

## ROBERT BELLARMINI AND POST-TRIDENTINE EUCCHARISTIC THEOLOGY

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*[Liturgical theologians notice that for some of the most distressingly outmoded aspects of contemporary magisterial teaching on the Eucharist, for instance, the suggestion that only the priest offers the eucharistic sacrifice, a citation trail leads back to Robert Bellarmine who, on investigation, turns out to be the primary mediator—but more messenger than originator—of some ossified post-Tridentine positions long since superseded in liturgical studies, but still present in the recent teaching documents of the Church.]*

A NOTABLE DIFFERENCE, INDEED A CHASM, often appears between what many liturgical scholars today agree is sound eucharistic theology and the eucharistic theology of several official documents of the Roman Catholic magisterium. Historical research suggests that Robert Bellarmine is one of the “messengers” if indeed not one of the “villains” of this unhappy story.<sup>1</sup>

The following summary can pass as a consensus position of contemporary liturgical theology that reflects recent developments: (1) The axiom *in persona Christi*, used to describe the role of the priest, is interpreted broadly; it is understood as including *in persona Christi capitis ecclesiae*, and also in tandem with the axiom *in persona ecclesiae*. Accompanying this is a growing emphasis on the ecclesiological (and not just christological) aspect of the Eucharist, as well as emphasis on its trinitarian dynamic and on the Holy Spirit’s special role. (2) There is an awareness that the mystery of the Eucharist (the sacrament and the sacrificial action in traditional

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<sup>1</sup> The principal source for this historical research is Edward J. Kilmartin, *The Eucharist in the West: History and Theology*, ed. Robert J. Daly (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1998).

terms) is spread out across the whole Eucharistic Prayer and its accompanying ritual action, and that it cannot be atomized or located merely in one of its parts, such as in the Words of Institution. (3) There is an awareness that the dynamic of the eucharistic action flows from Christ to the Church to the Eucharist, and that the role of the priest is embedded in the Christ-Church relationship and not as something standing between Christ and the Church.

The following can pass as a description of the position of the contemporary Roman Catholic magisterium: (1) The axiom *in persona Christi* is construed somewhat narrowly, eliminating, for the most part, the ecclesiological perspective and strongly emphasizing the christological perspective, to the concomitant overshadowing of the trinitarian aspect of the Eucharist and the special role of the Holy Spirit. (2) There is still a strong focus on the Words of Institution (formerly identified as the *forma essentialis* of the sacrament). (3) The dynamic of the eucharistic action is conceived as flowing from Christ to the priest to the Eucharist to the Church—thus leading to an overemphasis on priestly power, position, and privilege against which many have protested.<sup>2</sup>

The discrepancy between these two views is striking. The late Edward Kilmartin, for instance, characterized this “modern average Catholic theology of the eucharistic sacrifice” as “bankrupt” and “without a future.”<sup>3</sup> The question, therefore, for the historian of doctrine is: How did this discrepancy come about?

#### “MODERN AVERAGE CATHOLIC THEOLOGY OF THE EUCHARIST”

This phrase refers to a specific line of the teaching of the Roman Catholic magisterium from Pius XII’s *Mediator Dei* (1947)<sup>4</sup> to John Paul II’s *Dominicae cenae* (1980)<sup>5</sup> and the “Letter of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on the Subject of the Role of the Ordained Ministry of the Episcopate and Presbyterate in the Celebration of the Eucharist” (1983).<sup>6</sup> The phrase “specific line of the teaching” refers to an aspect, often the dominant aspect, of contemporary magisterial teaching that seems to circumvent or pass over in silence (and thus, at least implicitly, to reverse) some of the important developments of Vatican II’s Constitution on the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, and the subsequent liturgical reform in the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 346–47, 350–51.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 384. My task is not to substantiate Kilmartin’s thesis. I assume that the force of his argument is strong enough to require serious attention by scholars.

<sup>4</sup> *Acta apostolicae sedis* (= AAS) 39 (1947) 521–600.

<sup>5</sup> AAS 72 (1980) 113–48.

<sup>6</sup> AAS 75 (1983) 1001–9.

<sup>7</sup> See Kilmartin, *The Eucharist in the West* 187–201.

In *Mediator Dei* it is stated that: “[t]he priest acts for the people only because he represents Christ, who is head of all his members and offers himself for them. Thus he goes to the altar as the minister of Christ, inferior to Christ, but superior to the people.”<sup>8</sup> This is an obvious paraphrase from Robert Bellarmine (to whom the encyclical’s footnotes refer): “The sacrifice of the Mass is offered by three: by Christ, by the Church, by the minister; but not in the same way. For Christ offers as primary priest, and offers through the priest a man, as through his proper minister. The Church does not offer as priest through the minister, but as people through the priest. Thus Christ offers through the inferior, the Church through the superior.”<sup>9</sup>

On this Kilmartin pointed out: “This theological approach . . . subsumes the ecclesiological aspect of the eucharistic sacrifice under its christological aspect. In other words, the priest represents the Church because he represents Christ the head of the Church who offers the sacrifice in the name of all the members of his body the Church.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, the dynamic line is not: Christ—Church—Eucharist, in which the role of the priest is embedded in the relationship Christ—Church, but rather, submerging the ecclesiological aspect under the christological, and elevating the role of the priest: Christ—priest—Eucharist—Church. That latter viewpoint is basically what is developed in *Mediator Dei* as is clear from the following passage:

For that unbloody immolation, by which at the words of consecration Christ is made present upon the altar in the state of victim, is performed by the priest and by him alone, as representative of Christ and not as representative of the faithful. But it is because the priest places the divine victim upon the altar that he offers it to God the Father as an oblation for the glory of the Blessed Trinity and for the good of the whole Church. Now the faithful participate in the oblation, understood in this limited sense, after their own fashion and in a twofold manner, namely, because they not only offer the sacrifice by the hands of the priest, but also, to a certain extent, in union with him. . . . Now it is clear that the faithful offer by the hands of the priest from the fact that the minister at the altar, in offering a sacrifice in the name of all his members, represents Christ, the head of the mystical body. Hence the whole Church can rightly be said to offer up the victim through Christ. But the conclusion that the people offer the sacrifice with the priest himself is not based on the fact that, being members of the Church no less than the priest himself, they perform a visible liturgical rite; for this is the privilege only of the minister who has been divinely appointed for this office; rather it is based on the fact that the

<sup>8</sup> AAS 39 (1947) 553. The text is also found in Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion symbolorum*, 36th ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 1967) no. 3850; hereafter cited as DS.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Bellarmine, *Controversiarum de sacramento eucharistiae* lib. 6.6, *Opera omnia* 4 (Paris: Vivès, 1873) 373.

<sup>10</sup> Kilmartin, *The Eucharist in the West* 190.

people unite their hearts in praise, impetration, expiation, and thanksgiving with the prayers or intentions of the priest, even of the High Priest himself, so that in the one and same offering of the victim and according to a visible sacerdotal rite, they may be presented to God the Father.<sup>11</sup>

This is the line of teaching repeated and, in some respects, promoted even further by present-day magisterial teaching. As is well known, Vatican II and its subsequent liturgical reforms took steps toward a much broader understanding of the Eucharist. But the council did not in fact make a clean break from the traditional narrower approach. In the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium* no. 10, we read: "In the person of Christ he [the ministerial priest] brings about the Eucharistic sacrifice (*sacrificium eucharisticum in persona Christi conficit*) and offers it to God in the name of all the people."<sup>12</sup> The Constitution on the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, also includes this line of thinking when it states:

The Church, therefore, spares no effort in trying to ensure that, when present at this mystery of faith, Christian believers should not be there as strangers or silent spectators. On the contrary, having a good grasp of it through the rites and prayers, they should take part in the sacred action, actively, fully aware, and devoutly. They should be formed by God's word, and be nourished at the table of the Lord's Body. They should give thanks to God. Offering the immaculate victim, not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him, they should learn to offer themselves. Through Christ, the Mediator, they should be drawn day by day into ever more perfect union with God and each other, so that finally God may be all in all (no. 48).

There is indeed more emphasis on the participation of the faithful, but the traditional dynamic line of Christ—priest—Eucharist—Church (rather than Christ—Eucharist—Church), remains intact, and there is no mention of the role of the Holy Spirit. A few years later, the *Missale Romanum* (1969) of Pope Paul VI made a significant advance by introducing an explicit epiclesis of the Holy Spirit, but in such a way (especially by placing it before rather than after the consecration) as to leave intact the traditional Western overemphasis on Jesus' Words of Institution. This is clear from the "General Instruction on the Roman Missal" which, after speaking of the Eucharistic Prayer as "the climax and the very heart of the entire celebration,"<sup>13</sup> proceeds under the heading "The Institution Narrative and

<sup>11</sup> Pius XII, *Mediator Dei* (AAS 39 [1947] 555–56).

<sup>12</sup> Vatican II translations are taken from *The Basic Sixteen Documents: Vatican Council II*, gen. ed. Austin Flannery (Northport, N.Y.: Costello, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> Paul VI, *Institutio generalis missalis romani* no. 54, in *Missale Romanum* (Rome: Vatican Press, 1970) 39; also in *Enchiridion documentorum instaurationis liturgicae: Ordo missae*, ed. Reiner Kaczynski (Turin: Marietti, 1976) no. 1449, 1.488; also in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1975) 175.

Consecration” to say: “Through the words and actions of Christ there is accomplished the very sacrifice which he himself instituted at the Last Supper when, under the species of bread and wine, he offered his Body and Blood and gave them to his apostles to eat and drink, commanding them in turn to perform this same sacred mystery.”<sup>14</sup> The result is that the Eucharistic Prayer and the communion of the faithful may still be considered as pertaining to the integrity of the liturgical rite, but not to the integrity (“essential form” in traditional Scholastic terms) of the sacrament or the sacrifice.

Before moving on to the subsequent development of magisterial teaching in John Paul II and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, it may be helpful to summarize how Kilmartin, under the headings “Words of Consecration” and “Representation of the Sacrifice of Christ,” described this “modern average Catholic theology of the Eucharist.” The core of this position is the theology of the “moment of consecration.”

In the Western tradition, the words of Christ spoken over the bread and wine are [also] understood to be the essential form of the sacrament. These words thus constitute the moment when the sacrament is realized, namely, when the bread and wine are converted into the body and blood of Christ. Thus, while the words are spoken by the presiding minister, they are understood as being spoken by Christ through his minister. This act is one accomplished only by the minister acting *in persona Christi* in the midst of the prayer of faith of the Church. . . . The representation of the death of Christ occurs with the act of conversion of the elements. The somatic presence of Christ and the representation of the sacrifice of Christ are simultaneously achieved in the act of the consecration of the elements.

But what is meant by the idea that the death of Christ is “represented at the moment of the consecration of the elements”? The post-Tridentine theories, which sought to find the visible sacrifice of the Mass in the separate consecration of the elements, proposed a “mystical mactation” of Christ at the level of the sacramental signs. *Thus they espoused the idea of a sacrificial rite, the structure of which was the sacrifice of the self-offering of Christ in the signs of the food. This is a pre-Christian concept which is now generally discarded in current Catholic theology.*

Nowadays the average Catholic theology of the Mass . . . affirms that the representation of the sacrifice of the cross is a sacramental reactualization of the once-for-all historical engagement of Jesus on the cross. The idea that in the act of consecration a sacramental representation of the sacrifice of the cross is realized in the sense that the historical sacrifice is re-presented or reactualized also seems to be favored by official Catholic theology today. However, Pius XII in *Mediator Dei* did not attempt to settle this basic question.<sup>15</sup>

It should be noted that this idea of sacramental representation, although now quite characteristic of contemporary Catholic theology, is actually one

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. no. 55 (d); Kaczynski no. 1450 d, 1.488; Flannery, *Vatican Council II* 176.

<sup>15</sup> Kilmartin, *The Eucharist in the West* 294–95.

of the weak points of that theology. For this theory—that the historical saving acts of Christ are “metahistorically” made present to us—is not significantly supported by the biblical witness, nor by the Jewish background, nor by broad patristic evidence. Still more, it is also a theory that creates further problems, since there is little agreement among scholars on how to explain what is being asserted.<sup>16</sup>

John Paul II in his 1980 Holy Thursday letter, “On the Mystery and Worship of the Holy Eucharist” (*Dominicae cenae*), points out that the sacredness of the Eucharist is due to the fact that Christ is the author and principal priest of the Eucharist, and that this ritual memorial of the death of the Lord is performed by priests who repeat the words and actions of Christ, who thus offer the holy sacrifice “*in persona Christi* . . . in specific sacramental identification with the High and Eternal Priest, who is the author and principal actor of this sacrifice of his.”<sup>17</sup> Commenting on this, Kilmartin pointed out that here and throughout this letter: “John Paul II limits himself to the typical scholastic approach to the theology of the Eucharist, passing over the trinitarian grounding of the holiness of the Eucharist. In modern Catholic theology, the sacred character of the Eucharist is grounded on more than just this Christological basis. Its sacredness is not merely based on the fact of originating in a historical act of institution by Christ. Rather, what grounds the holiness of the Eucharist is the initiative of the Father: the self-offering by the Father of his only Son for the salvation of the world.”<sup>18</sup>

John Paul II’s description does not highlight the role of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist suggested by Vatican II’s *Sacrosanctum concilium* and subsequently implemented by the insertion of epicleses of the Holy Spirit in the new Eucharistic Prayers of the Missal of Paul VI. John Paul II’s description of the role of the ministerial priesthood omits the pneumatological dimension. Rather, basing himself on Trent’s decree on priesthood, canon 2, concerning the *potestas consecrandi* (DS 1771), the ministerial activity of priests is mentioned under the presupposition of its christological grounding. Priests are said to be the acting subjects of the consecration: “they consecrate (the elements of bread and wine),”<sup>19</sup> “by means of consecration by the priest they become sacred species.”<sup>20</sup>

This neglect of recent magisterial and theological developments is characteristic of *Dominicae cenae*. Three more examples stand out. As first example one can note that appeal is made to chapters one and two of the

<sup>16</sup> See *ibid.* 268–300.

<sup>17</sup> *Dominicae cenae* II 8 (AAS 72 [1980] 128).

<sup>18</sup> Kilmartin, *The Eucharist in the West* 196–97.

<sup>19</sup> *Dominicae cenae* II 11 (AAS 72 [1980] 141).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* II 9 (AAS 72 [1980] 133).

Council of Trent's Decree on the Sacrifice of the Mass: "Since the Eucharist is a true sacrifice it brings about the restoration to God. Consequently the celebrant . . . is an authentic priest performing . . . a true sacrificial act, that brings men back to God."<sup>21</sup> Also in the same number it is stated: "To this sacrifice, which is renewed in a sacramental form. . ."<sup>22</sup> Kilmartin pointed out that this reflects the same kind of confusion as that caused by Trent when it used *offerre* to refer both to the historical sacrifice of the cross and to the phenomenological, history-of-religions liturgical-ritual sacrificial act of the eucharistic celebration, not attending to the fact that sacrifice, in the history-of-religions sense of the word, had been done away with by the Christ-event. The theological and terminological problem caused by Trent's failure to distinguish the historical self-offering of Christ and its ritual expression can be resolved, Kilmartin insisted, only by rethinking both the inner relation of the personal sacrifice of Jesus and his body the Church, and the outward form of the meal as its efficacious sign.<sup>23</sup>

A second example may be noted. *Dominicae cenae* follows Trent in viewing the Last Supper as the moment when Christ instituted the Eucharist and, at the same time, the sacrament of the priesthood.<sup>24</sup> But the pope also goes beyond Trent in teaching that the Last Supper was the first Mass.<sup>25</sup> This view was once favored by Catholic theologians; but most now argue that the Church was constituted in the Easter-event, and that the sacraments are also Easter realities grounded on the sending of the Holy Spirit.<sup>26</sup>

A third and final example is available. *Dominicae cenae* also slips back into older and outmoded terminology when it speaks of the sacrifice of Christ "that in a sacramental way is renewed on the altar (*in altari renovatur*)."<sup>27</sup> It is hard to imagine that the pope wanted to take up again the infelicitous implications of the saying of Pope Gregory the Great that "(Christ) in the mystery of the holy sacrifice is offered for us 'again'."<sup>28</sup> One must presume that "John Paul II did not intend to state anything more

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* II 9 (AAS 72 [1980] 131).

<sup>22</sup> "Ad hoc igitur sacrificium, quod modo sacramentali in altari renovatur. . ."

<sup>23</sup> Kilmartin, *The Eucharist in the West* 198–99.

<sup>24</sup> Trent, session 22, canon 2; DS 1752.

<sup>25</sup> *Dominicae cenae* I 4 (AAS 72 [1980] 119–21).

<sup>26</sup> Kilmartin, *The Eucharist in the West* 200–1.

<sup>27</sup> *Dominicae cenae* II 9 (AAS 72 [1980] 133; see also 131).

<sup>28</sup> The sentence in which this phrase occurs reads: "Haec namque singulariter victima ab aeterno interitu animam salvat, quae illam nobis mortem Unigeniti per mysterium reparat, qui licet resurgens a mortuis jam non moritur, et mors ei ultra non dominabitur (*Rom.* VI, 9), tamen in semetipso immortaliter atque incorruptibiliter vivens, pro nobis iterum in hoc mysterio sacrae oblationis immolatur" (Gregory the Great, *Dialogorum libri IV* 4.48 [PL 77.425CD]).

than that the newness of the eucharistic sacrifice can only be ascribed to the repetition of the ecclesial dimension.”<sup>29</sup>

Two documents of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith continue this line of interpretation. The “Letter of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on the Subject of the Role of the Ordained Ministry of the Episcopate and Presbyterate in the Celebration of the Eucharist” (1983) states the traditional teaching: “For although the whole faithful participate in one and the same priesthood of Christ and concur in the oblation of the Eucharist, nevertheless only the ministerial priesthood, in virtue of the sacrament of orders, enjoys the power of confecting the eucharistic sacrifice in the person of Christ and of offering it in the name of the whole Christian people.”<sup>30</sup> Later on there is more detail regarding the representative function of the presiding minister:

“However those whom Christ calls to the episcopate and presbyterate, in order that they can fulfill the office . . . of confecting the eucharistic mystery, he signs them spiritually with the special seal through the sacrament of orders . . . and so configures them to himself that they proclaim the words of consecration not by mandate of the community, but they act ‘in persona Christi,’ which certainly means more than ‘in the name of Christ’ or even ‘in place of Christ’ . . . since the one celebrating by a peculiar and sacramental way is completely the same as the ‘high and eternal Priest,’ who is author and principal actor of this his own sacrifice, in which no one indeed can take his place.”<sup>31</sup>

The “Declaration of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on the Question of Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood” (1976) had also contained this line of teaching when it put special weight on the christological argument to show that only men can represent Christ in the act of eucharistic consecration: “It is true that the priest represents the Church which is the body of Christ; but if he does so it is primarily because, first, he represents Christ himself who is head and pastor of the Church.”<sup>32</sup> In response to this Kilmartin had noted that, since the priest represents Christ in strict sacramental identify at the moment of consecration, the role must be taken by a man.

If the consensus position of contemporary critical liturgical theology that I have described is basically correct, then there is indeed a divide between

<sup>29</sup> Kilmartin, *The Eucharist in the West* 201.

<sup>30</sup> CDF Letter of 6 August 1983, I 1 (AAS 75 [1983] 1001–9, at 1001). This letter conveniently contains footnote references to all the major statements of recent official teaching of the Roman magisterium on this point.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* III 4 (AAS 75 [1983] 1006). The quotation which occupies the second half of this citation is from Pope John Paul II’s *Dominicae cenae* 8 (AAS 72 [1980] 128–29).

<sup>32</sup> *Inter insigniores*, 15 October 1976 (AAS 69 [1977] 98–116, at 112–13, as quoted by Kilmartin 196).

that consensus position and contemporary magisterial teaching. The theology behind this teaching seems to be in need of renewal. In the remainder of this article, I shall try to contribute toward such a renewal by examining some of the 16th-century antecedents, eroded theological foundations, so to speak, of this contemporary magisterial teaching.

### THE SIXTEENTH-CENTURY ANTECEDENTS

As already pointed out, Pius XII's *Mediator Dei*, the beginning of modern Catholic magisterial teaching on the Eucharist, quoted the late 16th-century work of Robert Bellarmine in support of its eucharistic theology. Bellarmine's typically Western emphases on the words of consecration and on the christological aspects of the Eucharist to the detriment of its trinitarian, pneumatological and ecclesiological aspects is, as we have seen, the line that contemporary magisterial teaching has chosen to follow. How did this divide between the Church's teaching and the theology of its best liturgical theologians come about? Is Bellarmine the "villain" in this story or only its "messenger"? The answer seems to be: a bit of both.

Marius Lepin in his highly detailed and documented study,<sup>33</sup> summarized the general position of the theologians and Fathers who articulated the teaching of the Council of Trent:<sup>34</sup>

From all the preparatory discussions, several important facts stand out which it is important to underline.

First, at no point in the Council's deliberations can one find a suggestion of the idea that the Mass contains any reality of immolation. No theologian and no [council] father claimed to find anything but a figure or a memorial of the immolation once realized on the cross. There is no trace of the theories one will see arising in the following years, theories that tend to require of the eucharistic sacrifice a change in the victim equivalent to some kind of destruction, as if, for a sacrifice to be real, there would have to be a real immolation.

Second, the idea of the Sacrifice of the Mass appears to be connected practically to three fundamental elements: the consecration, the oblation, and the commemorative representation of the past immolation.

<sup>33</sup> Maurius Lepin, *L'idée du sacrifice de la messe d'après les théologiens depuis l'origine jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1926). Marius Lepin (1870–1952), Sulpician, founder of the congregation *Servantes de Jésus, Souverain Prêtre* (1938), published prolifically on Modernism and the eucharistic teaching of the Catholic Church. *L'idée du sacrifice de la messe*, honored by the *Académie française*, was his major work of enduring scholarly value (see *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique, Tables générales* 2 [Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1967] 2972–73).

<sup>34</sup> Contained specifically in the first two chapters of the *Doctrina de ss. Missae sacrificio* (DS 1739–43) and the first three canons of the *Canones de ss. Missae sacrificio* (DS 1751–53) of session twenty-two, 17 Sept. 1562 of the Council of Trent.

If diverse theologians seem to place the formal reason of the eucharistic sacrifice on one or other of these elements apart from the others, they are the exceptions. The largest number of them, and the most important, tend to locate the formal reason of the sacrifice in the three elements together, i.e., in the oblation of Christ, rendered present under the species by the consecration, with a mystical figuring of his bloody immolation. In doing so they seem to be recapitulating the best ancient tradition.<sup>35</sup>

For the understanding of post-Tridentine eucharistic theology it is important to keep in mind that although Trent defined that the Mass is a true and proper sacrifice, and although Trent did have a working description of what it understood as the Sacrifice of the Mass (with the three fundamental elements noted above by Lepin), it did not provide a definition of what it meant by “sacrifice.” The definition of sacrifice was left to the liberty and imagination of the theologians. These theologians inherited Trent’s confusion (lack of distinction) between the self-offering of Christ and the ritual liturgical offering. In addition, it seems that all post-Tridentine theologians, whether Protestant or Catholic, looked first to the phenomenology of sacrifice, i.e. to the history-of-religions idea of sacrifice, in order to understand how the liturgical celebration of the Eucharist could be a sacrifice. They did not realize that the Christ-event had done away with sacrifice in the history-of-religions sense of the word. As the 16th century progressed, and to a large extent under the pressures of the Protestant-Catholic polemic, the history-of-religions idea of the destruction of a victim as a necessary characteristic of sacrifice became a key point in proving or disproving that the liturgical celebration of the Eucharist was a true and proper sacrifice. One did not look to the Christ-event in order to understand the central meaning of the sacrifice of the Mass, one looked to the history-of-religions phenomenology of sacrifice—specifically, was there, and in what way was there a destruction of the victim?—in order to prove or disprove that the Mass was a sacrifice.

The post-Tridentine Catholic theology of eucharistic sacrifice becomes extremely complicated. Following Lepin’s highly detailed outline, one can distinguish four major theories—most with subgroups—for explaining this element of the destruction of the victim.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Lepin, *L'idée du sacrifice de la messe* 326 (my translation from the French). This 815-page study quotes extensively theologians’ writings on this theme beginning with the ninth century and covering the next eleven centuries. It constitutes the indispensable and single most important scholarly work for this research.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 346–415.

### Theory I

**The sacrifice does not require a real change in the victim; the Mass contains only a figure of Christ's immolation.<sup>37</sup>**

This theory was expatiated in two different ways. First, for Melchor Cano, Domingo de Soto, and others, the figure of the immolation of Christ is found outside of the consecration.

Melchor Cano (1509–1560) saw the consecration as the essence of the Mass, and the oblation which follows it as no less important. But neither of these suffice to constitute the sacrifice for which, following Thomas Aquinas, there must be a certain action exercised with the breaking and the eating of the bread understood as symbolic of the past immolation. For, on the eucharistic altar there is only a figuring of the immolation of Christ. However, hardly anyone else placed this significance on the breaking of the host.

Domingo de Soto (1494–1560) saw the essence of the eucharistic sacrifice in three parts: the consecration, the oblation, and the communion; but only in the communion (he did not mention the fraction) did he see realized in a perfect way the representation of the immolation of Christ. Like Cano, he needed to find an action exercised *concerning/around*, but *not on*, the sensible appearances of the eucharistic Christ. The Jesuits Luis de la Puente (1554–1624) and Pierre Coton (1564–1626) also followed the reasoning of de Soto.

Secondly, for two Jesuits, Alfonso Salmeron and Juan de Maldonado, the figure of the immolation of Christ was seen to be found in the consecration. They followed in principle the lines developed by the Dominicans Cano and de Soto, but they concentrated the representation of the immolation of Christ wholly on the consecration itself.

Alfonso Salmeron (1515–1585) saw the immolation figured in the double consecration, in the separate species of body and blood. All that follows the consecration contributes to the perfection of the mystical signification and thus to the perfection of the sacrifice but not to its substantial truth. To those who needed to find a “death of a victim,” he replied, first, that this death is “represented” in the Eucharist; but he also replied by distinguishing between modes of presence: the death of a victim is required only when the victim is present *in propria specie*, but not when present, as Christ is in the Eucharist, *sub aliena specie*. This became a very popular theological explanation.

Juan de Maldonado (1534–1583) found that what is called sacrifice in Scripture is not the death of the victim but its oblation. The Eucharist does

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 346–57.

look back to the oblation on Calvary, just as the Last Supper looked ahead to it. This means that the oblation of Christ does not need to be repeated; his once-for-all oblation suffices.

### Theory II

#### **The sacrifice requires a real change of the material offered: in the Mass the change takes place in the substance of the bread and wine.**

This theory was held, for instance, by Michael de Bay [Baius], Francisco Torrès, Matthew van der Galen, Francis Suárez, Francisco de Toledo.<sup>38</sup> In general, all the other theologians of the end of the 16th century agree in putting the idea of change into the definition of sacrifice. Many see this change only in the bread transubstantiated by the consecration. But since the bread and the wine are not the true victim offered to God, they are led practically to justify the eucharistic sacrifice in some other way.

Michel de Bay [Baius] (1513–1589), in a small work in 1563,<sup>39</sup> claimed, with some equivocation,<sup>40</sup> that the Eucharist is called sacrifice simply because it is the principal sacrament. Then, also aligning himself with those who see sacrifice in a change in the victim, he allowed that the bread and wine, as dedicated for change, are rightly called sacrifice, and the body and blood of Christ, as the term of the change, are rightly called sacrifice. But while sacrifice, properly understood, is an act (of oblation), de Bay reduced it to a mere quality, the quality of victim.

The idea of sacrifice being a change affecting the bread and wine is presented in a form that is more orthodox—but theoretically hardly more satisfying—by the following theologians:

Francisco Torrès (1509–1584) located it in the change of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ in the consecration as transubstantiation, which is not our work but the *opus operatum* work of Christ. Since the remission of sins is attributed to this *opus operatum*, it is properly an act of sacrifice.

Matthew van der Galen (1528–1573) built an elaborate definition of sacrifice from an analysis of a broad spectrum of ancient sources, then gradually found that he could not apply it to the Eucharist, because the only change he could locate was in the bread and wine converted into the body and blood of Christ. Rather than leave the Eucharist as simply a sacrifice (change) of bread and wine, he appealed to a complementary

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 357–74.

<sup>39</sup> *De sacrificio*, in *Michaelis Baii, celeberrimi in Lovaniensi Academiis theologi Opera, cum Bullis Pontificium, et aliis ipsius causam spectantibus . . . studio A.P. theologi* (Cologne, 1596) 1.160 (see Lepin, *L'idée du sacrifice de la messe* 359).

<sup>40</sup> Lepin, *L'idée du sacrifice de la messe* 361.

reality of another order, namely the term of the change, the oblation of Christ himself rendered present under the transubstantiated species of bread and wine, etc. In making this his eventual “solution,” he has, in effect, abandoned his own elaborate theory of sacrifice and gone back to the more constant tradition of the Church.

The position of Francis Suárez (1548–1617), while more beautiful and more sophisticated, followed the same pattern as that of van der Galen. He built an elaborate definition, including that the sacrifice is *in genere signi*, focused strongly on the words of consecration (like Maldonado and Salméron), followed Thomas Aquinas closely, but then added the essential idea of change (*immutatio*)—even if the change can be slight and not go all the way to destruction. Like van der Galen, he ended up focusing on the positive term of the change, namely Christ, who is alone truly the host of our sacrifice, and in whom there can be no change (*immutatio*). It ended up being a beautiful and profound interpretation of the eucharistic sacrifice—which has little to do with the narrowness of his own general definition of sacrifice. Francisco de Toledo (1534–1596) followed a very similar course.

### Theory III

#### **The sacrifice requires a real change of the material offered; in the Mass, the change affects Christ himself.<sup>41</sup>**

A certain number of theologians actually took the “logical” step in applying this change (immutation) to Christ himself. These can be organized into three principal groups.

Group one (Jan Hessels, Jean de Via, Gaspard do Casal) argued that there was a change of Christ in the consecration. Jan Hessels (1522–1596), following Ruard Tapper (1487–1559), stated for example that: “The New Law . . . contains an image of what takes place in heaven where Christ, in exercising his priesthood, stands before God and intercedes for us in representing his passion to his Father and in consummating the sacrifice of the cross. . . . On the altar Christ does what he is doing in heaven.”

Jean de Via (d. ca. 1582) held a similar position, expressed with remarkable richness: “But if his priesthood is eternal, so too should his sacrifice be eternal, not only in the effect that is produced but also in the function that is exercised, although in a different manner: in heaven in its proper form, here below by the mysterious action of a different minister (*in caelo in propria forma, in altari hic infra in aliena operatione arcana*) . . . in the Church militant, a new sacrifice is not made by the ministry of the priest, but it is the same sacrifice once offered which he continues to offer.”

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 375–93.

Hessels followed Thomas Aquinas and Tapper in holding for a distinction between oblation and sacrifice, but he modified the Thomistic axiom that sacrifice occurs when a certain action is exercised with regard to/about the matter offered. His new formula reads: "Sacrifice occurs when the things offered are destroyed (*consumantur*) in honor of God." Thus, for him too, destruction (= *mutatio vel consumptio*) becomes part of his definition of sacrifice, which makes it impossible for him to apply the definition satisfactorily to the Eucharist. The closest he can come to this is the basic thesis of Tapper that "the Body of the Lord receives a mode of being which it did not have before, i.e. subsistence under the appearance of bread." But above all the Mass is an oblation, an oblation which is one with (and only formally distinguished from) the concrete reality of the consecration. "The Consecration . . . puts at our disposition the Body of the Lord so that we can offer it."

Gaspard do Casal (1510–1585) combined two statements of Aquinas: (1) action with regard to/about the victim, and (2) an act done in honor of God in order to propitiate him (*ad eum placandum* [*ST* 3, q. 48, a. 3]) in order to come up with a definition of sacrifice which requires, essentially, a destruction. The Eucharist, instituted in continuation of the Last Supper and as memorial of the Cross, can actually be that only "by way of immolation—*modo immolatio*." He found this verified in the double consecration. Although many theologians stop here, Casal tried to go further, but each step he took only revealed further the difficulty or impossibility of trying to find a real "destruction" or "immolation" in the Eucharist.

The second group was led by Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621) who argued that the change of Christ occurs in the communion. Bellarmine was also convinced of the need of a real destruction for sacrifice. However, he fails to find this in the consecration. For he was not convinced by Gaspard do Casal's theory that saw Christ suffering diminishment in *acquiring* sacramental being. For Bellarmine, the destruction takes place in *losing* it, in the eating of the sacramental species by the priest. According to Bellarmine, the Sacrifice of the Mass has two essential parts: (1) the consecration, and (2) the communion/consumption. But the consecration alone does not suffice to make the Eucharist a sacrifice for, in the consecration, the immolation is entirely mystical; sacrifice, as he pointed out from his analysis of Old Testament sacrifice, requires a *real* destruction.<sup>42</sup> The communion by the priest is what constitutes the consummation of the sacrifice as op-

<sup>42</sup> "Id vero probatur, primum ex nomini sacrificii . . . Secundo probatur ex usu Scripturarum . . . Et omnia omnino in Scriptura dicuntur sacrificia, necessario *destruenda* erant: si viventia, per occisionem; si inanima solida, ut similia, et sal, et thus, per combustionem; si liquida, ut sanguis, vinum et aqua, per effusionem: LEV., I ET II. Neque his repugnat exemplum Melchisedech. . . ." (Robertus Bel-

posed to the communion of the simple faithful, which is only an eating of the victim. Bellarmine emphasized: “The consumption of the sacrament, as done by the people, is not a part of the sacrifice. As done by the sacrificing priest, however, it is an essential part, but not the whole essence. . . . For the consumption carried out by the sacrificing priest is not so much the eating of the victim [what the people do] as it is the consummation of the sacrifice. It is seen as properly corresponding to the combustion of the holocaust.”<sup>43</sup>

Bellarmino’s influential and much repeated definition of sacrifice reads: “Sacrifice is an external offering made to God alone by which, in order to acknowledge human weakness and confess the divine majesty, some sensible and enduring thing is consecrated and transformed (*consecratur et transmutatur*) in a mystical rite by a legitimate minister.”<sup>44</sup> He followed the Thomistic line in seeing the sacrifice as a mystical rite, as an action *circa rem oblatam*. He was apparently convinced that his whole theory was in accord with the teaching of Aquinas. In the end, although his great authority as a theologian helped solidify the idea that a true sacrifice required a real destruction of the victim, hardly anyone followed him in seeing that destruction in the sacramental consumption of the species.

Finally, a third group held composite theories that were more or less dependent on Bellarmine. Among these theologians were Henrique Henriques [Enríquez], Pedro de Ledesma, Juan Azor, Gregorio de Valencia, Nicolas Coeffeteau.

Henrique Henriques (1536–1608) modified Bellarmine’s definition to read: “Sacrifice is an external ceremony by which a legitimate minister consecrates a thing and, consuming it in a certain way, offers it cultically to God alone in order to appease him.”<sup>45</sup> Thus there are not two essential parts of the Sacrifice of the Mass (as in Bellarmine) but three: consecration, with emphasis on the separation of the species, oblation, and the consumption or destruction that transforms the victim pleasing to God, separates it from all other use and consumes its substance in order to attest the sovereign dominion of God over being and life. This is what is accomplished by the communion *of the priest*.<sup>46</sup> In other places, however, Henriques seemed to speak of the priest’s communion as a “clearer signification” of

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larminus, *Disputationes de controversiis fidei* [Ingolstadt, 1586–1593; Paris, 1608], *De missa*, 1. V., c.xxvii, t. III, col. 792).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. col. 792–93.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. col. 792 (Lepin, *L’idée du sacrifice de la messe* 383–84).

<sup>45</sup> Henricus Henriques, *Summae theologiae moralis libri quindecim* (Salamanca, 1591; Moguntiae, 1613) 1. IX, c. III; 498b (Lepin, *L’idée du sacrifice de la messe* 345 and 387).

<sup>46</sup> Lepin, *L’idée du sacrifice de la messe* 388.

the death which has already been represented by the consecration under the two species.<sup>47</sup>

Pedro de Ledesma (d. 1616) spoke of a figurative immolation consisting in the separation of the species.<sup>48</sup>

Gregory of Valencia's definition of sacrifice read: "A function of an external order by virtue of which a man, particularly chosen for this purpose, offers something to God by way of confection or transformation—as when an animal is slaughtered or burned, or when bread is broken and eaten—in a certain ritual ceremony in recognition of the divine majesty and also in proclamation of the interior devotion of the man, i.e. his homage and servitude, toward the Sovereign Master of all things."<sup>49</sup> One recognizes the language of Suárez as well as the ideas of Bellarmine. But in addition to the essential elements of consecration and communion (Bellarmine) he adds a third, the fraction. But, like so many others, it is in the consecration that he sees the constitutive essence of the sacrifice.

#### Theory IV

**The sacrifice requires a real change: nevertheless, there is in the Mass a change only in the species of the sacrament.**<sup>50</sup>

A final group of theologians admitted that sacrifice requires a change in the material offered, and nevertheless placed the essence of the eucharistic sacrifice elsewhere than in a real change in Christ. The resulting contradiction was ignored by some, while others tried to save the theory by restricting the rigor of its application to the Eucharist.

Some of these theologians such as William Allen, Jacques de Bay, and Willem van Est [Estius] were satisfied with a simple affirmation of the principle and of the fact. William Cardinal Allen (1532–1594) saw in the consecration the proper act of sacrifice simply because Christ is put to death there in a sacramental manner. Allen was following a long traditional line in seeing only a figurative or sacramental immolation (*mactatur sacramentaliter*) of Christ. But he did not attempt to resolve the contradiction with contemporary theories of sacrifice (including his own) that require a real change/destruction of the victim.<sup>51</sup>

Jacques de Bay [Baius] (d. 1614) also saw the Sacrifice of the Mass

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 389.

<sup>49</sup> Gregorio de Valencia, *Metimnensis: De rebus fidei hoc tempore controversis* (Lyons, 1591), *De sacrasancto missae sacrificio, contra impiam disputationem Tulingae nuper a Jacobo Herbrando propositam, atque adeo contra perversissimam Lutheri, Kemnitii aliorumque novatorum doctrinam* 1. I, c. II; 504a (Lepin, *L'idée du sacrifice de la messe* 344 and 390–91).

<sup>50</sup> Lepin, *L'idée du sacrifice de la messe* 393–415.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 394–97.

concentrated in the consecration (as did Salmeron) and, like Allen, left the contradiction unresolved.<sup>52</sup>

Willem van Est (1542–1613), when commenting on *The Book of the Sentences*, has similar contradictions. But when commenting on the Epistle to the Hebrews, he followed a line that is both more promising and also more in line with the better pre-Tridentine theories. This consists in identifying (or at least associating) the sacrificial action, the action of the eucharistic Christ, with that which he accomplishes before his Eternal Father in heaven. In effect, what takes place in the Eucharist and in heaven is one and the same oblation: the oblation of Christ, the High Priest, offering himself to his Father for his Church.

Other theologians such as Gabriel Vasquez and Leonardus Lessius attempted to reconcile the principle and the fact. Both of these Jesuits exercised considerable influence in the centuries to follow.

Gabriel Vasquez (1549–1604) pointed out the “absurdity” of Bellarmine’s communion/destruction theory (without naming him) by pointing out that such would make the sacrifice take place not on the altar but in the stomach of the priest; that in any case the corruption of the species means simply that Christ ceases to exist under them—which is not a sacrifice; that this theory turns the consecration into a mere preparatory rite. He also rejected Suárez’s theory (also without naming him) that the eucharistic sacrifice consists not in a change/destruction, but in a confection/production. He insisted, as did most of his contemporaries, in seeing the essence of sacrifice in the act itself of the change that takes place in the victim. He tried to save the day by distinguishing between an *absolute* sacrifice and a *relative* sacrifice (of which the Eucharist is the unique instance). This *relative* sacrifice has a different definition: “Sacrifice is a mark or note existing in a thing, by which we profess God as author of death and life.”<sup>53</sup> This change in the thing offered is thus not real, but *figurative*, and it is realized in the act of consecration of the two species, which he sees as a *mystical* (not real, because of concomitance) immolation of the body and blood which represents/signifies the death of Christ. In the end, Vasquez’s understanding of the Eucharist (in itself) exercised great influence. He, too, however, was unable to reconcile his theology of the Eucharist with his general theory of sacrifice. His idea of a *relative* sacrifice, unique to the Eucharist, did not catch on.

Leonardus Lessius (1554–1623) defined sacrifice as “an external oblation, offered to God alone, by a legitimate minister, in which a sensible

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 397–99.

<sup>53</sup> Gabriel Vasquez, *Commentarii ac disputationes in III<sup>m</sup> partem S. Thomae* (Lyons, 1631), Disp. 220, c. III, no. 26; 394a (Lepin, *L’idée du sacrifice de la messe* 406).

substance undergoes a change, or even a destruction, in witness to the divine sovereignty and our servitude thereto.”<sup>54</sup> He is somewhat influenced by Vasquez, but much more by Suárez’s idea of understanding the “destruction” more as a kind of *production* that takes place in the consecration. For a while he thought it was “very probable” that the communion of the priest also pertained to the essence of the eucharistic sacrifice, but he subsequently returned to the more common opinion which saw its whole essence in the consecration. His explanation of the theory of a *virtual* or *mystical immolation* of Christ on the altar became influential. He argues that if the blood of Christ is not drawn from its flesh in reality, “that is a kind of accident due to the law of concomitance. But, inasmuch as it depends on the force of the words, there is a true separation: under the species of bread is placed only the Body, not the Blood; under the species of wine only the Blood, not the Body.”<sup>55</sup> He also wrote that: “[t]he words of consecration are a kind of sword. The Body of Christ which is now living in heaven, is to be slaughtered here instead of a living victim. The Body, placed under the species of bread, and the Blood under the species of wine, are like the body and blood of a lamb now immolated.”<sup>56</sup> In effect, he followed closely Vasquez’s idea of the eucharistic sacrifice, but without adopting his peculiar theory of a relative sacrifice. Picking up on an idea that goes back at least to Aquinas, he did not insist on a change of the victim (*mutatio hostiae*), but on a *mutatio circa hostiam*—a change that takes place with regard to the host/victim, and insists that this change suffices to assure (Trent’s) “true and proper sacrifice.”<sup>57</sup>

From this detailed outline of post-Tridentine theologies of eucharistic sacrifice Marius Lepin concluded finally:

As we cast a retrospective eye over the half century since the Council [of Trent], we can see that the theologians follow one or the other of two clear tendencies.

<sup>54</sup> Leonardus Lessius, *De sacramentis et censuris, praelectiones theologicae posthumae, olim in Academia Lovaniensi ann. 1588 et 1589 primum, iterum 1596 et 1597 propositae*, q. 83, art. 1., no. 7, in *In divum Thomam, de beatitudine, de actibus humanis, de Incarnatione Verbi, de sacramentis et censuris, praelectiones theologicae posthumae* (Louvain, 1645) 152 (Lepin, *L’idée du sacrifice de la messe* 344–45).

<sup>55</sup> Lessius continues, acknowledging his debt to Vasquez: “Et hoc sufficit ad rationem hujus sacrificii, tum ut sit verum sacrificium (fit enim circa hostiam, dum sic ponitur, sufficiens mutatio, qua protestamur Deum habere supremam in omnia potestatem), tum ut sit sacrificium commemorativum, repraesentans nobis sacrificium crucis et mortem Domini. Qui plura hac de re desiderat, legat Gabr. Vasquez” (Leonardus Lessius, *Opuscula in quibus pleraque theologiae mysteria explicantur, et vitae recte instituendae praecepta traduntur: ab ipso auctore, paullo ante mortem, varie acuta et recensita* [Antwerp, 1626], *De perfectionibus moribusque divinis* (1620), 1 XII, c. XIII, no. 97; 128 (Lepin, *L’idée du sacrifice de la messe* 413).

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* no. 95; 128 (Lepin, *L’idée du sacrifice de la messe* 413).

<sup>57</sup> Lepin, *L’idée du sacrifice de la messe* 414.

1° The theologians of the first group propose in principle that sacrifice consist essentially in a *destruction* or *real change* of the victim. They are thus forced to find this real change (or destruction) in the Sacrifice of the Mass. No one found sufficient the pure and simple change of the bread and wine by transubstantiation. The ideal of a simple acquisition by Christ of his sacramental essence (Hessels) also did not satisfy. Two theories received most of the attention: that of Casal, which sees the destructive change of Christ realized in the consecration itself; and that of Bellarmine, where it is accomplished in the communion [of the priest].

2° An equally large number insist, on the contrary, that the eucharistic Christ does *not undergo any real change*, neither at the consecration, nor at the communion; there is only a figure of his past immolation and an appearance of death.

Consequently, those who maintain that sacrifice in general requires the change (destruction) of the victim suppose that the Sacrifice of the Mass is an exception to the common rule. Salmeron and Jacques de Bay justify the exception from the fact that Christ is not rendered present under his own species. Vasquez justifies it by reasoning that the Mass is a relative sacrifice. The others are of the opinion that sacrifice can be conceived apart from a real change/destruction of the thing offered. Suárez replaced the idea of destruction with the quite opposite idea of *production*. Melchor Cano, Domingo de Soto, and Maldonado require, following Thomas Aquinas, a simple *action* carried out with regard to the sacrificial matter. Lessius, finally, with whom one can place van Est, retain the term “change—*immutatio*” and, applying it to the same reality as the just-mentioned theologians, talked about change “with regard to” the host/victim.<sup>58</sup>

#### BELLARMINE AND THE “MODERN AVERAGE CATHOLIC THEOLOGY OF THE EUCHARIST”

We are now in a better position to see Bellarmine in his history-of-doctrinal context, and thereby also to see more clearly the historical-doctrinal background and theological limitations of that line of magisterial teaching that draws upon Bellarmine and his contemporaries and followers. As to the “villain/messenger” question, it is now clear that Bellarmine, although not without responsibility, is in this story more the messenger than the villain. His stature and influence made him an effective mediator, but he was not the originator of what can now be recognized as decadent theology.

Roman Catholic eucharistic theology on the eve of the Council of Trent was much broader, more open, and much more in continuity with the overall traditions of the Church than Catholic eucharistic theology 50 years later at the end of the 16th century. For example, none of the pre-Tridentine or Tridentine theologians seemed to suggest that there was any *reality* of immolation in the Mass. But, on the more negative side, none of the Catholic theologians of that century seemed to have any sense of the existence, let alone importance, of the content and structure of the Eucha-

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 414–15.

ristic Prayer and its accompanying ritual. But somewhat balancing out this disastrous lack, most of the theologians before Trent understood that there were three essential elements in the eucharistic celebration: consecration, oblation, and representative commemoration of the past immolation. Most importantly, they generally refrained from attempting to narrow the Eucharist down to just one of these essential elements or moments. Admittedly, however, in the final analysis, the Words of Institution held pride of place.

In this situation, and against the attacks of the Reformers, Trent defined that the Mass is a “true and proper sacrifice—*verum et proprium sacrificium*.”<sup>59</sup> But it did not define, or even describe, what sacrifice is. That was left for the theologians to take up, and take it up they did with a vengeance: Protestants vigorously attacking, Catholics vigorously defending. The other major (and prior) eucharistic definition of Trent, the reality of the change of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ,<sup>60</sup> made it inevitable that the discussion of sacrifice would be afflicted with heavily physical connotations that effectively destroyed the fragile balance between the symbolic and the realistic that, up to this time, had never totally been lost.

A further complicating factor was that theology was entering into the early phase of what came to be the age of science. To reject the proposition that the Mass is a true and proper sacrifice, Protestants looked to what was later called the history of religions (phenomenological analysis of Old Testament sacrifice and other kinds of sacrifice) in order to establish a general (scientific) definition of sacrifice, on the basis of which one could then look to the Eucharist and see that it was not a sacrifice. Catholics followed exactly the same methodological process. This was an unfortunate instance of ecumenical “agreement,” for both were making the same fateful mistake.

The mistake consisted in seeing things backwards. Instead of looking first to the Christ-event, and then asking, from that perspective, what it was that Christians were calling sacrifice, instead of allowing the Christ-event to define the Eucharist, Protestants and Catholics all took the opposite route. They all looked first to define sacrifice phenomenologically, and then to apply that definition to the eucharistic rite of the Church. This happened at a time when awareness of the content and structure of the classical Eucharistic Prayers of the Church was no longer present in the Western

<sup>59</sup> Trent, Session 22, 17 Sept. 1562, canon 1 of “*Canones de ss. Missae sacrificio*” (DS 1751).

<sup>60</sup> Trent, Session 13, 11 Oct. 1551, in the “*Decretum de ss. Eucharistia*”: cap. 4 “*De transsubstantiatione*” (DS 1642) and canon 2 of “*Canones de ss. Eucharistiae sacramento*” (DS 1652).

Church. What we have come to call the “shape of meaning” of the Eucharist (following Gregory Dix) had become too obscured for it to save the day.

This massive methodological mistake was then mismatched by a “content” mistake that apparently no one thought to question: namely, the idea, first favored by the Protestant polemicists, but by the end of the century accepted by all the Catholics as well, that a *real* sacrifice requires a *real* change or *destruction* of the victim, and then the application of this idea to the Mass. That the Christ-event had done away with sacrifice in the history-of-religions sense of the term was not yet clear to theologians. For it was still common for theologians to deal with the Old Testament and the New Testament in a relatively undifferentiated way, i.e. without any historicizing hermeneutic. One took one’s definition of sacrifice from the Old Testament and applied it, without differentiating hermeneutic, to the Eucharist, almost as if the paschal event of Christ had not taken place. Some of the Catholic polemicists came up with more or less passing understandings of the Eucharist, but none of them were able to do so in a way consistent with their own (unquestioned) definition of sacrifice as involving the destruction of the victim. The closest anyone came to a theologically satisfying explanation was in those theories that emphasized not a real, but a mystical or sacramental immolation. But often this “mystical immolation” was described in terms so graphically realistic as to undercut the symbolic or mystical meaning. Jan Van Eyck’s famous painting of “The Adoration of the Mystical Lamb” is a graphic illustration of this.

To come back to Bellarmine, no one followed his idea that the eucharistic sacrifice was essentially consummated by the priest’s communion. In effect, the only “essential element” that survived was the consecration, carried out “by the action of the priest” as the infelicitous contemporary rendering of one of the classical eucharistic hymns puts it.

In sum, the eucharistic theology of Bellarmine and of the outgoing 16th century, to which Pius XII’s *Mediator Dei* and the subsequent teaching of the Roman Catholic magisterium appeals, suffers from the following theological shortcomings:

(1) Lack of trinitarian perspective and massive overemphasis on the christological perspective; no mention of the role of the Holy Spirit; no statement that the Eucharistic Prayer is addressed to the Father.

(2) Neglect of the ecclesiological perspective. There is an allusion to the ecclesiological in the insistence that the rite is to be celebrated by a legitimate or properly ordained minister. This minister, however, is the sole essential performer of the action. He is not conceived as standing there as part of the Church, embedded in the Christ-Church relationship, but as standing between Christ and the Church.

(3) Neglect of the role of the participating faithful. They are not even necessary for the essential integrity of the Eucharist. They take part in it

only by a kind of association, by consenting to the action of the priest which is, in any case, essentially complete without them.

(4) Minimal awareness of the ultimate (or eschatological) goal of the Eucharist, namely the reorienting transformation of the participants in the direction of the dispositions of Christ. So much emphasis was put on the real presence of the Body and Blood of Christ, so much emphasis put on verifying a real—or at least symbolic (but with graphically real descriptors)—destruction of the victim that the real goal and ultimate reality of the Eucharist—transformation into Christ—was obscured.

This helps explain the dichotomy between the teaching of the contemporary official Roman magisterium and that of most contemporary liturgical theologians. It is due to the magisterium's continued acceptance of some of the shortcomings of post-Tridentine Catholic eucharistic theology. Thus, if there is to be movement toward a more broadly shared Catholic understanding of the Eucharist, the Roman magisterium will need to become less attached to explanations of the Mystery of Faith that are less than satisfactory. Theologians must do their part also. They must do a better job of pointing out that their attempts to provide the Church with a more adequate understanding of the Eucharist are not a challenge to, but are in continuity with, the fullness of the Catholic tradition.