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Figures of the Sacrifice of the Eucharist



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Figures of the Sacrifice of the Eucharist

In the last talk we looked at the Old Testament types of the Eucharist as the sacrament of spiritual nourishment and as the supreme realization of the Indwelling of God with His people. Now we shall look at the Old Testament types of the Eucharist as the Sacrifice of the New Covenant. Here the figures are even more numerous and manifest. All the sacrificial rites of the Patriarchs and the Mosaic Covenant were types or figures both of the sacrifice of Calvary and of the Eucharistic sacrifice. The paschal lamb was but a type of the sacrifice of Christ, made present in the Eucharist. The same is true of all the holocausts of Israel, the scapegoat offered on the Day of Atonement, the morning and evening sacrifice, the peace offerings, the communion offerings, the thanksgiving offerings, the memorial offerings, the offerings of wheat, the offering of bread and wine of the priest Melchizedek. All of these were figures pointing to the reality truly contained in the Eucharist.

The typology of the Old Testament sacrifices and events is beautifully explained in an ancient homily from the second century by St. Melito of Sardis:

For he who was led away as a lamb and who was sacrificed as a sheep, by himself delivered us from servitude to the world as from the land of Egypt, and released us from bondage to the devil as from the hand of Pharaoh, and sealed our souls by his own spirit and the members of our bodies by his own blood.

This is he who covered death with shame and who plunged the devil into mourning as Moses did Pharaoh. . . . This is he who delivered us from slavery into freedom, from darkness into light, from death into life, from tyranny into an eternal kingdom, and who made us a new priesthood and a chosen people forever.

This is he who is the Passover of our salvation. . . . This is the one who was murdered in Abel, and bound as a sacrifice in Isaac, and exiled in Jacob, and sold in Joseph, and exposed in Moses, and sacrificed in the lamb. . . .

This is the lamb that was slain. This is the lamb that was silent. This is the one who was born of Mary, that beautiful ewe-lamb. This is the one who was taken from the flock, and was dragged to sacrifice, and was killed in the evening, and was buried at night; the one who was not broken while on the tree, who did not see dissolution while in the earth, who rose up from the dead, and who raised up mankind from the grave below.¹

Christ's Sacrifice made present in the Eucharist recapitulates the entire history and liturgy of the Chosen People.

¹ Homily on the Passover, nos. 65–71, included in the Office of Readings on Holy Thursday.

Priesthood and Sacrifice before the Mosaic Law

The Patriarchs were priests under the natural law. We first encounter sacrifice offered to God right after the Fall by Cain and Abel in Genesis 4:3–5: “In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard.”

After the flood, Noah offered sacrifice, as we see in Genesis 8:20–21:

Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And when the Lord smelled the pleasing odor, the Lord said in his heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.”

Noah here performs the priestly function of mediation between God and man. On behalf of mankind, which has now been reduced to his family, he offers up to God the burnt offerings of animals regarded as “clean” for sacrifice. This sacrifice propitiates God and calls down His favor on the family of Noah and his descendants (all mankind). Thus Noah performs both an ascending and descending mediation.

Abraham likewise served the priestly function of mediation between man and God. The greatest example was his preparation to offer the sacrifice of Isaac, through whom and in whose seed God had designated the promised blessing. As we know, only the interior sacrifice was accepted, without its exterior realization. Here too the ascending mediation of sacrifice was followed by a descending mediation of grace. On account of Abraham's extraordinary fidelity, God renewed His promise to make of Isaac a people as numerous as the sands of the sea, and a blessing for all the nations of the earth (Gen 22:16–18). Abraham's readiness to offer His son Isaac is a figure of Christ's immolation on Calvary in obedience to the salvific will of His heavenly Father. This very offering is contained in the Eucharistic sacrifice. Thus it is fitting that Abraham's sacrifice be remembered in the Roman canon, together with that of Abel and Melchizedek.²

Isaac is clearly a figure of Christ, the beloved Only-begotten Son of God the Father, in whom all the promises to the human race are contained. The promises were con-

² “Look with favor on these offerings and accept them as once you accepted the gifts of your servant Abel, *the sacrifice of Abraham, our father in faith*, and the bread and wine offered by your priest Melchizedek.”

tained in Isaac as forefather of the Messiah. As Abraham was ordered to sacrifice Isaac, so God the Father, in His eternal Providence, had determined the sacrifice of His Only-begotten Son for the redemption of the human race. As Isaac is a figure of Christ, the sacrificed Son, so Abraham, in this episode, corresponds to God the Father, a Father who sacrifices the object of His greatest love.

And as Abraham's readiness to perform the sacrifice showed his faith in the future resurrection of his son, that the promises might be fulfilled, so God the Father had His Son sacrificed in virtue of the divine decree for the Resurrection of Christ that would fulfill the promises of blessing to the human race. This parallel is discussed in Hebrews 11:17–19, which mentions that Abraham believed that God was able to raise Isaac from the dead: "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, 'Through Isaac shall your descendants be named.' He considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead; hence he did receive him back and this was a symbol." The word "symbol" in Hebrews 11:19 is equivalent to "type." Abraham's faith in God's power to raise Isaac from the dead was a type of faith in the Resurrection of Christ. Thus the fact that Isaac was not actually immolated, but was restored to Abraham, is seen by the Letter to the Hebrews as a type of the Resurrection by which Christ was restored after His real immolation. Abraham is therefore also a figure of all Christians who believe in the Resurrection of the Messiah. Other elements of the story of the sacrifice of Isaac are significant as well. Abraham has Isaac carry the wood for his own sacrifice. The Fathers³ see in this a figure of Christ carrying the Cross up to Calvary. At the last moment the angel stayed the hand of Abraham and a ram appeared with his horns caught in a thicket of thorns. This ram, offered as a holocaust as a substitute for Isaac, was also—like Isaac—a figure of Christ. Christ also was crowned with thorns, offered as a holocaust in substitution not for one individual, but for all sinners. Christ is a vicarious victim for the sins of every man. Thus it is fitting that He be represented by a vicarious sacrifice in the Old Testament figure.

³ See, for example, the early third-century work of Tertullian, *Adversus Marcion* 3.18, ANF 3:336: "And no doubt it was proper that this mystery [the Passion] should be prophetically set forth by types, and indeed chiefly by that method: for in proportion to its incredibility would it be a stumbling-block, if it were set forth in bare prophecy; and in proportion too, to its grandeur, was the need of obscuring it in shadow, that the difficulty of understanding it might lead to prayer for the grace of God. First, then, Isaac, when he was given up by his father as an offering, himself carried the wood for his own death. By this act he even then was setting forth the death of Christ, who was destined by His Father as a sacrifice, and carried the cross whereon He suffered." See also St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.5.4.

Abraham's readiness to sacrifice Isaac merited a renewal of the promise of blessing to all nations, confirmed by the oath of God. God said: "By my own self have I sworn . . . because thou hast done this thing, and hast not spared thy only begotten son for my sake, I will bless thee, and I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand that is by the sea shore. . . . And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because thou hast obeyed my voice" (Gen 22:16–18). This figure, however, magnificent as it is, falls far short of the reality of the Passion which is its fulfillment. Isaac was spared, whereas Christ was not. It seems that St. Paul makes reference to this difference between the sacrifice of Isaac and Christ in Romans 8:32: "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?" Furthermore, Isaac was not the promise itself, but only the forefather of the Promise that was Christ, in whom all nations are truly blessed.

Finally, a type of the sacrifice of Christ is present in Abraham's answer to Isaac's question about the sacrificial animal. Abraham replies: "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son" (Gen 22:8). The significance of this phrase is reinforced in Genesis 22:14, as Abraham calls the name of that place "The Lord will provide." In the literal sense, the Lord provided the sacrifice in the ram found in the thicket. But typologically, the Father provides the sacrifice through the Incarnation of His Son. What no mere man could accomplish—a sacrifice to redeem the world—the Lord provided in His Incarnation and Passion.

Priesthood and Sacrifice in the Law of Moses

The patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, continued to perform a priestly function similar to that of the patriarchs before them, such as Abel, Seth, and Noah. They built altars and offered sacrifices on them to adore and propitiate God, and they won graces for themselves and their descendants.⁴

The Law of Moses gave a new, divinely established form to the priesthood. The Mosaic Law put the priesthood and the offering of sacrifice at the heart of the worship of Israel. These sacrifices were first offered in the Tent of Meeting, and then in the Temple in Jerusalem.

It is easy to miss this reality of priesthood and sacrifice in rabbinical Judaism, because this dimension of Jewish worship has been lost since the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. Since all sacrifice had to be offered in the one Temple in Jerusalem, the destruction of that Temple at the hands of the Roman legions under Titus—and the impossibility of rebuilding it—meant the end of the entire sacrificial system of Judaism. The Jews mourn that destruction in an annual fast, *Tisha B'Av* (ninth day of the Jewish month of Av). With the loss of the offering of sacrifice,

⁴ With regard to Abraham, see Gen 15, and above all, Gen 22 recounting the sacrifice of Isaac.

the Old Testament priesthood lost its principal function and its reason for existing. Nevertheless, the line of the priesthood has not been lost; it is preserved in those who have the last name Cohen (or derivatives such as Kahn, Cohn, Kogan, Kagan, or Kahanowitz).⁵ Descendants of the priestly line still have the duty of giving the priestly blessing from Numbers 6:24–27: “‘The Lord bless you and keep you: The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you: The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.’ The Lord says, ‘So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.’”

The principal task of the Old Testament priests was offering the various kinds of sacrifice. They offered up sacrifice to God, and brought down blessings and teaching from God to man.⁶ There was a daily offering, morning and evening, and there were special sacrifices, especially in the principal feasts of Passover, Pentecost, Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), and the feast of Tabernacles (Sukkoth). The principal part of these sacrifices involved the shedding of the blood of domestic animals as a sign of vicarious atonement, as stated in Leviticus 17:11: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of the life.”

Four Ends of Sacrifice

The fundamental purpose of all sacrifice offered to God is to give something to God so as to enter into fellowship with Him. St. Augustine gave a classic definition of sacrifice in book 10 of *The City of God*. Speaking of pagan and Jewish animal sacrifices, he said: “We are to understand that the significance of those acts was precisely the same as that of those now performed amongst us — the intention of which is that we may cleave to God and seek the good of our neighbor for the same end. Thus the visible sacrifice is the sacrament, the sacred sign, of the invisible sacrifice.”⁷

The invisible sacrifice is expressed in Psalm 51:17: “The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” There needs to be a visible sacrifice to represent and exteriorly manifest the interior sacrifice of the heart because man is

⁵ The name “Cohen” is the direct transliteration of the Hebrew word for “priest” (קֹהֵן). The mere possession of such a last name is not considered sufficient proof, but should be backed by more complete genealogical records. Tombstones of priests were marked with a special sign of hands giving the priestly blessing.

⁶ See Deut 33:10: “They shall teach Jacob thy ordinances, and Israel thy law; they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt offering upon thy altar.” See also Ezek 44:15, 23.

⁷ *City of God* 10.5, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), 377. For the context of St. Augustine’s definition, see Uwe Michael Lang, “Augustine’s Conception of Sacrifice in City of God, Book X, and the Eucharistic Sacrifice,” *Antiphon* 19.1 (2015): 29–51.

a not a pure spirit like the angels. Having a bodily and a social dimension, we need to give worship to God with our bodies and through the offering of exterior things in a visible and social way.

Sacrifice is an act of the virtue of religion, by which we externally offer to God something which represents and accompanies the internal holocaust and submission of our will and intellect to God, who is the source of being, source of all our goods and of all our happiness, our final end and Judge, and seek to repair for our offenses against Him. Human nature requires us to offer to God both interior and exterior sacrifices, in accordance with our nature which is both bodily and spiritual. The inner sacrifice of the contrite heart is more important, but our *human nature also requires a sensible manifestation of what occurs in the heart*, and thus we need to offer God visible sacrifices, just as we offer visible tokens of our love, gratitude, and sorrow to our loved ones.

Under this general purpose of an external sign whose purpose is to establish fellowship with God, we can distinguish four distinct purposes for which offerings are made: to express adoration by manifesting God’s dominion over creation; returning some part of His gifts in thanksgiving for all that we have received; making propitiation for sin by offering something by way of satisfaction; and offering something to obtain a particular blessing from God and implore His aid. These purposes can be summarized as adoration, thanksgiving, propitiation, and supplication.

These purposes of sacrifice are accomplished by returning to God a symbolic part of His gifts to us. Interestingly, neither Israel nor pagan religions offered lifeless things to God in sacrifice, such as gold or jewels. Sacrifices were made from living things, plants and animals, which sustain human life: bread, wine, and the flesh of animals together with their lifeblood. Of all the things offered in sacrifice, the lifeblood was the most important because it most directly represents our life. What is offered in sacrifice thus represents the life of the one offering. This offering of nourishment and blood thus represents several things at once. It represents our dependence on God as the source of life, our need to offer what is highest in thanksgiving, supplication, and to make satisfaction for sin, and to represent the complete gift of self that we are called to make back to God. Finally, the sacrifice of that which sustains life, together with the lifeblood, most perfectly represents the sacrifice of Christ, whose blood was poured out for our redemption, in order to win us a share in His divine life.

Thus the reason countless sacrifices have been offered to God through the centuries in all the religions of the world is because each sacrifice falls infinitely short of giving to God something truly worthy of Him, and the only way to make up for its shortfall is to repeat it numberless times. Sacrifice is still due to God, even though we can offer nothing worthy, nothing capable of fully manifest-

ing His glory or of expiating our sin. St. Thomas Aquinas considers sacrifice to be a duty of man to God, mandated by the natural law, and thus known in conscience.⁸ This is the reason for its universal presence in human culture. No people is too primitive to grasp this fundamental duty of religion, despite the insufficiency of all our sacrifices.

Different Kinds of Old Testament Sacrifice

The first seven chapters of the book of Leviticus give the prescriptions for the various kinds of sacrifices that the Israelites were to freely offer to the Lord. The fundamental categories are burnt offerings, cereal offerings, peace offerings, sin offerings for inadvertent sins, and guilt offerings to atone for deliberate sin.

In all the animal sacrifices, the animal was killed before the Lord present in the Tent of Meeting, and later in the Temple. The blood was poured out on the altar as the portion of the Lord. Before the sacrifice, the person offering put his hand on the head of the animal to express solidarity with it.

Burnt offerings were distinguished from the others in that they were entirely consumed by fire. For the other sacrifices, the fat was reserved for the Lord whereas the meat was eaten by the priests. The cereal offerings of unleavened bread were partly burnt for the Lord and partly consumed by the priests. In the peace offerings the meat was consumed also by those who offered it.

All of these sacrifices are figures of the sacrifice of Calvary, made present in the Mass. For Christ gave Himself entirely, holding absolutely nothing back, and in this He is a whole burnt offering or holocaust. He offers Himself under the sacramental sign of (unleavened) bread, and in this the Mass is like the cereal offerings. Christ offers Himself to atone for the sins of the world, and this fulfils the types of the sin and guilt offerings which were offered in propitiation for sin. Finally, Christ's Sacrifice establishes peace between God and man and between men, and thus it fulfills the types of the peace offerings. Furthermore, the immolated victim is given to all the faithful in communion and this is also represented by the peace offerings.

⁸ See St. Thomas, *ST* II-II, q. 85, a. 1: "Natural reason tells man that he is subject to a higher being, on account of the defects which he perceives in himself, and in which he needs help and direction from someone above him: and whatever this superior being may be, it is known to all under the name of God. Now just as in natural things the lower are naturally subject to the higher, so too it is a dictate of natural reason in accordance with man's natural inclination that he should tender submission and honor, according to his mode, to that which is above man. Now the mode befitting to man is that he should employ sensible signs in order to signify anything, because he derives his knowledge from sensibles. Hence it is a dictate of natural reason that man should use certain sensibles, by offering them to God in sign of the subjection and honor due to Him, like those who make certain offerings to their lord in recognition of his authority. Now this is what we mean by a sacrifice, and consequently the offering of sacrifice is of the natural law."

In addition to the general offerings described in Leviticus 1-7, Leviticus 23 and Numbers 28-29 mandate special sacrifices for each day, for the Sabbath, for the beginning of each month, for Passover, Pentecost (offering of the First Fruits; feast of weeks), Rosh Hashanah (feast of trumpets), Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), and for the feast of booths.

Each day a year-old unblemished male lamb was offered morning and evening in the Temple as a burnt offering, together with the offering of unleavened bread wine and unleavened bread. On the Sabbath the offering was doubled.⁹ At the beginning of each month (the new moon) these burnt offerings were further multiplied: "two young bulls, one ram, seven male lambs a year old without blemish" (Num 28:11), accompanied by an increase of the unleavened bread and wine and the sin offering of a goat.

The most prolific offerings occurred on the day of Passover, as each household offered its own one-year old unblemished male whose blood was to be poured out in the Temple court. At the time of Jesus the lambs sacrificed may have numbered in the tens of thousands. In addition to the paschal lamb for each family, additional burnt offerings—two young bulls, one ram, and seven male lambs a year old—were offered in the Temple for the seven days of the feast.¹⁰ Similar offerings were made on each of the days of the other feasts. At Pentecost, each family also offered a cereal offering from the first fruits of their harvest. The most solemn and dramatic form of sacrifice took place on Yom Kippur.¹¹ In addition to burnt offerings as on the other feasts, this day was also marked by a unique offering of atonement for the sins of the priests and for all of Israel. On this day alone the high priest entered the Holy of Holies behind the veil and prostrated himself before the mercy seat, uttering the most holy name of God, and "not without taking blood" of a bull, ram, and goat, "which he offers for himself and for the errors of the people" (Heb 9:7). The blood was sprinkled by the high priest upon the mercy seat that covered the Ark of the Covenant, between the sculpted cherubim. The blood of the bull atoned for the sins of the high priest and his house, whereas the blood of the goat was for the sins of the people. This day also included the sending out of the scapegoat. Leviticus 16:21–22 describes the strange ritual:

Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins; and he shall put them upon the head of the goat, and send him away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. The goat shall bear all their iniquities upon him to a solitary land; and he shall let the goat go in the wilderness.

⁹ Num 28:9.

¹⁰ Num 28:19-24.

¹¹ See Lev 16.

The scapegoat most clearly represents vicarious atonement. What is implicit in other sacrifices is here made explicit. The scapegoat is laden with the sins of Israel, bears them in himself, and is exiled from the camp to atone for those remain inside. The scapegoat is therefore a magnificent type of Christ who bears the sins of the whole world, with whom He puts Himself in solidarity as our Head, Bridegroom, and High Priest.

Solemnity and Quantity of Sacrifice in the Temple

When King Solomon consecrated the first Temple in Jerusalem (2 Chr 7:5), 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep were sacrificed. Every Passover, on the afternoon of the 14th of Nissan, tens of thousands of paschal lambs were sacrificed in the court of the Temple at the hands of hundreds of priests, in rapid succession. The blood poured out in such quantity must have made an indelible impression on the mind.

The Mosaic Law stipulated that all sacrifice was to be done in the place that God would appoint, which, after its consecration by Solomon, was the Temple in Jerusalem.¹² This commandment, on the one hand, was a great difficulty for the Jewish people, requiring them to travel to Jerusalem three times a year.

Why did God command that all sacrifice be offered in the Temple? First of all, the Temple was a visible symbol of the unity that God wanted in His liturgy. Secondly, it helped preserve the unity of faith and worship in Israel, since all sacrifice was offered in one place under the oversight of the High Priest. Beyond these reasons, however, the precept that all sacrifice had to be offered in the Temple was a great symbol prefiguring the unity of worship in the New Covenant.

Although sacrifice is offered everywhere in the Catholic world, from the rising of the sun to its setting,¹³ nevertheless, the worship of the Church is even more unified than that of Israel. Everywhere in the Catholic Church,

12 See Deut 12:10–14: “When you go over the Jordan, and live in the land which the LORD your God gives you to inherit, and when he gives you rest from all your enemies round about, so that you live in safety, then to the place which the LORD your God will choose, to make his name dwell there, thither you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the offering that you present, and all your votive offerings which you vow to the Lord. . . . Take heed that you do not offer your burnt offerings at every place that you see; but at the place which the Lord will choose in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I am commanding you.” See also Deut 16:5–6: “You may not offer the passover sacrifice within any of your towns which the LORD your God gives you; but at the place which the LORD your God will choose, to make his name dwell in it, there you shall offer the passover sacrifice.”

13 See Mal 1:11: “For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name is great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts.”

one and the same sacrifice—the sacrifice of Calvary—is offered until the end of time in the Holy Mass. In Israel, many animal sacrifices were offered in only one place (the Temple), whereas in the Church, one and the same sacrifice is offered in every place under the sun.

Furthermore, the fact that all sacrifice had to be offered and consumed at the Temple where God indwelt with a mysterious presence (the *shekinah*), also served to unite the types or figures of the three different aspects of the Eucharist as the sacrament of the Real Presence, of spiritual nourishment, and of sacrifice. In the Eucharist, the Real Presence is one with the sacrifice and with the spiritual nourishment received in Communion. In Israel, the sacrifice, the spiritual nourishment, and the Indwelling were distinct, but they were united in that they occurred in the same place: the Temple and the precincts of Jerusalem (where the Passover had to be eaten).

After the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, this commandment linking all sacrifice with the Temple meant that the entire sacrificial system of Mosaic Judaism could no longer be observed. With the destruction of the Temple and the cessation of the offering of sacrifice for almost two millennia, it is not surprising that Jewish notions of sin and atonement have weakened. Today most Jews think of these as exclusively Christian concepts. Michael Wyschogrod, a prominent scholar of Jewish thought, writes: “Contemporary Jewish folk wisdom has little sympathy for the idea of sin and therefore has relatively little use for the relief of atonement. Any but the most fleeting reference to these ideas sounds strange to many Jewish ears. The accepted teaching is that sin is a Christian preoccupation with which Judaism is not burdened.”¹⁴ Wyschogrod argues that this common, although erroneous view, is the result of the massive influence of secularism in the Jewish community, and secondly, the desire of Jews to distance themselves from Christianity. It is likely that a third cause is the loss of liturgical representation of sacrifice after the destruction of the Temple.

The visual spectacle of the great quantities of animal sacrifices, day after day and year after year, must have impressed on the Jewish mind the reality of sin, the need for atonement through reparation and the spilling of the blood of an innocent victim, as well as the inefficacy of the sacrificial blood that was poured out. For if it was efficacious, why did it need to be replaced by new sacrifices every day? Thus the Temple sacrifices would have reinforced the hope that redemption would be fully and finally accomplished in the Messianic age. Indeed, some of the ancient rabbis held that the only sacrifice that would continue in the Messianic age would be the sacrifice of

14 Wyschogrod, in *The Human Condition in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Frederick E. Greenspahn (Hoboken: Ktav Publishing House, 1986), 103.

thanksgiving (*Todah*),¹⁵ which is the meaning of the Greek term, “Eucharist.”

The Passover

Of all the sacrifices of Israel, the immolation of the paschal lamb during the feast of Passover most perfectly prefigures the Eucharist. It prefigures Christ not only in the aspect of sacrifice, but also in that of communion and in its effect of grace.¹⁶ Not only was the lamb immolated on behalf of each household, but was also entirely consumed by them, protecting them in the first Passover from the angel of death.

At the first Passover in Egypt, the blood of the sacrificial lamb was applied to the doorposts and lintels of the houses of the Israelites to save them from the angel of death. In the Eucharist, the blood of the true Lamb of God offered in sacrifice is applied not to doorposts, but consumed and applied to our interior being to save us from the dominion of Satan and communicate the grace of supernatural life.¹⁷

Like the other rites of Israel, the Passover was not only a memorial of the past deliverance of the Exodus, but a prefiguring of the future messianic deliverance. Pope Benedict XVI comments on how the Eucharist fulfills the typology of the sacrifice of the paschal lamb:

This ritual meal, which called for the sacrifice of lambs (cf. *Ex* 12:1-28, 43-51), was a remembrance of the past, but at the same time a prophetic remembrance, the proclamation of a deliverance yet to come. The people had come to realize that their earlier liberation was not definitive, for their history continued to be marked by slavery and sin. The remembrance of their ancient liberation thus expanded to the invocation and expectation of a yet more profound, radical, universal and definitive salvation. This is the context in which Jesus introduces the newness of his gift. In the prayer of praise, the *Berakah*, he does not simply thank the Father for the great events of past history, but also for his own “exaltation.” In instituting the sacrament of the Eucharist, Jesus anticipates

15 See *Midrash Rabbah Leviticus* 9.7, in *Midrash Rabbah*, ed. H. Freedman (London: Soncino Press, 1961), 4:114: “In the Time to Come all sacrifices will be annulled, but that of thanksgiving will not be annulled.” See also *Pesikta* 79a and Emil G. Hirsh, “Sacrifice,” in *Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1964), 10:622a.

16 St. Thomas, *ST* III, q. 73, a. 6: “The Paschal Lamb foreshadowed this sacrament in these three ways [*sacramentum tantum, res et sacramentum, and res tantum*]. First of all, because it was eaten with unleavened loaves, according to Exodus 12:8: ‘They shall eat flesh . . . and unleavened bread.’ As to the second because it was immolated by the entire multitude of the children of Israel on the fourteenth day of the moon; and this was a figure of the Passion of Christ, Who is called the Lamb on account of His innocence. As to the effect, because by the blood of the Paschal Lamb the children of Israel were preserved from the destroying Angel, and brought from the Egyptian captivity; and in this respect the Paschal Lamb is the chief figure of this sacrament, because it represents it in every respect.”

17 See St. John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* 3.13–19, trans. Paul Harkins (Westminster, MD: Newman press, 1963), 60–62, included in the Liturgy of the Hours, Office of Readings for Good Friday.

and makes present the sacrifice of the Cross and the victory of the resurrection. At the same time, he reveals that he himself is the *true* sacrificial lamb, destined in the Father’s plan from the foundation of the world, as we read in *The First Letter of Peter* (cf. 1:18-20). By placing his gift in this context, Jesus shows the salvific meaning of his death and resurrection, a mystery which renews history and the whole cosmos. . . . Jesus thus brings his own radical *novum* to the ancient Hebrew sacrificial meal. For us Christians, that meal no longer need be repeated. As the Church Fathers rightly say, *figura transit in veritatem*: the foreshadowing has given way to the truth itself. The ancient rite has been brought to fulfilment and definitively surpassed by the loving gift of the incarnate Son of God. The food of truth, Christ sacrificed for our sake, *dat figuris terminum*.¹⁸

Sealing of the Old Covenant

Another key figure of the Eucharistic Sacrifice was the solemn sealing of the Mosaic covenant on Mt. Sinai with the blood of many oxen. In Exodus 24:5–8, burnt offerings and peace offerings of oxen were offered, and the blood was gathered in basins. Half of the blood was poured out on the altar, and the other half “poured out” or sprinkled on the people after they promised to be faithful to the covenant: “And Moses took the blood and threw it upon the people, and said, ‘Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words’” (Ex 24:8).

Normally the blood was reserved exclusively for God as His portion. Only on two occasions was blood also sprinkled on the people or their doorposts: the first Passover and the sealing of the Covenant at Mt. Sinai. Why? Both were covenantal events prefiguring the Eucharist. At the Passover the blood signified the propitiation worked by the blood of Christ. At Mt. Sinai it represents the mysterious fellowship between God and His people, which is achieved through our being adopted to receive a share in His divine life. This was represented on Mt. Sinai but fully realized precisely in the Eucharist in which the Blood—which is not only God’s portion, but God’s own Blood—is not merely sprinkled on us, but given to all the Christian faithful as our spiritual nourishment!

The animal sacrifices of the Old Testament, mandated by God Himself through Moses, were the center of the religious rites of Judaism, but they were always insufficient. This is clearly taught both in the Old¹⁹ and the New Testament, especially in Hebrews 10:1–7:

Since the law has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased being offered? . . . But in these

18 Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Sacramentum caritatis* §10–11.

19 See Ps 40:4-6; Ps 50; 1 Sam 15:22; Ps 51:17; Is 1:11; Amos 5:21.

sacrifices there is a reminder of sin year after year. For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins. Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, “Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Lo, I have come to do your will, O God,’ as it is written of me.”

Just as the Old Covenant was sealed with sacrificial blood poured out and sprinkled on the people, so too the New Covenant is sealed with blood. The difference lies in the victim whose blood is poured out. The victim in the New Covenant is not a multitude of irrational beasts, but the Messiah, the Son of God made man, “who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal 2:20).

Another key difference is that in the sacrifices of the Old Covenant, the victim and the priest are always distinct, even though the victim represents the priest and those for whom he offers. In the New Covenant, on the contrary, priest and victim are one and the same. The spotless Lamb of God offers not another, but Himself to the Father on behalf of all mankind, and especially of those who are made members of His Bride, the Church.