

BLACKFRIARS

SUPPLEMENT

THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT

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THE ESSENCE OF THE MASS

Lovers of the Mass, and especially lovers of the theology of the Mass, are under a great debt of gratitude to Dom Romanus Rios, O.S.B., for his article in *The Clergy Review* of November, 1942, on "*Sacrificium Quod Immolamus*." Our gratitude would have been still greater if the valuable list of words had been referred to their place in the Mass.

His two concluding sentences offer an inducement to clear up some theological difficulties. He writes: "Lainez, S.J., when presenting his *Votum* on the Eucharistic Sacrifice defined the Sacrifice of the Last Supper, the Sacrifice of the Cross, and the Sacrifice of the Mass, each by itself and in its own way as a *verum et plenum sacrificium*. He was merely echoing the traditional Catholic doctrine as expressed particularly in the Secrets of the Mass." (*Clergy Review*, November, 1942, p. 487.)

(1) The theological difficulty betokened by these words of Lainez called forth this plain decree of the Council:—*Si quis dixerit, blasphemiam irrogari sanctissimo Christi sacrificio in Cruce peracto per Missae sacrificio, aut illi per hoc derogari— anathema sit.* (Sess xxii. *De Sacrificio Missae*, Can. iv.) Many minds, both inside and outside the visible Church, were perplexed by the words of those theologians who, rightly enough, maintained the sacrificial character of the Last Supper and of the Mass.

Theologians of the Church scrupled to call the Last Supper a sacrifice. To them it seemed that if the Last Supper was Christ's redemptive sacrifice, then the Passion and Death were not Christ's redemptive sacrifice.

Theologians outside the Church scrupled to call the Mass a sacrifice. To them it seemed that if the Mass was Christ's

redemptive sacrifice, then the Passion and Death were not Christ's redemptive sacrifice.

(2) In the unsettled state of opinion the Council, copying conciliar precedents, left the matter undefined.

But (perhaps by the special guidance of the Holy Spirit) it laid down the principle for settling a definition. In contrasting the Mass with the Sacrifice of Calvary it declared them to be one; and that they were *Sola offerendi ratione diversa* (Sess xxii, C. ii.)

(3) In these historic and weighty words they answered the scruples of Protestant theologians by asserting that there is but ONE sacrifice, as there is but one redemption and one Redeemer.

In other words, the difference between the Mass and Calvary is not essential or substantial, but accidental. It is like the difference between one and the same substance which has changed its Quality, or its Quantity, or its Place, or its Relation.

(4) This change of accident in an unchanged substance occasions much verbal ambiguity. If John has gone from Europe into Asia, we say "John has changed his place." Yet in truth John's *essence* has not changed; only his *accident* of Place has changed.

Again, to take an example from Quality: John, by going from a warm room into a winter's frost, may have changed from warm to cold. Yet, again, John's *essence* has not changed. Only his *accident* of Warmth has changed.

(5) We need to understand these principles in order to solve the difficulty which the Tridentine Fathers, in their divinely-guided wisdom, left unsolved.

For them, as for the scrupulous Protestant theologians, there can be only one Redeemer and only one redemptive Sacrifice. They could not forget the decisive words of St Paul: "Now ONCE at the end of ages, He hath appeared for the destruction of sin by the sacrifice of Himself. . . Christ was offered ONCE to exhaust the sins of many" (Heb. ix, 22-28).

When Lainez, voicing a current opinion, said that "the Last Supper, the Sacrifice of the Cross, and the Sacrifice of the Mass (were) each by itself and in its own way a *verum et plenum sacrificium*, he did not deny, though he might easily be taken to deny, that there was only one sacrifice. All three could not be three sacrifices; unless in the way in which we say "three Baptisms" and mean "One Baptism given to three persons."

(6) When the Tridentine Fathers defined that the difference between the Mass (as well as the Last Supper) and the Cross was only modal or accidental, the difficulty suggested by words such as those of Lainez, was at an end.

There is only ONE sacrifice—the Sacrifice of the Cross. The Last Supper and the Mass are not sacrifices. *The Last Supper and the Mass are THE Sacrifice of the Cross*; as a man who has changed from cold to heat or from right to left is one and the same man; but not with one and the same accident.

(7) From this we conclude that the investigations into the essence of the Sacrifice of the Mass seem to be based on a misapprehension.

It is clear that when a being changes its accident it does not change its essence. John is essentially one and the same when he has (accidentally) changed from cold to warm. If there is only a modal or accidental difference between the two, then these two are essentially one.

(8) The question: What is the essence of the Mass, which is only accidentally different from the Cross, is paralleled by the question: What is the essence of John cold (as different from John warm).

This question has two meanings. (a) What is the essence of John? or (b) What is the essence of warmth?

Now if the Cross is the ONE absolute Sacrifice in its absolute mode, and the Mass is the ONE Absolute Sacrifice in its representative and applicatory mode, the question "What is the essence of the Mass?" has two meanings.

(a) What is the essence of the Sacrifice of the Cross? or

(b) What is the essence of its representative and applicatory mode in the Mass?

To the first question the answer is: "The essence of the Sacrifice of the Cross is Jesus Christ's obedience unto death."

To the second question the answer: The essence of the representative and applicatory mode is the separate Consecration of the Body and Blood, whereby "As often as you shall eat this bread and drink the chalice you show the death of the Lord till He come." (I Cor. xi, 25.)

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ON PATIENCE

In our age of frenzy and unrest, when peace and tranquility are threatening to leave Europe altogether, it is a good thing to reflect for a while upon patience, and thus reflecting to recover that spirit of quiet and detachment, which is an essential condition of our spiritual regeneration.

Patience is not a popular virtue. It lacks the splendour of charity, or the persuasiveness of humility. Its light pales beside