practical objection that it would be extremely difficult to make the less-educated faithful grasp and remember the subtle distinction between the numerical identity of the Mass and the cross, which the theory asserts, and a specific identity, which would make the Mass a *repetition* of Calvary. In any case, the Reformers objected to *any* "bloody mactation" of Christ in the Mass. The admission, therefore, that such a theory was current in the Late Middle Ages virtually concedes the substance of the Anglican contention in its moderate form.

The position may be illustrated from the words of Cranmer: "The papists . . . do say that they make no new sacrifice, nor none other sacrifice than Christ made . . . but they say that they make the selfsame sacrifice for sin that Christ himself made . . . then followeth it of necessity that they every day slay Christ and shed His blood. . . ."²⁴ Cranmer had grasped the distinction between specific and numerical identity, but he still did not like the theory. And the rejection of this theory of re-presentation, perpetuation, or renewal, particularly on these grounds, is, in itself, far from implying a rejection of the moderate, or conservative, Catholic theory of the Mass.

The evidence, then, shows that the Mass was commonly declared to be substantially identical with the sacrifice of the cross (even though saving clauses were almost invariably added by the top theologians) and that it was often explained as being a perpetuation or re-presentation of the one sacrifice. The Catholics were careful to point out that re-presentation is not the same as repetition, but some

²³ *Op. cit.*, pp. 256-57.

²⁴ *Defence of the True and Catholic Doctrine: An Answer unto a Crafty and Sophistical Cavillation by Stephen Gardiner* 5 (*Works* [Parker Society] 1, 348).

of the extant controversies suggest that when they explained this distinction to the Reformers—as they regularly did when challenged—the latter thought the re-presentation theory not only unacceptable, but also so improbable that they sincerely considered the distinction a quibble. In the theology of the Mass, the English Reformers seem to have thought themselves faced with a straight choice, sometimes between a mere commemoration of Calvary and a repetition of Calvary, sometimes between the denial (as they denied) that Christ is slain in the Mass and its affirmation (as it *is* affirmed in the literal re-presentation theory). And the denial of the perpetuation, in any sense, of the Calvary-*event* does not, in itself, imply the denial of the perpetuation of the saving power of Calvary in the Eucharist. This is the attitude expressed by Thomas Becon, Cranmer's chaplain: "The papists cannot be content with this doctrine, that the supper of the Lord . . . should be a memorial or remembrance of that sacrifice which Christ himself offered on the cross; but they will have it the selfsame sacrifice, of the same virtue, strength, efficacy, might and power, to save the souls both of the quick and dead."²⁵

It should be remarked that the line of thought developed in my last paragraphs does not depend, for its validity, on the re-presentation theory being *really* objectionable (and in view of the distinguished theological authority it has enjoyed one would hesitate to assert this), but only on the fact that it seemed to the Reformers to be objectionable and to imperil the gospel and the "once-for-allness" of the Passion and the Redemption. The comment of Becon just cited brings out another source of confusion, namely, the common assertion that the Mass is of "equal value" with the cross; this orthodox formula is somewhat ambiguous, and it is intelligible how, in its "strong" sense, it could give sincere offense to orthodox Christians.

Another possible source of genuine confusion lay in the fact that in English up to the sixteenth century "to offer" and "offering" were synonyms of "sacrifice." *Opfer* was similarly ambiguous in German. This ambiguity is illustrated by the controversy between Zwingli, the Swiss Reformer, and the Catholic apologists. Zwingli, reasonably equating sacrificing with putting to death, argued that, in spite of their protestations, the Catholic conception of the Mass logically

²⁵ Becon, *Catechism and Other Pieces*, P. S., p. 246.

implied the slaying of Christ: "As if any victim can be slain before God without also being offered to Him, or offered without being slain."²⁶ The corresponding ambiguity in English is perhaps relevant to the interpretation of the much-debated Anglican Thirty-first Article: "The Offering of Christ once made is that perfect redemption. . . . Wherefore the sacrifices of Masses, in the which it was commonly said, that the Priest did offer Christ for the quick and the dead . . . were blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits."

Even so famous a theologian as Peter Lombard could use careless language and speak of the sacrifice of Calvary being "repeated" in the Mass,²⁷ and the immensely influential Gabriel Biel could speak of the Mass as being "not merely the memorial of that great, unique and perfect sacrifice offered once on the cross, but the very same sacrifice, always the selfsame."²⁸ All theologians of repute, of course, regularly added, either in the immediate or remote context, the necessary qualifications, but it is hard not to suspect that this great emphasis on the "identity" of the Mass and Calvary must have spread some uncertainty and confusion, even some exaggerated notions, in the popular mind.

It is, of course, perfectly clear that there is no question at all of the medieval Church having committed herself to unsound, or even merely dangerous, doctrine. Why, then, should there be such an extreme reluctance, especially in English-speaking countries, to admit that there may be a good deal in the Anglican contention that the bitter dispute about the Mass in sixteenth-century England was, in greater or less degree, due to the fact that several current Catholic theological formulations were, though essentially sound, somewhat vague and misleading? And yet, at any such suggestion, we immediately stand to arms and assume that it cannot be true and that it is a priori necessary to deny it—just as if the infallibility of the pope or the essential soundness of Catholic Eucharistic doctrine were being denied. But here there is no such great principle at stake. To admit that the moderate Anglican apologists are right in their claim on this

²⁶ Zwingli, *Opera omnia* (Zurich, 1832) p. 101.

²⁷ *Sent.* 4, d. 12, c. 5 (quoted by Clark, pp. 75-76)—apparently the passage most frequently quoted by medieval theologians.

²⁸ *Expositio sacri canonis missae*, lectio 85, lit. F.

point is not at all to admit that medieval official Catholic teaching was wrong. We admit very readily the disedifying state of the papal court in the Borgia period; we know that (if a theological parallel is sought) in the Arian controversy half the bishops of the East, including several saints and one doctor of the Church, were for a time in the wrong camp. No scandal on anything approaching that scale is postulated here, but only that an anomalous ambiguity in certain theological slogans, and in a matter which had not yet been clarified by Roman or conciliar definition, led to the scandalizing of certain Christians who were apt to be as much shocked by maximizing in Eucharistic doctrine as we rightly are by minimizing, and who, mistakenly but in good faith, thought that this particular form of maximizing imperiled certain principles of Christian theology which they devoutly cherished.

Do not our instinctive reactions in this matter show that we are not entirely free from that "war psychology" which the Pope has bidden us to shake off? We perhaps too easily regard as enemies those who in fact are our friends and fellow Christians. Half unconsciously we regard the Anglicans as rivals, and half unconsciously we too easily assume that to concede, in whatever measure, their claim on this point is to compromise our essential position. But that is not so. The admission that is in question in this article would neither convict the Church of having erred in doctrine nor exculpate the Anglicans from having, under whatever provocation, wilfully seceded from Catholic unity. I incline to think that the interpretation here outlined alone makes sense of the historical evidence, which else is strangely puzzling. It is not really probable that the Reformers, though too easily disobedient, were in general exceptionally stupid or wicked men. The probability is that they were very much like their successors today: men not without intelligence, and of high integrity—men, in fact, very much like ourselves. In any case, I emphasize that the interpretation here put forward makes no arrogant claim to have said the last word on this very complex subject; it is offered *salvo meliore iudicio*, for the consideration of theologians and historians more learned than myself.

Finally, if, as I believe, fairness to the Anglicans requires that no less be said than has been said above, yet an impartial objectivity

probably also requires the recognition that most of the English Reformers of the first half of the sixteenth century in many respects fell far short of Catholic orthodoxy. Many of these theologians, including Cranmer, adopted the extreme Continental Protestant theory of justification by faith and held a correspondingly low view of the sacramental principle. Several of them repudiated even moderate and unambiguous Catholic statements of Eucharistic doctrine. Here all that can be suggested in extenuation is that part of the sad and tragic story lay in the fact that perhaps large-scale Catholic clarification at all levels came somewhat late, and by then both sides, embittered and entrenched, were reluctant to parley. What it is more important to observe is that, on the crucial question of sacramental doctrine, the official Anglican formularies of Elizabeth's reign (or at least the Thirty-nine Articles), so far from expressing Cranmer's view, affirm of the "two sacraments of the Gospel" that they "be not only badges or tokens . . . but rather . . . effectual signs of grace" (Art. 25), while Article 28 defines the Eucharist as "a sacrament of our Redemption by Christ's death"—a definition which echoes a phrase on the first page of this article.