

The Irish 990  
Ecclesiastical Record

*A Monthly Journal under Episcopal Sanction*

VOLUME LXVII  
JANUARY TO JUNE 1946

*FIFTH SERIES*

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1946

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## CONCERNING 'THOMIST METAPHYSICS AND THE SACRAMENT-SACRIFICE'

By Rev. J. BRODIE BROSNAN, M.A., O.B.E., P.P.

UNDER the above title the I. E. RECORD of June, 1945, published a paper which invites careful consideration and provokes many questions. It deals with the vexed problem of the Mass-Sacrifice. Only an honest examination of its contents can tell 'with what success.'

The paper may be summarized under the heads: general statements concerning 'sacrament'; sacrificial immolation; our priestly character and the difficulty of duly relating its function with Christ's sacrifice in Holy Mass.

### SACRAMENT

We know that there are seven sacraments. Yet the paper begins by stating:

The Church is herself the great *sacrament*, the *sacrament* of Christ in His kingly, prophetic and priestly offices. . . . The hierarchic activity is the *sacrament* of Christ's redeeming activity. . . . Our present study is concerned with Christ's priestly work . . . as it is represented in the *sacrament* of the activity of the Catholic priesthood. (Italics mine.)

Here the learned Dominican gives no clear indication of the precise meaning which he attaches to the word 'sacrament.' The reader is left to puzzle it out, and the puzzle increases as the paper proceeds to state:

The first theologian in modern times to discover the fully *sacramental* character of the Mass was . . . Abbot Vonier.

Perhaps it is true to say that the post-tridentine theologians, in their oblation theories of sacrifice or again in their mystical-immolation or even natural-immolation theories, had forgotten entirely the traditional 'sacramental outlook.' Not unnaturally those whose apologetic pre-occupations had led them to consider the Church as a *Res* and not as a *Sacramentum* were also led to envisage the Mass as a *Res*, another thing set over against the Cross, and not as the *Sacramentum* of the Cross.

Had Father Barden stated the precise meaning he attaches to 'sacrament,' it would have been most welcome. It would then be possible accurately to estimate the import implied in his various statements. As they stand these statements are ambiguous. They may cause mis-interpretation; for ambiguity is a smoke screen that precludes perfect observation and it may hide truth or falsehood. Perhaps until Alexander of Hales coined the word 'sacramental,' it is true to say that the term 'sacrament' could not be used in an exclusive sense. It was employed indiscriminately for any rite or

ceremony of a religious nature. When discussions arose among the Scholastics (say of baptism) as regards what properly constituted the sacrament, a distinction was made between the *sacramentum tantum*, *sacramentum et res*, and *res tantum*. The first was the due outward rite, the second the character, and the third sacramental grace. As regards the sacraments this distinction has more or less survived. But as regards Holy Mass, it would be interesting to learn where it may be found. No doubt St. Augustine spoke of the 'visible sacrament or sacred sign of the invisible sacrifice,'<sup>1</sup> and St. Thomas states that the words of consecration have from Christ an instrumental power and 'operate sacramentally.'<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine's 'sacred sign,' from the context, can only mean the outer sacrifice. Clearly the Mass is not the outer sacrifice of the Cross; for the Council of Trent declares the Mass-mode different from the Cross-mode. Why, therefore, call the Mass the *Sacramentum* of the Cross? Catholics speak of the *sacrifice* of the Mass and would deem it strange if asked: 'Have you been to the *sacrament* of the Mass?' Their terms 'sacrifice of the Mass' and 'sacrament of the Eucharist' seem truly traditional. Is it surprising if the post-tridentine theologians do not call the Mass a *sacrament* or a *sacrament-sacrifice*? Post-tridentine theologians have always regarded the priest's communion as intimately connected with the Mass-sacrifice; indeed, later on, some, as Dr. J. Bellord, Renz and others, considered the Mass just a sacrificial banquet and in the graphic words of the late Father McNabb, O.P. transferred it to the 'culinary department.' It is hardly credible therefore that post-tridentine theologians forgot the 'traditional sacramental outlook' of the Mass.

Can it be that St. Thomas wished his words to mean that the Mass is a sacrament-sacrifice? Though aware of their tradition on the saint's teaching, the great Dominican theologians after Trent give no sufficient hint that such was the saint's meaning. Good Friday, St. Thomas says, was not an *aptum tempus* for the consecrating of this sacrament. 'Ideo in die quo ipsa passio Domini recolitur, prout realiter gesta est, non celebratur consecratio hujus sacramenti';<sup>3</sup> yet the Body of Christ consecrated on the previous day was reserved for consumption, lest the Church be deprived of the fruit of the Passion bestowed on us by this sacrament. Before this, though having admitted that the consecration is an instantaneous act, the saint clearly distinguished the Eucharist as a sacrifice from the Eucharist as a sacrament.<sup>4</sup>

The Cross active sacrifice (or *in fieri*) was Christ's actual dying and that act of dying was instantaneous. Still, from one aspect that act was the active sacrifice and from another aspect the passive sacrifice; yet one aspect is not the other—*moriens* is not *mortuus est*.<sup>5</sup> The same obtains in the consecration of the Eucharist. Only after the consecration is the Eucharist a sacrament, while in the instantaneous consecrating act it is the active sacrifice—and

<sup>1</sup> De Civ. Dei, bk. x c. 5.

<sup>2</sup> S. 3, Q. 78, a. 4.

<sup>3</sup> S. 3, Q. 83, a. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Q. 79, a. 5.

<sup>5</sup> S. 3, Q. 50, a. 4.

*consecrans* is not *consecratus est*. St. Thomas makes the very true though subtle distinction: 'Dicitur enim in talibus factum esse secundum quod jam est; fieri autem secundum quod ante non fuit.'<sup>1</sup>

Here another difficulty is that the words of consecration are pragmatic. Hence, working on this pragmatic or sacramental idea, Canon Masure calls 'the ritual sacrifice of the New Law' (the Mass) 'A series of visible signs and actions, a unity of chosen materials and sacred formulas, which by reason of Christ's Will, contain the sacrifice whose image they portray before our eyes.'<sup>2</sup> No doubt they 'contain the sacrifice,' but only inasmuch as the act of the subordinate priest makes them by priority not the sacrament, but the outer sacrifice *in fieri* or the Mass. As already pointed out, the Eucharist-sacrament exists only after the consecration when the Eucharistic-active-sacrifice, *qua tale*, has ceased to be present. This sacrifice is essentially offered for all men—though the Church secures that it is offered especially for the faithful; it contains Christ and Christ's act as paying supreme reverence and obtaining the salvation of all men to whom of itself it proffers grace—whether or not they accept it. A sacrament gives grace only to the recipient; nor does any sacrament contain the whole Cross—since the sacrament of the Eucharist does not, *qua* sacrament, contain Christ's active sacrifice. For these and other reasons which might be cited, it seems that there is an incongruity or impossibility implied in the expression *sacrament-sacrifice* and that its use is to be deprecated.

#### IMMOLATION.

One is grateful that Father Barden faces the knotty problem of immolation. His purpose is to solve (to some a metaphysical impossibility) the great difficulty of the Mass-sacramental theory, to wit, 'the numerical identity of the active immolation in the Cross and the Mass.' Here it is imperative to grasp clearly the meaning of the active immolation of the Cross. Thus Father Barden treats the term negatively and positively. Negatively it is not (1) Christ's death on the part of the executioners. Their action, says St. Thomas, was a *maleficium*, an evil deed. It is not, as Father De la Taille observes, (2) Christ's voluntary acceptance of death. It is not (3) Christ's death merely. Positively it is, over and above these, 'the giving or yielding up the victim into the ownership of God.' It is an 'act of the practical intellect ordering or relating the thing out of the priest's (and the people's) possession into the special possession of God.' It is 'an act of oblation which avails of a destruction which is being carried out,' and so it 'takes on itself the special character of immolative offering.'

No doubt it is the function of man's intellect to dictate man's purpose and action. Thus Father Barden says: 'The inner essence of Calvary as a sacrifice was the act of relating His Body and Blood out of His dominion into the dominion of God.' But the inner essence of sacrifice must have due outer expression, and that

<sup>1</sup> Ch. Sacrif., p. 211.

<sup>2</sup> S. 3, Q. 75, a. 7, 2.

expression is stated to be twofold: the absolute or 'necessary and natural expression at the blood-shedding and death on Calvary'; and the relative and sacramental or the 'double transubstantiation,' where '*vi verborum* the Body alone is present under the species of bread and the Blood alone under the species of wine. But the immolative priestly act is other than the transubstantiative act. Christ in His human nature elicited the transubstantiative act as the instrument of the divinity, but He elicited His priestly act precisely as a secondary cause.'

This explanation seems a modification of the oblation-theory of the French School; agreements and disagreements need not be mentioned. Now can it truly be that the 'inner essence of Calvary' was Christ's act of 'relating His Body and Blood out of His dominion into the dominion of God'? Can it be really said that this is what the Cross outer-sacrifice really expressed? Considering the hypostatic union, how possibly can Christ alienate His Body and Blood out of His own dominion into the dominion of God? Even when dead, Christ retained complete dominion over His Body and Blood. Sinner and saint and every creature are so perfectly under the dominion of God that a more perfect dominion seems impossible—though it is true that sinner and saint hold each a different relation to Him. As man, Christ's relation to the Father was so supremely reverent and subordinate that any change therein does not seem conceivable. In fact it seems that Christ's perfect dominion over His Body and Blood enabled Him to use them with the utmost freedom in accomplishing the Father's Will and Purpose. And that Purpose (which was also Christ's) was not to relate Christ's 'Body and Blood out of His dominion into the dominion of God,' but rather to redeem fallen man and enable him to enter into the union that Christ ever had with the Father: 'That they all may be one, as thou Father in me, and I in thee: that they also may be one in us.' (John xvii. 21.) It was this same Purpose, may one humbly suggest, that Christ expressed and accomplished on the Cross; and that Christ expresses and accomplishes in the Mass-sacrifice.

It is interesting to find the *vi verborum* argument still utilized. No doubt the learned Dominican is aware that it was rejected by Cardinal Billot (and others) on the threefold ground: that the *actio de se* does not exclude the Blood from the Body under the species of bread; that if true the *actio de se* should in some conceivable case actually do so; and that the *actio consecrativa* 'nullo modo mutat Christum sed solam materiam quae consecratur.'<sup>1</sup> To me personally it has two difficulties. All admit that Christ offers Himself to the Father in Holy Mass. If the *vi verborum* argument be true, then it seems to follow that here Christ offers Himself in parts—one portion now, another portion again; and that the sacrificial blood-shedding represented is not the shedding *in fieri* (actually happening) but the shedding *in facto esse* (or already shed). Hence the Cross would seem not to be represented but misrepresented

<sup>1</sup> Q. 82-83, *De Sacrif. Missae*.

here—a misrepresentation which seems also inherent in the *sacrament-sacrifice* theory.

Forgetting the different theories of theologians, Christ's sacrificial oblation might be defined as His freely giving Himself and His all to the Father unto immediately accomplishing the act which will fulfil the Father's Will and redeem the world; and Christ's sacrificial immolation defined as His most reverent carrying out of that act in all its details according to the mode and manner decreed by the Father. A moment's consideration will reveal that both oblation and immolation obtain in the Mass as well as on the Cross. In each of these we have the same Christ, redeeming the same world with the same immutable supreme reverence, love and power; doing it in precisely the mode and manner decreed by the Father. The mode and manner of the Cross and Mass are different, but the active sacrifice is one and the same. Lest we may think that Christ lost any dominion over His Human Nature when being immolated on the Cross, it is well to remember that no suffering conquered Christ. Suffering affected His Human Nature only to the degree, for the time, and in the manner He allowed it according to the Father's decree: He permitted no bone to be broken; He freely endured it up to the moment wherein He granted its greatest act, the separation of soul and body. Then taking death in His arms for three days He threw it with all suffering from Him for ever. Father Barden must forgive me for not being able to agree with his meaning of immolation nor consequently with his deductions therefrom. The other meaning suggested, may one state with due reverence, seems the meaning of Tradition and of the Fathers, and would explain why the latter did not expressly treat the subject. Before Trent, oblation and immolation were usually employed indiscriminately one for the other. When contra-distinguished, which was but rarely, the difference seems to be as set forth above.

The doctrine of the Mass thus explained may easily be utilized to serve as a norm of the spiritual life. Through Christ we offer ourselves to God, our Last End; then, 'filling up what is wanting to the sufferings of Christ,' with Christ also we immolate ourselves and complete the work of our sanctification by reverent obedience and perfect observance of God's commandments or counsels, at all times and in everything. Our fundamental bond of union with Christ is faith, but our perfective bond is living faith or charity. The importance of this bond, when we assist at Holy Mass, the Mystery of Faith, or draw on its immense treasures, can hardly be over-emphasized.

THE PRIESTLY CHARACTER, ITS FUNCTION IN HOLY MASS, ETC.

This part of Father Barden's paper, though deep and abstruse, is quite interesting. The common thomistic doctrine is adopted. According to St. Thomas,<sup>1</sup> the priestly character is a quality of the second species or a *potentia* infused into the intellect; its

<sup>1</sup> 3. 2. q. 63.

function is instrumental; though permanent itself, its action is transient.

Before proceeding, perhaps, it may be well to note that a priestly character is a free instrument, in the sense that it will function only by the sufficient intention and purpose of its possessor who must use the proper matter and form. Using these any priest can call his character into act; nor does he require preventing grace for valid sacrificial activity, as is evidenced by the case of one who celebrates sacrilegiously.

Father Barden declares that our 'priestly character is analogically the same as Christ's'; that it is 'only an analogous participation of the priestly character of Jesus'; but he questions the statement that the act of our priesthood is 'completely understood when it is recognized as an analogous participation in the priestly action of Jesus.'

It is to be regretted that Father Barden does not specify precisely what he means by 'analogous.' Usually the word signifies some agreement of likeness or proportion in things that are of different natures or otherwise diverse. He does mention their disagreements when he says that our priestly character is numerically distinct from Christ's and that its act 'cannot be numerically the same as the immolative action of Jesus.' Their agreements seem involved in his treatment of physical premotion as applied to each when really functioning in Christ's active sacrifice. What then of physical premotion?

Father Barden's explanation is philosophical and abstruse, occasioning some ambiguity. So, in the sincere hope that he has been correctly understood, may one be allowed to put it another way: Existence is the *actus primus*; the action of what exists (creatures, of course) is called *actus secundus*. Physical premotion concerns *actus secundus*. Take an organ pipe which gives the note G. When the organ is silent, this pipe-note is in *potentia*. When the action of the air current awakes this pipe, the note G is audible. This action is the cause which reduced the *potentia* of the pipe to act; and may be called the *actus secundus causalis* or the 'physical premotion.' While the *potentia* of the pipe is now in act, it causes the note G which is the express or formal note required. Hence this *potentia* in act is producing an effect which is named the *actus secundus formalis*. It is clear that the note G depends both on the premotion and on the pipe-*potentia* and each is said to 'dominate over it.' Further, the will of the player may control the action of the air current and so enter the formal production of the note G as forte, piano, etc. On this account the player is often said to produce this peculiar note. In like manner the priestly character is a *potentia*; physical premotion awakes it into act; its formal act is the active sacrifice. The act of the *potentia* is only for a brief space; it is transient.

Father Barden, if one mistake not, uses the word 'power' for *potentia*; priestly power for the priestly character in the intellect;

*actus secundus causalis* for premotion; and *actus secundus formalis* for the immolative or sacrificial act itself. Hence he writes: 'Intermediate between the power and the immolative act is the *actus secundus causalis* or physical premotion, by which the priestly power of Jesus actually causes His priestly act and dominates over it as His own.' It is not quite clear here whether this domination is due immediately to the premotion or to the priestly act.

In the above example, the player's mind bears some resemblance to the note he would produce. The act of his mind is physically different from the premotion or air current which awakes the note, yet its purpose is the same and it dominates physically in the premotion in order to secure the formal act or note G. The action of both these might be described as analogically the same and they themselves might be called analogous. Father Barden seems to teach a somewhat similar analogy between our priestly character and that of Christ. He suggests that the formal act of our priestly character is a participation not merely of the *actus secundus formalis* but also of the *actus secundus causalis* of Christ's priestly power, i.e. the formal act of our priestly power participates in the causal act of Christ's priestly power as well as, doubtless, in its formal act. Thus we actually participate in the act of dominating over the priestly action of Jesus.

And again:

The mind of the human priest at the moment his character is in act is possessing as his own the very priestly action of Jesus itself. By an act which is numerically distinct from the physical premotion of the priestly character of Jesus, but which is an analogous, though real and physical participation thereof, he is really and physically participating in dominion over the self-same immolative act of Jesus which inheres in the mind of Christ and in no other, but which is really and physically contacted, appropriated, in the act of the character of the Catholic priesthood.

This, doubtless, is a clever attempt by a keen mind to solve a well-known difficulty and one is grateful for the personal element which gives it a touch of originality. Yet it does not convince for many reasons, some of which may be set down here.

It is hard to reconcile with the teaching of St. Thomas, whom the present writer has always tried to follow as the greatest authority on this subject. The I. E. RECORD paper speaks explicitly of the priestly character of Christ, e.g. 'our priestly character is only an analogous participation of the priestly character of Christ.' On the contrary, St. Thomas says expressly that Christ has no priestly character. Christ as man is the supreme priest; a priestly character belongs only to a subordinate priest. Hence when St. Thomas writes 'character Christi,' he does not mean any mark inhering in Christ's intellect but the mark inhering in the intellect of subordinate priests, whereby 'deputantur ad cultum christianum cujus auctor est Christus.'<sup>1</sup> This denial of a priestly character in Christ seems to undermine Father Barden's whole theory of physical premotion.

<sup>1</sup> S. 3, Q. 63, a. 3, ad. 2. Vide this whole Q. 63, where character is fully discussed.

But then Father Barden may mean by Christ's priestly character not any mark on His human intellect, but that the fulness of priestly power resides therein; or as St. Thomas puts it, 'Christo non competit habere characterem; sed potestas sacerdotii ejus comparatur ad characterem, sicut id quod est plenum et perfectum.'<sup>1</sup> Indeed speaking of Christ's active immolation Father Barden writes: 'That act still persists in the mind and will of Christ in heaven, and the state of victimhood in which His human nature ever remains is the perpetual term of that priestly action.'

There can be no doubt that Christ exercises the fullness of His priesthood through His intellect and will, but there is much doubt about Christ's perpetual act of immolation and state of victimhood in heaven. Father Barden's view must be judged on his theory of immolation and afford deep and enlightening thoughts. That theory has already been discussed nor does its existence or non-existence as regards heaven seem to need further and detailed discussion here. The point is that, on Father Barden's view, there must be a permanent and immutable *actus secundus causalis* of Christ's priestly power; and the question is, can such *actus secundus* be called physical premotion? Is there physical premotion in heaven? And did Christ's soul, which ever enjoyed the beatific vision, require physical premotion for acts of its intellect and will? The question is deep and invites answers. Still it does seem that the fulness of perfection infused into the soul by the beatific vision does exclude physical premotion; and if it does, the basis of Father Barden's solution seems to lapse.

Keeping, it seems, to what actually happens, St. Thomas states that at Mass the priest does nothing more than pronounce the words: 'Minister in hoc sacramento perficiendo non habet alium actum nisi prolationem verborum.'<sup>2</sup> No doubt it is understood that the priest does so with the proper intention and over the due material. The saint then briefly explains: 'Forma hujus sacramenti profertur quasi in persona ipsius Christi loquentis, ut detur intelligi quod minister in perfectione hujus sacramenti nihil agit nisi profert verba Christi.'<sup>3</sup> It may be noted that the Latin admits of more than one translation: 'In this sacrament the form is pronounced as if it were the words (*forma*) of Christ Himself speaking in person, etc.'; or, 'pronounced as it were in the person, i.e. by one representing the person, of Christ, etc.' This difference of meaning need not be discussed. The point is that, as it is not explicitly stated what part the priestly character plays, it must be deduced from these words when interpreted in accordance with the saint's general teaching on this subject. Here there is room for speculation and diverse opinions. The following is suggested as a possible solution. St. Thomas says that the priestly character is the instrument of Christ, who is the principal agent. It will, however, be allowed that it must be adjusted and as it were freely handed to Christ by

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.<sup>2</sup> S. 2, Q. 78, a. 1.<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

the human priest before Christ will use it. This requires that the human priest shall have a proper intention and employ the form and elements pre-ordained by Christ.

At the Supper, Christ merely pronounced outwardly the consecrating words over bread and wine. At the same moment the fulness of His Priesthood made Himself really present, really and truly offering His sacrifice to God under the species of these particular elements. At Mass the human priest *outwardly* represents Christ; by his priestly character he is the deputed and authoritative subordinate minister whom Christ has willed to employ. Hence, when duly functioning as subordinate and pronouncing the words of consecration, infallibly and instantaneously Christ Himself utilizes the character of the subordinate priest in order to direct the fulness of His own Priesthood on to *these particular elements* of bread and wine; and so, under their particular species, Christ makes Himself really present, really and truly offering His whole sacrifice to God for the Church, for the living and the dead, for all men; while in a particular way Christ is offering His sacrifice here, according to the special intention of the subordinate priest, for particular persons or purposes, for a private favour, person, etc. Hence, because of the human priest's authority received at ordination, Christ in every case utilizes the priestly character of this priest who, with proper intention in his performance of public worship, pronounces the words (or prescribed *forma*) over the pre-ordained elements. For then, utilizing this subordinate priest's character, Christ Himself instantaneously and infallibly perfects and completes the act of worship by these elements, making it *in se* efficient and fruitful. By the Will of His Father, Christ instituted this worship and instituted also that outwardly it should thus be performed by His subordinate priest. Omitting further development, it may easily be understood how intimately the human priest is connected with the Mass-sacrifice, how by pronouncing the words he secures its presence and offering on earth, etc. Now this seems the profound meaning conveyed by the statement of St. Thomas. On consideration it will be found tremendous and one will marvel at the power attached to the priestly voice of Christ's subordinate priest. If unable to see how physical premotion and its consequences enter here, may one be forgiven?

Father Barden deserves deep gratitude not only for the learned and original manner in which he treats the subject, but also for the valuable thought which he has put at the reader's disposal. Not to mention other salutary points, it is especially gratifying to find that he emphasizes the *active sacrifice* of the Mass. If one has not been able to agree with his theory, that does not detract from its intrinsic worth nor from its genuine endeavour to solve a very difficult problem.

J. BRODIE BROSNAN.