

## The Death of Jesus as Sacrifice

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**T**he death of Jesus stands at the very heart of the mystery of our redemption and of the liturgy, especially in the season of Holy Week clearly presents the Cross as a priestly sacrifice, theologians have interpreted it in a great variety of ways. The recent document of the International Theological Commission on the theology of redemption—thus far unpublished in English, so far as I know—summarizes a number of theories including the following five.<sup>1</sup>

### Theologies of the Death of Jesus

First, many evangelical Christians, following certain indications in the writings of the Reformers, speak as though Jesus experienced God's wrath and was divinely punished for all the offenses of the human race, thereby opening up for sinners the path of justification. Faith, they hold, is the instrument whereby, without merits of our

own, we appropriate Christ's merits for ourselves. This position, commonly known as the doctrine of penal substitution or substitutionary atonement, is still prominent in American Protestantism today. Second, liberal theology, reacting against the theory just described, eliminated the element of vindictive justice as an explanation for the death of Jesus. Instead, many Protestants of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries depict the crucifixion as a manifestation of God's unconditional love, which saves us by evoking in us a response of gratitude and by exemplifying virtues that we are to imitate.

Twentieth-century existential theologians propose still a third theory. Instead of concentrating on what actually happened in the death of the historical Jesus, Bulmann and Tillich, for example, speak of the redemptive power of the message (kerygma) or of the biblical image of the crucified Lord. They point out the capacity of this

paradoxical word or tense symbol to instill in us a new consciousness whereby we are liberated from selfishness and anxiety and brought to "authentic existence."

Transcendental theologians such as Karl Rahner propose yet a fourth theory. They see the death of Jesus as a real symbolic event that both expresses and embodies God's redemptive grace. This grace, they maintain, is extended to all human beings, at least by way of offer, whether or not they have heard the good news of the gospel. The crucifixion, as Rahner interprets it, gives us a clear sign that God's final word toward human beings is not one of severity and judgment but one of love and mercy.

A fifth school, exemplified by liberation theologians, emphasizes the sociopolitical aspect of Christ's redemptive work. According to this school, Jesus championed the rights of the poor and the oppressed and was crushed by the opposition of the rich and powerful. The death of Jesus is seen as a tragic consequence of his efforts to preach a message of social justice in a sinful world. Some feminist theologians agree, looking upon the Cross "as a life-affirming protest against all torture and injustice, and as a pledge that the transforming power of God is with those who suffer to bring about life for others."<sup>2</sup>

Distancing itself to some degree from these five theories, and others that might be mentioned, the Catholic

Church in its liturgy and its dogmatic teaching gives special emphasis to the sacrificial aspect of Christ's death as a transaction that took place between Christ and his divine Father. By "sacrifice" the Church means an external act that symbolically expresses the interior homage of the creature to God. The Church steadfastly maintains that the death of Jesus on the cross was a sacrifice offered in free obedience to God on behalf of the human race. It was, moreover, an expiatory sacrifice, since it was offered to atone for the moral faults of the human race and to obtain favor and grace from God. This doctrine was taught by the Council of Ephesus in the fifth century,<sup>3</sup> was emphatically reiterated by the Council of Trent and reappears in many of the documents of the Second Vatican Council.<sup>4</sup>

The sacrificial interpretation is frequently affirmed in papal documents. For instance, Paul VI in his *Credo of the People of God* writes: "We believe that our Lord Jesus Christ by the sacrifice of the Cross redeemed us from original sin and from all the personal sins committed by each one of us."<sup>5</sup> *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, officially promulgated by John Paul II in 1992, refers to Christ's death as "the unique and definitive sacrifice," a sacrifice that "completes and surpasses all other sacrifices."<sup>6</sup>

The differences are not simply inter-confessional. Closer inspection would reveal that the priestly and sacrificial

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theory is not peculiar to the Catholic Church, but plays a role in much Protestant and Anglican theology, as well as in Eastern Orthodoxy. And some Catholics, as we shall presently see, reject the category of sacrifice. In view of the current disagreements among and within the confessions, we must ask: Is the sacrificial interpretation biblically and theologically warranted? Can it be defended against all the modern theories that reject or bypass the concept of sacrifice, and especially that of expiatory sacrifice?

### The Biblical Evidence

Some recent authors deny that sacrifice is a central concept in the Bible. Karl Rahner expresses doubts about whether Jesus interpreted his own death as an expiatory sacrifice. Rahner finds the idea of sacrifice in some late New Testament texts that were over-influenced, in his view, by primitive notions that have subsequently been transcended.<sup>8</sup> Reinterpreting the event for the modern consciousness, Rahner expunges the concept of propitiatory sacrifice and substitutes his concept of symbolic or quasi-sacramental causality, to which I have already referred.

From the point of view of cultural anthropology, another Catholic, René Girard, argues in a series of books that the concept of sacrifice depends on a primitive psychological mechanism that has no proper place in Christian theology.<sup>9</sup> Girard denies that Jesus interpreted his own death as a sacrifice.

With reference to the biblical warrants, Girard adds, "I also believe that the sacrificial interpretation of the Passion and the Redemption cannot legitimately be extrapolated from the text of the New Testament—though an exception must perhaps be made in the case of the Epistle to the Hebrews."<sup>10</sup> Although Girard has recently modified his position,<sup>11</sup> his non-sacrificial interpretation has gained considerable following in recent years.<sup>12</sup>

From my own reading of the biblical evidence, influenced by the work of many exegetes, I think it must be said that the idea of the death of the Redeemer as sacrifice is massively present in Holy Scripture.<sup>13</sup> The priesthood and sacrifice of Christ are the central theme of the Letter to the Hebrews, in which we learn that Christ offered himself without blemish to God (Heb 9:14) as a single, once-for-all sacrifice for sins (Heb 10:12). But many other New Testament authors also emphasize the idea of sacrifice. Paul in Romans 3:25, says that we receive expiation through the blood of Christ. In 2 Corinthians 5:21, he depicts Jesus as a sin-offering made that we might achieve divine righteousness. In Ephesians 5:2, we are told that Christ "gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." In the First Letter of John, we read that Jesus is "the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). The First Letter of Peter states that we have been ransomed "with the pre-

cious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Pet 1:19). The Revelation to John celebrates the death of the Lamb who was slain and who by his blood redeemed members of "every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev 5:9-10).

These sacrificial themes are also present in the Gospels. In Matthew and Mark, Jesus is reported as saying that the Son of Man has come "to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45). All three Synoptic Gospels present Jesus at the Last Supper as instituting the Eucharist with the explanation that his body is to be broken and his blood poured out as the seal of the New Covenant. These passages implicitly refer to the sacrificial action of Moses whereby he ratified the Old Covenant by pouring out the blood of goats and oxen (Heb 9:13-14; cf. Ex 24:5-8).

According to the Fourth Gospel, John the Baptist points to Jesus as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). At Capernaum, Jesus speaks of his body as the bread that he will offer up for the life of the world (John 6:51). In his account of the Passion, John portrays the crucifixion as the preordained fulfillment of the sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb (cf. John 19:36).

The New Testament does not permit us to view the Cross as an unfortunate accident contravening the plan of God. According to Peter's Pentecost sermon, reported in Acts 2:23, Jesus

was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. Hebrews 9:14 tells us that Jesus offered himself "through the eternal Spirit." It was the obedience of Jesus to the Father and his docility to the Spirit that made his death a sacrifice pleasing to the Father. John 3:16 and Romans 8:32 assure us that God did not spare his Son but rather gave his Son up to death for our sakes. According to John's Gospel, Jesus proclaims that he has received and is freely obeying the Father's command to lay down his life (John 10:18). In the course of his prayer in the Garden of Olives, Jesus, as described in the Synoptic Gospels, struggled to accept the Father's will that he should undergo his Passion. The sufferings of Jesus, in the biblical perspective, must therefore be interpreted not as an unfortunate accident but as a sacrifice willed and intended by God.

### Sacrifice—Reparation for Sin

The concept of expiatory sacrifice has little intelligibility apart from a correct understanding of sin. In the moral order, the concepts of sin and reparation are essentially conjoined. The view that sin deserves punishment is not a primitive mythological notion but an inalienable part of the intuitive wisdom that belongs to all centuries and all peoples. Even children recognize that when they have done something wrong it is only proper and fair that they should be punished. They are uneasy, as are the rest of us, if they do

wrong and get away with it, without any kind of price being exacted for their misconduct.

This correct intuition must be distinguished from primitive mythical thinking, which fails to take into account the element of personal responsibility. For the primitive mind, the evil consists in a merely external occurrence, regardless of the intentions of the persons involved. A misdeed performed unconsciously or under coercion is treated no differently than a free and responsible act. Ritual impurity is not distinguished from moral culpability. This primitive mode of thinking survives in some cultures today. During the recent civil war in Rwanda, it is said that some of the women who had been raped by enemy soldiers were ostracized from their communities and scorned on the grounds that they had lost their physical integrity. The notion of personal moral responsibility seems to be a clear advance over this more primitive attitude.

Punishment is not, or at least should not be, a vengeful, sadistic act. Loving parents, without any anger or resentment, may obligate their disobedient children to go without dessert, to stay home from a party, or the like. Punishment in such cases has a retributive as well as a pedagogical purpose. Its aim is to restore the moral order and also to help the child, who is morally harmed if no compensation is exacted.

This moral component is readily recognized on the social scale, where

culpable injustice is viewed as a crime. Criminal behavior violates the right order of things and calls for retribution. Before sentence is passed on a criminal, culpability must be established. If the perpetrator was not morally responsible, our law states that no crime was committed.

Some contemporary jurisprudence, influenced by the loss of the sense of sin, seeks to dismiss the idea of retribution as a relic of an outdated primitive mechanism. Retribution is often confused with vindictiveness, with the lust for personal vengeance. Retribution, however, refers to an objective order that does not depend on any instinct to strike back at one's enemies.<sup>14</sup>

Sin is not merely a moral concept—it is preeminently a religious notion. It is an offense against God. This leads to a sense on the part of religious peoples of the need to placate God by offering in atonement some gift of great price, such as a spotless lamb or even an innocent child. However, even the choicest animals and the most sinless human beings are felt to be insufficient offerings; hence the constant repetition and accumulation of sacrifices. Natural religion is constantly striving to find a sacrifice adequate to atone for the turpitude of sin. In this way, it prepares the minds of devout people for the revelation of Jesus Christ as the true and perfect sacrifice. As Anselm saw so clearly, only a divine person was able to effect adequate reparation for the offense of sin.<sup>15</sup>

### Vicarious Satisfaction

At this point we must consider the particular problems connected with the concept of vicarious satisfaction. It is important to recognize that, although human beings are responsible for their own sins, we exist relationally. Thanks to our mutual solidarity, it becomes possible for us to intercede for others. Sin and retribution have a social dimension. There is such a thing as participation in collective guilt and in social acts of reparation.

The concept of expiatory suffering for the sins of others is present in the Servant Songs of Isaiah, especially in the fourth song (Is 52:13–53:12), in which the Servant makes himself an offering for sin so that by his sufferings the people may be restored to righteousness. The New Testament authors interpret this passage as a prophetic text referring to Jesus, in whom the text finds its typological fulfillment. Matthew, quoting from the fourth Servant Song, can say of Jesus, "He took on our infirmities and bore our diseases" (Matt 8:17; cf. Is 53:4). In the Acts of the Apostles, Philip, coming to the help of the Ethiopian eunuch, gives a Christological interpretation to the verses about the sheep that is led to the slaughter without opening its mouth (Acts 8:32; cf. Is 53:7–8). In 1 Peter 2:24, Jesus is said to have borne our sins, so that by his wounds we might be healed (cf. Is 53:5, 11). Paul, in Romans 4:25, says that Jesus was put to death for our trespasses (cf. Is 53:12). Hebrews 9:28

states that he bore the sins of many (cf. Is 53:12). For these New Testament authors, Christ is the innocent victim, vicariously bearing the sins of others in order that he may deliver them from the disaster they have brought upon themselves.

In this light we may find a richness of meaning in the concise New Testament statements that Jesus gave his life "for us" or "for the many" (Mark 10:45, 14:24; Matt 26:28; 1 Cor 11:24). The "for" (*ἀντί, υπέρ*) in these cases must be understood as a kind of vicarious representation. Jesus suffers *in place of* the guilty in order to deliver them from their guilt.

Here again, as in the case of punishment, we must distinguish between primitive mythological thinking and perennial wisdom. In the primitive society, sacrifice for sin takes the form of transferring punishment by loading guilt upon an innocent victim, who suffers involuntarily. This substitution is the kind of psychological mechanism against which Girard rightly protests. In some theological theories, Jesus is portrayed as a scapegoat on whom the sins of the human race are laid, so that the rest of us can escape punishment. God is depicted as punishing his innocent Son in our place.

A personalist framework of thinking calls for a radical transformation of this concept of atonement.<sup>16</sup> In primitive mythological thinking, as I have said, guilt is understood in crassly material or objective terms, and consequently

atonement is depicted as the mere substitution of one thing for another, as would be the case when an old tire is replaced by a new one, which will itself eventually be replaced. But in a personalized framework, there is no way in which one person can simply replace another: One person may represent another, but cannot substitute for that other except in a merely functional way. As Dorothee Sölle has brilliantly explained, substitution is the definitive exchange of reified objects, whereas representation is the provisional intervention of persons on behalf of other persons. To retain this distinction, it seems preferable to avoid speaking of "substitutionary atonement" in the case of Jesus Christ. Sölle herself proposes to speak rather of Christ the Representative.<sup>17</sup>

Christ's redemptive act, unlike the merely mechanical substitution of the scapegoat, is the loving identification of the innocent sufferer with the guilty on behalf of whom he suffers. However, it cannot be understood in merely moral or psychological terms, as the vocabulary of "loving identification" might seem to imply. Even when personalistically interpreted, "substitution" does not do justice to the reality, since a substitute could not do for us any more than we could do for ourselves. In view of his theandric constitution as incarnate Son of God, Christ is able to do far more for us than any human person could do. He stands before the Father as the representative head of the new,

reborn humanity. He is the Second Adam, the progenitor in the order of grace, the firstborn of the dead (1 Cor 15:45; Rom 8:29; Col 1:18). Alone among human beings, he is qualified to remove the guilt of human sin and to communicate divine life.

Because there is no mechanical substitution of one person for another, the representative death of Christ does not automatically remit the guilt of sinners. The merits of Christ are not simply imputed to us by some kind of juridical fiction; rather we are truly and inwardly healed through the infusion of the grace that flows from him. We have to allow ourselves to be taken over by Christ as he stands in for us. This we do by appropriating Christ's action on our behalf through free and personal acts of faith, hope, and loving obedience.<sup>18</sup>

Does the vicarious nature of redemption mean that Jesus is punished in our place? Some authors, indulging in very powerful rhetoric, describe in lurid terms the way in which the wrath of the eternal Father was visited upon the guiltless Son, so that he felt rejected and even hated by God.<sup>19</sup> Some go so far as to suppose that Jesus suffered a loss of faith, fell into despair, and underwent the pains of the damned. His cry on the Cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou abandoned me?" (Matt 27:46 & parallels) is considered to confirm this interpretation. Against these views, I would insist that Jesus remained at all times the well-beloved Son, living in close com-

munion with the Father through the incomparable grace that flooded his soul. Far from despairing, he continued to trust in the Father, whom he loved. Since the cry from the Cross is a quotation from the first verse of Psalm 22, the interpretation remains somewhat uncertain. It seems probable that Jesus (or the Evangelists who ascribe these words to him) had in mind the whole of the psalm, which Jesus is, so to speak, intoning. As Walker Kasper points out, "According to the practice of the time, saying the opening verse of a psalm implied the whole psalm."<sup>20</sup> The Psalm, beginning as a lament, turns into a song of thanksgiving to the God who saves from death:

I will tell of thy name to my  
brethren;  
In the midst of the congregation  
I will praise thee.

.....  
All the ends of the earth  
shall remember and turn to  
the Lord.  
(Ps 22:22, 27; cf. Heb 2:12).

It would be a mistake, therefore, to interpret the words quoted by Jesus as though he were describing his psychological state of feeling rather than referring to the religious message of the Psalm.

The fact remains, however, that Jesus did suffer terrible afflictions, and did so because it was the Father's will that he should do so. He was abandoned in the sense that God did not

come miraculously to his aid, as presumably God could have done. Would it not have been far better, some ask, for the Father simply to forgive the guilt of the human family without exacting any retribution? For all we know, it might have been possible for God to grant this free forgiveness. But would it have been better? How, if he had done so, would the right order have been established? What kind of healing would have been effected? How would we have learned the full gravity of sin? What motivation would we be given for avoiding sin in the future? What consolation would be given to persons burdened with exorbitant and unjust sorrows? All things considered, it appears that God has exercised greater mercy toward us by giving his innocent Son to suffer and die on our behalf than if he had simply cancelled out the debt of sin.<sup>21</sup>

### The Theories Compared

The advantages of the representational sacrifice theory, and the answers to the objections raised against it, may be clarified by a review of the alternative theories described at the opening of this paper.

In some ways the sacrificial interpretation, as I have proposed it, resembles the first theory, that of penal substitution, but the differences are important. Both theories maintain that Jesus suffered terrible ordeals and thereby won for sinners a release from the pains they deserve. But the penal

substitution theory makes it appear that God punishes the innocent in place of the guilty, thereby suggesting that God is unjust. The theory of representative headship, by contrast, looks upon Jesus as one who offered satisfaction, rather than endured punishment. These are true alternatives. As Anselm insisted, sin requires either punishment or satisfaction; satisfaction takes the place of punishment.<sup>22</sup> Satisfaction is voluntarily given, whereas punishment must be coercively endured. Satisfaction, unlike punishment, can be offered by the innocent as well as by the guilty. Punishment, as an act of justice, must be strictly proportioned to the offense, but satisfaction, as a work of love, may be superabundant.

According to Thomas Aquinas, Christ "offered to God more than was required to compensate for the sin of all humanity."<sup>23</sup>

Some authors have given the impression that adequate satisfaction is to be measured on a quantitative scale. However, St. Thomas puts the transaction in a personalist context. It is not simply the greatness of Christ's sufferings that pleases God, he writes; rather it is the dignity of the person and the magnitude of the love with which he suffered. Taken in combination, these immeasurably surpassed the malice of the sins of those who put Jesus to death, and indeed the sins of the whole world.<sup>24</sup>

The biblical metaphor of ransom, taken up in the theological tradition,

accurately conveys the idea of the innocent freely and lovingly taking on sufferings to win freedom for others. But the metaphor can easily be pressed beyond the limits of its utility, as was done by some Church Fathers who developed elaborate theories about a price paid by Christ to the devil. Another weakness of the ransom metaphor is its tendency to suggest that the offering is a purely extrinsic transaction that redeems sinners without interiorly transforming them.

In the theory I have proposed, following the *Intentional Theological Commission*, Christ as representative head stands in solidarity with those he redeems. In being redeemed they enter into mystical communion with the head, so that the head and members make up, in the phrase of St. Thomas, "one mystical person."<sup>25</sup> There is no question of purely material substitution, but only of an identification through love.

The liberal Protestant theory, the second in my enumeration, rejects not only the penal substitution theory but together with it the theory of propitiatory sacrifice. How can we suppose—it is asked—that the Father would be pleased by the torture and death of his innocent Son, let alone that he would command his Son to undergo such a fate? Would not this be, as some have suggested, the supreme instance of cosmic child abuse?<sup>26</sup> To avoid this kind of objection, liberal theologians eliminate the dimension of atonement

and reduce the meaning of the Passion to its exemplary value. Jesus is seen as a paradigmatic example of patience in affliction.

In what it positively asserts, the liberal theory is acceptable. We may agree that Christ in his Passion and death offers an example that should inspire all believers to follow him. As it is written in the First Letter of Peter, "Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps" (1 Pet 2:22). But the full efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ demands attention to that which transpired between Jesus and the Father. According to the Scriptures, as we have seen, God handed over his Son to death for our sakes (Rom 8:32). We have already noted how frequently the Scriptures speak of the death of Jesus as an expiatory sacrifice offered to God. This enables us to understand how the death of Christ could win grace even for those who have not, or not yet, been evangelized.

In the view I have presented, God is not angry with Jesus. God does will that Jesus should suffer and die, but only because the suffering and death of Jesus can bring about the redemption of the human race. In a certain sense it was necessary, as Jesus indicated when he asked the pilgrims at Emmaus, "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:26). To induce someone to submit to death is not the same as to kill that person. In the Second Book of Maccabees, we read of a mother

who saw her seven sons go to their deaths on the same day, and she encouraged each of them to do so, with the assurance that God would restore their lives to them in a renewed universe. When the last of the seven was being urged to apostatize, she exhorted him to not fear his executioners and to accept death "so that in God's mercy I may get you back again" (2 Macc 7:29). No one of good judgment could accuse this mother of murder or child abuse.

So too in the case of God. He does not physically kill Jesus, but he does encourage and command Jesus to accept death voluntarily at the hands of evil executioners, with the assured hope of being rewarded with an eternal crown of glory. The death of Jesus was pleasing to God insofar as it was a sacrifice, voluntarily and lovingly offered out of obedience. The action of those who put Jesus to death, however, was not a sacrifice but a most serious sin, displeasing to God. As Thomas Aquinas put it, it was not *sacrificium* but *maleficium*.<sup>27</sup>

There is much to be learned from the existential theory, as proposed in different forms by Bulmann and Tillich. This third theory captures the power of word and sacrament to transform those who open themselves in faith to the new life that God offers through these means. But the existential theory, taken by itself, fails to anchor the word and sacraments securely in the personal once-for-all event of Jesus Christ. For Bulmann and Tillich, Jesus himself almost disappears

in the shadowy caverns of historical research. The human agency of Jesus plays no essential role in their theology.

Rahner's transcendental theology of redemption (the fourth theory) rightly emphasizes that the initiative comes from God. We must agree that God, the redeemer par excellence, makes himself present in Christ, reconciling the world to himself (cf. 2 Cor 5:19). We may agree, consequently, that Christ does not exert some kind of causality on God, inducing an angry God to become merciful. But the theory of expiatory satisfaction, as Thomas Aquinas and others present it, does not require Christ as creature to act on the Creator. Christ's sacrificial self-offering enables God to exercise his mercy in surpassing measure without detriment to the due order of justice. In Rahner's theory, by contrast, the expiatory sacrifice of Christ becomes an embarrassment.

Turning now to the fifth theory, we may observe that liberation theologians are to be commended for bringing out the sociopolitical dimensions of the redemption. Jesus did identify himself with the poor and oppressed, and his death was brought about, in great part, by the rich and powerful. Part of the redemptive value of the death of Jesus may be thought to consist in its power to inspire others to take up the struggle for a just society. However, no society established by human effort can interiorly transform its members from sin to holiness, nor can it achieve the perfect peace of the kingdom of God.

Sociopolitical reductionism misses the very heart of the Christian doctrine of redemption.

Some contemporary theologians, influenced by liberation theology and by the psychological theories of Girard, have pointed to the nonviolence of Jesus as providing a path capable of breaking the seemingly endless circle of violence. This theme, in my estimation, can be successfully combined with the classical theories of propitiatory sacrifice and representative headship. The concept of sacrifice can easily be abused, as Girard and others have shown; but, rightly understood, the classical theories of Christ's sacrifice purify and transform the concepts prevalent in the history of religions. It does not consist in the violent action of the executioners but in the nonviolent submission of Jesus, who is both priest and victim, and thereby triumphs over all the powers of evil.

In confirmation of these remarks, it may be profitable to cite once again the new document of the International Theological Commission. In an important paragraph it declares:

The theory of representative headship understands redemption as God's gracious intervention into the human situation of sin and suffering. The incarnate Word becomes the gathering point for the constitution of a reconciled and restored humanity. The entire

career of Jesus, including the mysteries of his hidden and public life, is redemptive, but it comes to a culmination in the paschal mystery whereby Jesus, through his loving submission to the Father's will, seals a new covenant relationship between God and humanity. The death of Jesus, which results inevitably from his courageous opposition to human sin, constitutes his supreme act of sacrificial self-giving and is, under that aspect, pleasing to the Father, satisfying in an eminent way for the disorder of sin. Without being personally guilty or being punished by God for the sins of others, Jesus lovingly identifies with sinful humanity and experiences the pain of its alienation from God. In his meekness Jesus allows his enemies to unload their resentment upon him. Returning love for hatred, and consenting to suffer as though he were guilty, Jesus makes God's merciful love present in history and opens a channel through which redemptive grace can flow forth upon the world.<sup>28</sup>

As this approach implies, Jesus is not just a figure from the remote past whose deeds we recall. Raised to eternal glory, he still carries on his

redemptive work today. All who are baptized in his name and seek to live out their faith are living members of his body. He lives in them, breathes his Spirit into them, and interiorly directs them to share in the sacrificial movement of his life. In so doing, they are lifted out of the spiral of violence and brought into a new community of reconciliation. Sharing in the cross, they triumph over the forces of sin, make intercession for the broken world, and thereby contribute, in their own measure, to the universal peace that goes by the name of the reign of God. ■

#### Notes:

1. International Theological Commission, *Questiones Selectae de Deo Redemptore*. An Italian version has been published: *Commissione teologica internazionale, "Alcune questioni sulla teologia della redenzione," Civiltà Cattolica* 146 (December 16, 1995): 551-99.
2. Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Jesus and Salvation," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 49 (1994): 15.
3. The tenth anathema of Cyril of Alexandria (DS 261), included in the proceedings of the Council of Ephesus, teaches that Christ offered himself up for the sins of others.
4. Council of Trent, Session 22, *Doctrina de SS. Missae Sacrificio*, cap. 1 and 2 (DS 1739-43); canons 3 and 4 (DS 1753-54).
5. *Sacrosanctum concilium* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy) 47. See also

- Lumen gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) 5-6 and 28; also *Unitatis redintegratio* (Decree on Ecumenism) 2, and *Presbyterorum ordinis* (Decree on Priestly Ministry) 13.
6. Pope Paul VI, *Credo of the People of God* (1968) 10. See English translation in *Catholic Mind* 66 (September 1968): 58-64.
7. Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994) 613-614.
8. Rahner refers to "late" New Testament soteriology as the source of the concept that the death of Jesus was a sacrifice of propitiation. He remarks that "the general idea of sacrifice in the history of religions cannot easily be shown to be tenable without some verbal subterfuge," and that the notion of propitiatory sacrifice "is of little help to us today towards the understanding we are looking for." Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Crossroad, 1982) 282.
9. René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1977); *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1982); *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1987); *Job: The Victim of His People* (London: Athlone, 1987).
10. Girard, *Things Hidden* 224.
11. In an interview with Rebecca Adams, Girard says that in dismissing Hebrews in *Things Hidden*, "I was completely wrong." Although the notion of sacrifice is unacceptable in its primitive form, he remarks, "there should be a valid use of it" in Christian theology. See *Religion and Literature* 252 (Summer 1993): 28-29. I am indebted to Jody Bortum for calling my attention to this interview.
12. Robert Daly, in his Foreword to Raymond Schwager's *Must There Be Scapegoats? Violence and Redemption in the Bible* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), says that Girard's theory has "prepared the way for a quantum leap in our understanding of the biblical writings" (v). Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly, in his *Sacred Violence Paul's Hermeneutic of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), maintains that Girard has made it possible for us to see the pivotal importance of the cross in Paul and to accept Luther's theology of the Cross. In a sequel entitled *The Gospel and the Sacred: Poetics of Violence in Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), Hamerton-Kelly applies Girard's theory of mimetic violence or scapegoating to Mark. Gil Bailie, in his *Violence Unwielded: Humanity at the Crossroads* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), applies Girard's hermeneutics of sacred violence to a variety of contemporary social crises. [Editor's note: See the Winter/Spring 1996 issue of the *Josephinum Journal of Theology*, where Lawrence C. Landini, O.F.M., reviews Bailie's book.]
13. For two treatments that respond to Girard see Albert Vanoye, "Sacredcece au Christ et culte chrétiens selon l'épître aux Hébreux," *Christus* 28 (1981): 216-30, and Robert North, "Violence and the Bible: The Girard Connection," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47 (1985): 1-27.
14. See Joel Kidder, "Requital and Criminal Justice," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 15 (1975): 255-78. I am indebted to Father W. Norris Clarke, S.J., for having called my attention to this article and the pertinence of retributive justice to the theology of redemption, as sketched in the preceding paragraphs.
15. Summing up the dialogue in his *Cur Deus Homo*, Book II, chapter 18a, Anselm has Booso conclude: "This debt was so great that, while none but man must solve the debt, none but God was able to do it, so that the who does it must be both God and man." St. Anselm, *St. Anselm: Basic Writings*, trans. S. N. Deane (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1962) 279.
16. This transformation of meaning is well described by Joseph Ratzinger in his *Introduction to Christianity* (New York: Seabury/Crossroad, 1969) 213-23. See also Ratzinger's "Selbverleugung," *Handbuch Theologischer Grundbegriffe*, vol. 2 (Munich: Kösel, 1963) 566-75.
17. Dorothee Sölle, *Selbverleugung* (Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 1966) 26: "Einzart ist entgültiger Austausch von totem, dinghaftem oder verdinglichtem Sein, Selbverleugung dagegen vorläufiges Einwirken von Personen für Personen." English translation: *Christ the Representative* (London: SCM, 1967) 23.
18. This, of course, is the basic teaching of the Council of Trent on justification. See Session VI, chapter 7, and the corresponding canons 10 and 11 (DS 1528-31, 1560-61).
19. Karl Barth, standing within the punitive tradition, writes of Jesus: "He stands before the Father at Golgotha burdened with all the actual sin and guilt of man and of each individual man, and is treated in accordance with the deserts of man as the transgressor of the divine command." *Church Dogmatics II/2* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957) 758.
20. Jürgen Molmann, in *The Crucified God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), is even more explicit: "We must not allow ourselves to overlook this 'enmity' between God and God by failing to take seriously either the rejection of Jesus by God, the gospel of God which he lived out, or his last cry to God upon the cross" (152). Without speaking of "enmity" between Jesus and the Father, Hans Urs von Balthasar speaks of an experience of separation (*Trennung*), but the Holy Spirit, he says, remains as the pledge that the unity of love remains notwithstanding the separation, so that the separation itself becomes "the supreme proof of definitive unity." *Theodramatik IV, Das Endspiel* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1983) 236-37.
21. Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* (New York: Paulist, 1976) 118. For a survey of interpretations see Gérard Rossé, *The Cry of Jesus on the Cross* (New York: Paulist, 1987).
22. On the various reasons why it was suitable and even necessary for Christ to make reparation for humankind, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III q. 1 a. 2, III q. 46 a. 1c and ad 3.
23. St. Anselm, *Cur Deus homo*, Book I, chap. 15; Deane 209.
24. *Summa Theologiae* III q. 48 a. 2.
25. *Summa Theologiae* III q. 14 a. 1 ad 1; III q. 48 a. 3c; Suppl. 14.2. Cf. 1 John 22.
26. *Summa Theologiae* III q. 8 a. 1c; Cf. III q. 48 a. 2 ad 1; III q. 49 a. 1 ad 2; III q. 49 a. 3, etc.
27. Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad, 1988) 56; cf. Johnson 15.
28. *Summa Theologiae* III q. 48 a. 3 ad 3. International Theological Commission, *Questiones selectae*, Part III, §39.