

## Sacrifice according to the *Summa Theologica* of St Thomas Aquinas

*Abbot Bernard Lucien*<sup>1</sup>

Four main sections of the *Summa Theologica* lend themselves to an analytical study of St. Thomas' teaching on sacrifice:

- the treatise on the Old Law (ST1-2 q98 - q105);
- the treatise on the virtue of religion (ST2-2 q81 - q100);
- the question on the priesthood of Christ (ST3 q22) and that on the mode of efficiency of his Passion (ST3 q48);
- the treatise on the Eucharist (ST3 q73 - q83).

We could simply follow this order to carry out our investigation. But St Thomas himself invites us to examine first the data of natural law, since they are common and general, presupposed by the determinations of divine or human positive law. It is in the treatise on the virtue of religion that our Doctor provides this teaching. We will therefore begin with it.

### **1. Sacrifice from the perspective of the virtue of religion**

Reminders about the virtue of religion.

Sacrifice belongs to religion. As a potential part of justice, this virtue gives back to God what is truly due to him, without being able to give him as much as is due to him. On this second point, therefore, it does not fully realise the essence of justice (ST2-2 q80 a2).

Religion is a special virtue, ordered to give God the honour that is due to him (q81 a4). Since honour is due to someone because of their excellence, and God possesses a wholly unique excellence through his absolute transcendence, it follows that we must give God special honour.

Religion can also play the role of a general virtue when it orders the acts of other virtues for the glory of God (q81 a4 ad2); it is therefore necessary to distinguish clearly between acts that are elicited by religion and acts that are commanded by it (*ibid.* and q81 a1 ad1).

St Thomas specifies very formally (ST2-2 q81 a2 ad2) that acting in this way for the sake of divine reverence – which is what religion does – is a matter for the judgement of natural reason; it is the determination of this action that depends on the institution of divine or human law.

The virtue of religion should not be separated too abruptly from the theological order. St Thomas even affirms (ST1-2 q103 a3) that interior worship – to which exterior worship is ordered –

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consists in faith, hope and charity. However, in order not to reduce this virtue to nothing, it is important to understand its humble specificity in relation to faith, hope and charity. Our Doctor explains this (ST2-2 q81 a5): God is the object of the theological virtues, but He is only the end of religion, whose object is the worship due to God. This object is a means directly related to God – hence the pre-eminence of religion among the moral virtues – but it belongs to the created order.

From this perspective, the theological virtues govern religious acts, since these virtues have as their object the end itself, God, whereas religion has as its object certain acts in view of the end (*ibid.* ad1). But, correlatively, religion brings a specific dimension to the theological virtues, that of ordination to divine reverence in latria worship.

An important consequence of the *moral* character of the virtue of religion is that it possesses a golden mean, in a way that is unique to it<sup>2</sup>.

### ***The interior acts of religion***

The interior acts of religion – we need only recall – are devotion in the will (q82) and prayer in practical reason (q83).

Devotion is something much stronger than what the modern sense conveys: it is the will to accomplish promptly what concerns the service of God. As for prayer, it is directly concerned with prayer of petition; however, it comprises various parts (cf. q83 a17).

On the other hand, contemplation or meditation is the cause, as far as we are concerned, of devotion (q82 a3).

### ***External worship***

In article 7 (ST2-2 q81), St Thomas examines the question of external worship. Here, our Doctor uses the word "latria", which can be considered synonymous with "religion", as both refer to the same virtue<sup>3</sup>.

St. Thomas affirms the existence of the external act of religion. But we must meditate on the reason he gives for this, a reason that requires us to understand various aspects of the end:

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<sup>2</sup> The third objection is answered by saying that religion is not a theological or intellectual virtue, but a moral one, since it is part of justice. For religion, the middle ground does not lie between passions, but in a certain equality between actions that relate to God. I do not mean absolute equality, for we cannot give God as much as we owe him, but according to human capacity and divine approval.

There may be excess in matters relating to divine worship, not in terms of quantity, but in terms of other circumstances, for example because divine worship is given to someone who is not entitled to it, or when it should not be given, or according to what should not be given in other circumstances.

This is important to note – we cannot expand on this here, for certain aspects of the debate surrounding concelebration.

<sup>3</sup> However, there are nuances (3 S d9 q1 a1 q1a1).

We show reverence and honour to God not for His sake (*propter eum*), who possesses in Himself the fullness of glory and to whom creatures can add nothing, but for our sake (*propter nos*), for by the fact that we revere and honour God, our spirit is subject to Him, and this is what constitutes its perfection; for everything attains perfection by submitting to its superior<sup>4</sup>, as the body does by being enlivened by the soul, and the air by being illuminated by the sun.

Now, in order to unite with God, the human spirit needs to be led, as it were by the hand, by sensible realities: for the Apostle says in *his Epistle to the Romans* that invisible realities are intellectually conceived through the things that have been made...

That is why it is necessary to use certain bodily things in divine worship so that through them, as through signs, the human spirit may be stirred to spiritual acts by which it is united with God.

Therefore, religion does indeed have internal acts that belong to it as quasi-principal and in themselves, but it also has external acts that are secondary and ordered to the internal acts.

Thus, attention must be paid to the meaning of *propter*: God is certainly the end of the act of religion and even, in a sense, the end *cui*, since God is the One "to whom" worship is rendered. But He is in no way the end *cui* inasmuch as, in this respect, the end can include indigence and thereby, moreover, take on the formality of the subject matter in the overall structure of the end. St. Thomas explained this in response to the second objection<sup>5</sup>.

## **2. Sacrifices**

The study of the external acts of religion begins with what constitutes our specific subject: sacrifices. These external acts are encompassed by the characterisation: "acts by which certain external things are offered to God" (q85, prologue).

Within this group, Saint Thomas first distinguishes vows, by which promises are made to God (q88), from things given to God by the faithful. This category consists of sacrifices (q85), oblations and first fruits (q86) and finally tithes (q87).

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<sup>4</sup> This principle should be meditated upon and understood by those who have gone to war on the question of the insertion of the supernatural into the natural, against the notion of "obedient power"...

<sup>5</sup> The second objection is answered by saying that these external realities are not offered to God as if He needed them, according to this passage from the psalm: "Shall I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?" but they are offered to God as signs of internal and spiritual works, which God accepts for their own sake. Hence Augustine's words (Quoted from God, L.X): "The visible sacrifice is the sacrament of the invisible sacrifice, that is, the sacred sign."

Saint Thomas thus provides us here (ST2-2 q85) with a veritable short treatise on sacrifice. Four conclusions are established.

***Natural law itself commands that a sacrifice be offered to God (a1)***

I answer that natural reason teaches man that he is subject to some superior, because of the defects he experiences in himself and in which he needs to be helped and directed by some superior. And whatever that superior may be, he is the one whom everyone calls God.

Now, just as in natural things the inferiors are naturally subject to superiors, so natural reason dictates to man, according to his natural inclination, to show subjection and honour to the one who is above him, according to his mode. Now, the mode that suits man consists in using sensible signs to express certain things, for he receives his knowledge from the sensible world.

It is therefore natural reason that causes man to use certain sensible things, offering them to God as a sign of the subjection and honour due to Him, in a similar way to the practice of men offering something to their masters in recognition of their lordship.

Now this is part of the reason for sacrifice. That is why the offering of sacrifice is part of natural law.

The conclusion of the article provides us with an initial approach to the essence of sacrifice. However, it will need to be supplemented in order to clearly highlight the distinction between simple "offering" and "sacrifice" in the strict sense.

In ad1, St Thomas specifies: the oblation of a sacrifice considered in general is commanded by natural law; the determination of sacrifices is a matter for divine or human institution.

***Sacrifice should only be offered to God (a2).***

The principle that governs the answer is important: the oblation of sacrifice is done in order to signify something.

Now, the sacrifice that is offered externally signifies the internal spiritual sacrifice, by which the soul offers itself to God (cf. Ps 59:19: "A broken spirit is a sacrifice to God": since, as we have seen (q81 a7, q84 a2), the external acts of religion are ordered to the internal acts.

Now the soul offers itself to God as a sacrifice, as to the principle of its creation and as to the end of its beatification. And, according to the true faith, God alone is the creator of our souls (ST1 q90 a3; q118 a2). Moreover, our beatitude consists in him alone<sup>6</sup> :

"Conclusion: just as the internal sacrifice must be offered to God alone, so too must the external sacrifices (which are ordered to him as signs) be offered to him alone."

In the doctrine of sacrifice, the importance of its meaning, which is much more formal than the value of the material thing, must be carefully weighed. This is clearly emphasised in response to the second objection:

"In the offering of sacrifice, it is not the price of the animal that is killed that is considered, but the meaning, according to which this act is performed to honour the supreme Master of the entire universe."

### ***The offering of sacrifice is a special act of virtue (a3).***

Certainly, actions pertaining to various virtues, such as almsgiving or bodily mortification, can be ordered as to their end to the reverence of God<sup>7</sup> ; thus, these acts elicited by virtues other than religion can be called "sacrifices". Indeed, in general, when an act of virtue is ordered to the end of another, it participates in some way in its specificity.

Nevertheless, sacrifice is a special act, deserving of its own praise, because of its ordination to divine reverence: and, for this reason, it belongs to the virtue of religion.

And there are acts that have no other reason to be praised than the fact that they are performed to revere God: these acts are called "sacrifices" in the proper sense, and are elicited by religion.

At this stage, the notion of sacrifice begins to be enriched with various nuances, but also to suffer from a certain confusion. Saint Thomas brings clarity to this rich subject matter through his responses to two objections. In ad2, Saint Thomas affirms the principal character of interior sacrifice, distinguished both from the offering of bodily goods and from that of external things:

The good of man is threefold.

The first is the good of the soul, offered to God through a certain interior sacrifice, through devotion, prayer and other interior acts of this kind. And this is the principal sacrifice.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. ST1-2 q1 a8; q2 a8; q3 a1, a7, a8.

<sup>7</sup> Precisely, according to ad1, commenting on St Augustine, every act of virtue receives the reason for sacrifice by the fact that we perform it in order to adhere to God, according to a holy society.

The second is the good of the body, offered to God in some way by martyrdom, and by abstinence or continence.

The third is the good of external things, which are offered as a sacrifice to God. This takes place directly when we immediately offer to God the goods we possess; and immediately when we give these goods to our neighbours, for God.

Then, with ad3, the Common Doctor specifies how the offering of external things constitutes a sacrifice in the proper sense: when this offering – signifying, moreover, the interior sacrifice – is performed in a sacred rite:

We speak properly of sacrifice when something is done to the realities offered to God, as when animals were killed, when bread is broken, eaten, blessed. And the name itself indicates this, for sacrifice means that man does something sacred.

We speak directly of oblation when something is offered to God, even if no action is performed on it: thus we say that money or bread are offered on the altar, even though they are not the object of any action.

Therefore, every sacrifice is an oblation, but the reverse is not true.

#### ***All are required to offer sacrifices (a4)***

The reason for this is that all are bound by what is commanded by natural law. However, we can provide some clarification:

As we have said, sacrifice is twofold.

The first and principal sacrifice is the interior sacrifice, to which all are bound, for all are bound to offer God a devout spirit.

The other is the external sacrifice, which is divided into two parts

One has no other value than to be an external reality offered to God to proclaim that one is subject to Him.

Those who are under the new or old Law and those who are not under the Law are bound to this sacrifice in different ways.

For those under the Law are required to offer sacrifices determined by the commandments of the Law.

But those who were not under the Law were required to perform some external action to honour God, according to what was appropriate to the customs of the people among whom they lived, without being bound in any particular way to this or that.

Another is external sacrifice, which consists in directing the external acts of the other virtues towards divine reverence. Some of these acts fall under a precept that binds everyone, while others are supererogatory and are not binding on everyone.

These final clarifications allow us to situate the place of the priest (*sacerdos*) under the regime of divine law – old or new:

Objection 3:

"Furthermore, priests (*sacerdotes*) are so named because they offer sacrifice to God. But not all are priests. Therefore, not all are required to offer sacrifices."

Answer:

"Priests offer sacrifices specially ordained for divine worship, not only for themselves but also for others.

But there are also other sacrifices that anyone can offer to God for themselves, as appears from what has been said above."

### **3. Sacrifice in the light of the Old Law**

Often overlooked, St Thomas's study of the Old Law in the *Prima-Secundae* is a model of theological exegesis. We will go straight to the passages that concern us.

The Old Law, good though imperfect (q98 a1), was given by God (a2) to the Jewish people alone, because they were the sole depositaries of the Promise: it was from them that the Messiah would come (a4).

This Law certainly contained moral precepts, commanding acts of virtue (q99 a2) – and these precepts could then also be part of natural law (q98 a5) – but it also included ceremonial precepts, which St. Thomas justifies as follows (q99 a3)<sup>8</sup> :

"As has been said, divine law is principally instituted to order men to God (...)

Now man is ordered to God not only by interior acts of the mind, which are believing, hoping, and loving, but also by certain exterior works, by which man professes to be in the service of God. And these works are said to belong to the worship of God<sup>9</sup> ."

Ceremonial precepts are therefore those that concern divine worship and that provide determinations to what is required by natural law alone (cf. ST1-2 q99 a3 ad2).

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<sup>8</sup> There were also judicial precepts, which do not concern our subject: ST1-2 q99 a4.

<sup>9</sup> Saint Thomas then puts forward two etymological hypotheses for the word 'ceremony'.

St. Thomas devotes three questions to them (q101 - q103), the second of which is particularly extensive.

#### **4. Ceremonial precepts in themselves: the primordial nature of sacrifices**

Our Doctor first highlights the essence and division of these ceremonial precepts.

After reaffirming that their *ratio* consists in their concern for divine worship (q101 a1), St. Thomas introduces a very important notion (a2): these precepts are figurative. In the *sed contra*, he draws on the authority of St Paul: "Therefore, let no one judge you in matters of food and drink, or with regard to a festival, a new moon, or a Sabbath. These are only a shadow of what was to come; but the reality is Christ. " (Col 2:16-17) – which shows, moreover, how imperfect, for Saint Thomas, this characteristic of being "figurative" is.

Why then these external and figurative ceremonies? Saint Thomas explains this by introducing the distinction between the internal worship of God and the external worship of God (a2, *Corpus*):

The worship of God is twofold: internal and external. Indeed, since man is composed of soul and body, both must be applied to the worship of God, so that the soul honours Him through internal worship and the body through external worship (...). And just as the body is ordered to God by the soul, so external worship is ordered to internal worship.

This very simple doctrine allows us to understand the necessity and nature of external worship, according to the various states of humanity, with regard to its union with God. Our text continues:

Now, internal worship consists in the soul being united to God through understanding and affection.

Therefore, depending on how the intellect and affection of the person who honours God are united to Him in various ways, so too are the external acts of man applied in various ways to the worship of God.

In bliss, the human intellect will grasp divine truth in itself: hence the exclusion, through loss of *raison d'être*, of the figurative aspect of external worship – but not of worship itself: "In the state of future bliss, human intelligence will see divine truth itself and in itself. Then, external worship will not consist of figuration, but only in the praise of God, which proceeds from inner knowledge and affection."

In the present life, divine truth does not manifest itself to us without sensory images<sup>10</sup> ; with a variation according to the two states of knowledge: Old Law, New Law.

The contribution of the New Law in this regard is that the path that leads us to the Fatherland is open: it is Christ. Hence the important conclusion: "Under the New Law, this path is now revealed and should no longer be prefigured as something to come, but commemorated as a past or present reality; only glory, a future reality that has not yet been revealed, should be prefigured. Such is the thought of *the Epistle to the Hebrews* (10:1): 'The law is only a shadow of the good things to come, not the very image of those realities'; for a shadow is less than an image, and here the image belongs to the New Law, the shadow to the Old Law."<sup>11</sup> .

Note the twofold difference<sup>12</sup> :

- in the old Law, the tangible symbols concerning Christ are only shadows, and they prefigure;

- in the New Law, these symbols are not shadows but images, and they commemorate (Christ – the Way) either as a past reality or as a present one.

Let us conclude: the notion of "tangible symbol"<sup>13</sup> expresses the property of external worship as it derives from the internal worship of a person not yet in possession of divine truth itself.

After justifying the multiplicity of ceremonial precepts (q101 a3), with reference to the multiplicity of human inclinations, Saint Thomas explains the division of these ceremonies (a4), which more explicitly defines the specificity of sacrifices.

In this passage from the *Summa*, Saint Thomas gives us an important teaching: worship, in itself, consists especially in sacrifices, which are offered in honour of God<sup>14</sup> .

Sacred things are instruments of worship, sacraments and observances concerning the worshippers themselves.

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<sup>10</sup> For this entire theme, Saint Thomas refers to Saint Denis.

<sup>11</sup> Translation by Tonneau o.p.

<sup>12</sup> From the point of view of the "sign". There is also an essential difference from the point of view of "contained reality": cf. ST1-2 q101 a4 ad2: "The second objection is answered by saying that the sacrifice of the New Law, that is, the Eucharist, contains Christ himself (...). But the sacrifices of the Old Law did not contain Christ."

<sup>13</sup> St. Thomas does not use this word here, but uses the expression "sensible figures" for both states of this world. But immediately afterwards, he seems to reserve the word "figure" for the state of the Old Law; to avoid this ambiguity of vocabulary, we retain the word "symbol" as equivalent to "figure" in its generic sense.

<sup>14</sup> Let us note—this is a remark about vocabulary, but one that is important for a proper understanding of St. Thomas's thought—that the word "sacrifice" in both of our texts (this is especially evident in the second, with the example of sheep and calves) refers to the thing itself. In terms of the act, these sacrifices are simply said to be "offered" in the first case and "immolated" in the second.

In his response to the third objection, Saint Thomas affirms that sacrifices and sacraments were also sacred things. The expression "sacred things" encompasses those that are neither sacrifices nor sacraments.

Similarly, "observances" refer to an even more common reality: these were ways of life not immediately ordered to divine worship – unlike the tabernacle and its utensils – but which "nevertheless had a ceremonial character, derived in a sense, in that they conferred on the people of God a certain empowerment for divine worship. "

In response to the fifth objection, St Thomas places oblations and gifts in the vicinity of sacrifices, because they were offered to God, according to Heb 5:1: "Every high priest is taken from among men and appointed for men in matters relating to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins."

We will need to clarify, later on, the distinction between "offering" – or "gift" – and "sacrifice".

## **5. The purpose of these ceremonial precepts, especially sacrifices**

In question 102, St Thomas discusses this subject at length. Here we will focus only on what concerns sacrifices.

### ***Common data***

In general, the ceremonial precepts of the Old Testament had a dual purpose. On the one hand, they were ordered to the worship of God according to the requirements of that period of history, and on the other hand, they were ordered to represent the coming Christ: a 'literal' purpose and a 'figurative' purpose. St Thomas provides details on this dual purpose in q102 a2.

It should be noted that when the meaning concerns the present order – that of the Old Testament – we remain in the realm of literal purpose (ST1-2 q102 a2 ad1).

Furthermore, the two purposes can be combined for the same ceremony (*ibid.* ad2).

But while both types of cause are always to be considered in ceremonies in general, the fact remains that many ceremonial details have only a figurative meaning (*ibid.* ad3).

### ***The specific case of sacrifices in the Old Law***

Saint Thomas devotes an unusually long article to this subject, examining fourteen objections, which is quite exceptional for the *Summa Theologica*. It is probably not presumptuous to see in this the importance that our Doctor attached to the question.

It is characteristic of "theological wisdom" to strive, humbly but without timidity, to highlight the "reasonable causes"<sup>15</sup>, the seal of divine wisdom in divine government. Saint Thomas does just that. And, in doing so, while providing us with useful insights for understanding the past, he instructs us in essential and enduring truths about sacrifice in the present order of things.

"As has been said above, the ceremonies of the Old Law had a twofold cause, namely a literal cause, inasmuch as they were ordered to the worship of God, and a figurative or mystical cause<sup>16</sup>, inasmuch as they were ordered to represent Christ.

On both sides, we can appropriately assign the causes of the ceremonies that concerned sacrifices.

1°) Insofar as sacrifices were ordained for the worship of God, their purpose can be considered in two ways.

First, insofar as sacrifices represented the ordination of the spirit to God: to which the one offering the sacrifice was inspired.

Now, it belongs to the right ordination of the spirit to God that man should recognise that all he has comes from God as his first principle, and that he should order everything to God as his ultimate end.

And this was represented in the offerings and sacrifices: man offered them in honour of God, taking them from among his possessions, as if to acknowledge that he held his possessions from God (...). Thus, in the offering of sacrifices, man proclaimed that God was the first principle and the ultimate end of the creation of things, to whom everything had to be referred.

And since the right ordering of the mind to God requires that man recognise no other first author of things than God alone, and place his end in no other, it followed that the law forbade offering sacrifice to anyone other than God (Exod. 22) (...).

Hence, with regard to the cause of the ceremonies concerning sacrifices, it is possible to assign another reason for them: namely, that by this means men were diverted from offering sacrifices to idols. (...)

2) Among all the gifts granted by God to the human race fallen as a result of sin<sup>17</sup>, the principal one consists in the gift of his Son (cf. Jn 3) (...).

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<sup>15</sup> Mentioned by St Thomas in the *sed contra* of this article.

<sup>16</sup> Note this new clarification of vocabulary, equating "figurative" with "mystical". This is also what we call the "spiritual" meaning.

<sup>17</sup> Here we see that it is sin that introduces bloody sacrifice, in reference to Christ's sacrifice for the remission of sins. The symbolism of bloodshed does not seem to be required in itself and absolutely by natural law alone, in the absence of sin.

That is why the most powerful sacrifice is that by which Christ offered himself to God as a pleasing aroma (Eph. 5).

And because of this, all other sacrifices were offered in the Old Law to represent this principal, unique and singular sacrifice, just as the perfect is represented by the imperfect. This is why the Apostle says (Heb. 10) that the priest of the Old Law often offered the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins, while Christ offered a single sacrifice for sins, valid for all time. And since the reason for the figure is derived from what is represented, the reasons for the figurative sacrifices of the Old Law must be taken from the true sacrifice of Christ.

In ad1, St. Thomas summarises well the three reasons why God wanted the sacrifices of the Old Testament. Indeed, as Scripture says (Ps 49:13; Is 1:11), it was not because he needed the things offered, but:

- to exclude idolatry;
- to express the right ordering of the human mind towards God;
- to represent the mystery of the Redemption of mankind by Christ.

In his response to the other objections, St Thomas shows precisely the detailed appropriateness of the various prescriptions with regard to these three main reasons.

### ***The purposes of sacrifice***

The response to the eighth objection provides St Thomas with an opportunity to explore the question of the purpose of sacrifice, based on the revelations of the Old Testament. At that time, different types of sacrifice corresponded to specific purposes:

- The holocaust, entirely burned, was specially ordained for the glory of God:  
"This kind of sacrifice was offered to God especially to revere his majesty and out of love for his goodness; it was in accordance with the state of perfection in the fulfilment of the counsels. That is why this sacrifice was entirely burned: so that, just as the whole animal, reduced to smoke, rose to the heights, so it was signified that the whole man, and all his possessions, were subject to the lordship of God, and were to be offered to him."
- The sin offering; part of it was burned, the other part was intended for the priests, except in special cases: "The sin offering was different, offered to God according to the requirement of remission of sin; it corresponded to the state of the penitents satisfying for their sins."
- The peaceful offering, given in thanksgiving or to ask for blessings; part of it was burned in honour of God, another part went to the priests, and the third part to those who made the offering: "The third sacrifice was called the peace offering; it was offered to God either in

thanksgiving or for the salvation and prosperity of the offerers, according to the debt of a favour received or to be received. This is appropriate for those who are progressing in the fulfilment of the commandments."

St. Thomas also explains the special treatment given to blood and fat. Two reasons are fundamental: "In general, the following rule was observed: blood and fat were not used by the priests or by those who offered the sacrifice. The blood was poured out at the foot of the altar in honour of God; the fat was burned in the fire. (...)

The third reason is based on reverence for God. Blood is indeed essential to life – which is why it is said that the soul is in the blood – and fat manifests the abundance of food. Therefore, to show that life and the sufficiency of all goods come from God, the blood was poured out and the fat was burned in honour of God<sup>18</sup>.

The fourth reason is that this represented the shedding of Christ's blood and the abundance of his charity, through which he offered himself to God for us.

We must carefully note St Thomas' repeated assertion (ad 9 and ad 10) that the *burnt* offering was the most perfect and principal sacrifice. This was because it was "wholly consumed in honour of God, and nothing was eaten"; the order concerns the whole:

The tenth objection is answered by saying that, of all the sacrifices, the most important was the burnt offering, because it was completely burned in honour of God, and nothing was consumed.

Second in holiness was the sin offering, consumed only by the priests at the entrance to the temple on the day of the sacrifice.

The peace offerings for thanksgiving held third place: they were consumed on the same day, but anywhere in Jerusalem.

In fourth place were the peace offerings corresponding to a vow; the meat could still be consumed the next day.

*Quartum vero locum tenebant hostiae pacificae ex voto, quarum carnes poterant etiam in crastino comedi.*

And there is a reason for this order: it is because man is most obliged to God because of his majesty; secondly, because of the offence committed; thirdly, because of the benefits already received; and finally, because of the benefits hoped for.

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<sup>18</sup> There is an indication here of a fittingness, even according to natural law alone and independently of the fact of sin, for the symbolism of blood shed in the sacrifice of worship.

In articles 4 to 6, St Thomas justifies in even greater detail the sacred things, the sacraments and the observances of the Old Law.

## **6. From imperfection to completion: the temporal limitation of ceremonial precepts**

In the Old Law, the details of ceremonies are given by God. Does this mean that these ceremonies had their own virtue to justify them? St Thomas categorically denies this (ST1-2 q103 a2).

These ceremonies possessed – by virtue of divine institution – a certain efficacy against legal, external, bodily impurities, which were ritual irregularities rendering one – according to the Law of that time – unfit for divine worship<sup>19</sup>. But they were incapable of washing away the impurity of the soul, which is sin.

Justification was certainly possible at that time, but only through the means that allowed union with Christ: living faith in Christ the Saviour to come. The ceremonies were precisely – as figures of Christ to come – expressions of this faith: "In the time of the Law, the spirit of the faithful could be united by faith to Christ incarnate and suffering; and thus, through faith in Christ, they were justified. The observance of these ceremonies, as figures of Christ, was a certain proclamation of this faith. (*ibid.*)"

Nevertheless, in the Old Law, sacrifices offered for sins had no power against sins: "Sin is forgiven not by the virtue of the sacrifices, but by the faith and devotion of those who offer them. (...) It thus appears that the ceremonies under the Old Law did not have the power to justify. (*ibid.*)"

Saint Thomas strongly emphasises this distinction, which makes all the difference with the situation under the New Law: "The second objection is answered by saying that priests pleased God in ceremonies because of their obedience, devotion and faith in the reality prefigured, but not because of the things themselves considered according to their reality." (ST1-2 q103 a2 ad2)

This essential imperfection of the ceremonies of the Old Law disposes us to understand what St. Thomas teaches in the following article (a3): these ceremonies come to an end with the coming of Christ.

The *sed contra* recalls that this is the formal teaching of Holy Scripture:

"Therefore, let no one judge you in matters of food and drink, or with regard to a festival, a new moon, or a Sabbath. These are only a shadow of what was to come; the reality is Christ." (Col 2:16-17)

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<sup>19</sup> "For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean, sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean" (Heb 9:13).

"If God speaks of a new covenant, he declares the previous one to be obsolete. Now what is obsolete and outdated is ready to disappear." (Heb 8:13)

The explanation of the answer reveals the irrefutable reason for this abrogation:

As has been said, all the ceremonial precepts of the old law are ordered to the worship of God. But external worship must be proportionate to internal worship, which consists of faith, hope, and charity<sup>20</sup>.

Therefore, according to the diversity of internal worship, external worship had to be diversified.

Now, we can distinguish three states in internal worship.

One in which faith and hope are directed both towards heavenly goods and towards the goods by which we are led to heaven: both of these being future realities. Such was the state of faith and hope under the Old Law.

The second is the state of internal worship in which faith and hope relate to heavenly goods as future realities, but to the goods by which we are led to Heaven as present or past realities. This is the state of the New Law.

In the third state, both goods are present, and nothing is believed to be absent or hoped for as future. This is the state of the blessed.

In this state of the blessed, no reality concerning divine worship will be figurative; there will only be thanksgiving and the voice of praise. (...)

Therefore, for a similar reason, the ceremonies of the first state, by which the second and third were represented, had to cease with the coming of the second state; and it was necessary to introduce new ceremonies appropriate to the state of divine worship for this time in which heavenly goods are future while the benefits of God by which we are led to Heaven are present.

It follows that if the Old Law has sometimes been described as eternal (cf. Baruch 4:1), this must be understood in an absolute sense for moral precepts, but only with regard to the figurative truth for ceremonial precepts (ad1).

But we must go further: not only have the ceremonial precepts ceased with the coming of Christ, but to observe them now would constitute a mortal sin (a4). The very firm response of the Common Doctor is based on an immutable truth:

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<sup>20</sup> Note the link established here by St. Thomas between interior worship and the theological virtues. This is why, even though the virtue of religion in itself is only a moral virtue, we must not separate worship—interior worship, or latria—from the theological order.

All ceremonies are proclamations of faith, which is the inner worship of God. Thus, man can proclaim his inner faith through deeds or words; and in either proclamation, if man proclaims something false, he sins mortally.

And certainly, the faith we have in Christ is the same as that of the ancient Fathers; however, they preceded Christ and we follow him: it follows that the same faith is signified by us and by them with different words. For they said: "Behold, the Virgin shall conceive and bear a son" – these are words concerning the future –; but we represent the same thing with words in the past tense, saying that She conceived and bore a son.

Similarly, the ceremonies of the Old Law signified Christ who was to be born and who was to suffer, while our sacraments signify him as having been born and having suffered.

Saint Thomas recalls a basic truth that is sometimes obscured today: it would be a mortal sin today to proclaim one's faith in the coming Christ, whereas the Ancients did so in all piety and truth. And, likewise, it would be a mortal sin to observe their ceremonies, because they proclaim the coming Christ<sup>21</sup> :

Just as one who, in proclaiming his faith, would say that Christ is to be born would sin mortally, whereas the ancients said so in a pious and truthful manner, so too would one who observed the ceremonies that the ancients observed piously and faithfully sin mortally.

## **7. The priesthood and sacrifice of Christ**

We have already quoted, in our study of sacrifices in the Old Law, this statement by St Thomas (ST1-2 q102 a3): "Therefore, the most powerful sacrifice is that by which Christ offered himself to God as a pleasing aroma (Eph. 5).

And because of this, all other sacrifices were offered in the Old Law to represent this principal, unique and singular sacrifice, just as the perfect is represented by the imperfect. That is why the Apostle says (Heb. 10) that the priest of the Old Law often offered the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins, while Christ offered a single sacrifice for sins, valid for all time. And since the reason for the figure is drawn from what is represented, the reasons for the figurative sacrifices of the Old Law must be taken from the true sacrifice of Christ.

The two previous studies have provided us with a solid foundation for understanding the doctrine of Sacrifice. But it is in the study of Our Lord's priesthood and the sacrifice He Himself

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<sup>21</sup> In ad1, St Thomas explains that the abrogation of the old ceremonies took some time, between the Passion of Christ and the spread of the Gospel. In ad2, he comments on Gal 2:11, stating that St Peter really did sin in the matter for which he was rebuked by St Paul.

offered that we will find the highest insights into this reality which, although originally natural, only receives its true fulfilment on the supernatural level of the redemptive Incarnation.

## **8. The Priesthood of Christ**

In order not to make this work excessively long, we will not follow in detail St Thomas's doctrine on the priesthood of Christ (ST3 q22).

Let us note a few points:

I answer that the proper office of the priest is to be a mediator between God and the people, inasmuch as he transmits divine realities to the people – which is why the priest (*sacerdos*) is named as giving sacred things (*sacra in*) – (...); and also insofar as he offers the prayers of the people to God, and in some way satisfies God for sins; hence the words of the Apostle (Heb. 5): every priest is taken from among men and is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.

Now this applies to Christ in the highest degree. For through Him gifts are conferred on men, according to 2 Peter 1, through Whom – namely Christ – He has given us precious and magnificent promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature. It is He also who has reconciled mankind to God, according to these words of Colossians 1: In Him—that is, Christ—it pleased God to dwell in all fullness, and through Him to reconcile all things. Therefore, it is most fitting for Christ to be a priest. (a1).

Another remark: the priesthood of the Old Law was a figure of that of Christ; but precisely, it was necessary to mark the difference between the figurative and the real, and that is why Christ did not want to be born of the priestly race:

The second objection is answered by saying that, as Damascene says (Book 3), what is similar in all respects will be the same and not merely an example. Therefore, since the priesthood of the Old Law was a figure of Christ's priesthood, Christ did not want to be born of the line of figurative priests, to show that it was not absolutely the same priesthood, but that they differed as the true differs from the figure.

### ***Priest and host (a2)***

It is especially article 2 that highlights the central truth, from the point of view of our present study, which focuses on sacrifice: Jesus was both priest and host<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> This subject is developed in the commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, ch. 9, lessons 3 and 5.

The diversification of sacrifices in the Old Law manifested the purposes of sacrifice; all of them are perfectly fulfilled in Our Lord, in this twofold capacity:

"For in the first place, our sins have been blotted out, according to Rom. 4, He was delivered up for our sins.

Secondly, through Him we receive the grace that saves us, according to Hebrews 5: He became the cause of eternal salvation for all those who submit to Him.

Thirdly, through Him we obtain the perfection of glory, according to Hebrews 10, we have the assurance of possessing, through His blood, access to the sanctuary, that is, to eternal glory.

That is why Christ himself, as a man, was not only a priest but also a perfect sacrifice, being at once a sacrifice for sin, a sacrifice of peace and a burnt offering.

Our Lord therefore fulfils in himself, in his humanity delivered up for us to Passion and death, all the purposes of sacrifice announced in the various types of the Old Law.

Of course, Our Lord did not kill himself, but he voluntarily offered himself up to death, retaining power over his life until the end: "To the first objection, we reply that Christ did not kill himself, but that he voluntarily exposed himself to death, according to Isaiah 53. He offered himself because he wanted to. That is why we say that He offered Himself."

The response to the second objection provides St Thomas with an opportunity to clarify "the essence of the host":

The killing of Christ the man can be related to two wills.

- On the one hand, with the will of those who killed Him. And so, it was not a sacrifice, for we do not say that Christ's murderers offered a sacrifice to God, but that they sinned gravely. A similarity to this sin can be found in the ungodly sacrifices of the Gentiles, when they sacrificed men to idols.

- On the other hand, we can consider the killing of Christ in relation to the will of the One who suffered, who voluntarily offered himself to the Passion. In this respect, it is a sacrifice. In this, it has no similarity with the sacrifices of the pagans.

### ***Effects of Christ's priesthood***

St. Thomas then shows that the effect of Christ's priesthood was the expiation of sins (a3): both in terms of the stain of sin, destroyed by Christ's grace (cf. Rom 3:24-24), and in terms of the debt of punishment, for Christ has fully satisfied for us (cf. Is 53:4).

Ad1 of Article 3 specifies that although Christ was a Priest as a man, it remains true that he was both Priest and God. And it was because his humanity operated in the virtue of divinity that his sacrifice was absolutely effective in destroying sin.

Ad3 affirms that Christ's sacrifice brought completion and consummation to all others.

The response to the second objection in Article 4 introduces and clarifies an extremely important distinction in the act of the priest offering the sacrifice:

The second objection is answered by saying that, in the offering of the sacrifice by any priest, two things can be considered: the sacrifice offered itself, and the devotion of the one who offers it.

Now the proper effect of the priesthood is that which follows from the sacrifice itself. But Christ obtained something through his Passion, not as by virtue of the sacrifice, which is offered by way of satisfaction, but by virtue of the devotion with which, according to his charity, he humbly endured the Passion.

Ad3 indirectly reiterates that Christ's sacrifice is satisfactory: "The figure cannot be adequate to the truth. Therefore, the figurative priest of the old Law could not attain such perfection that he did not need a satisfactory sacrifice. But Christ does not need it. Therefore, the reason is not the same in both cases."

### ***The eternal consummation of Christ's sacrifice (a5)***

To manifest the eternity of Christ's priesthood, affirmed by Psalm 109:4 *Tu es sacerdos in aeternum*, St Thomas distinguishes two elements in the office of the priest:

1°) the offering of the sacrifice itself;

2°) the consumption of the sacrifice, which consists in the fact that those for whom the sacrifice is offered obtain the end of the sacrifice.

However, the end of the sacrifice offered by Christ does not consist in temporal goods, but in eternal goods, according to Hebrews 9:11: "But when Christ appeared, the high priest of the good things to come..."

This is why, concludes St Thomas, Christ's priesthood is said to be eternal.

Christ entered the Holy of Holies, that is, Heaven, and prepared the way for us to enter by the virtue of his blood, which he shed for us here below.

This answer should not be misunderstood. It is not only the effect of the sacrifice that is eternal: it is the priesthood itself. And, indeed, it lasts eternally because its eternal effect remains eternally under its active influence. St Thomas specifies in ad1:

... The saints, in their homeland, will no longer need further expiation through the priesthood of Christ; but, having already atoned, they will need to be led to completion by Christ himself, on whom their glory depends, according to what is said in Rev. 21: the brightness of God illuminates it (i.e., the city of the saints) and its light is the Lamb.

The following two answers confirm this meaning:

"To the second objection, it is replied that, although the Passion and death of Christ are not to be repeated, nevertheless the virtue of this sacrifice remains eternally, for, as it is said in Hebrews 10, by a single offering he has made perfect forever those who are sanctified.

This also provides the answer to the third objection. The unity of this offering was symbolised in the law by the fact that once a year the legitimate pontiff entered the sanctuary with the solemn offering of blood, according to Leviticus 16. But the symbol was deficient in relation to the truth in that this sacrifice did not have perpetual virtue; and that is why these sacrifices were repeated annually.

### ***The excellence of Christ's priesthood (a6)***

Although the legal priesthood was a figure of Christ's priesthood, it was the priesthood of Melchizedek that prefigured the excellence of Our Lord's priesthood. The tithe paid by Abraham to Melchizedek (Gen 14:20) was a sign of the superiority of his priesthood over that which was to come from Abraham.

Ad2 clarifies the situation of sacrifice in the New Law by introducing the notion of participation in Christ's oblation:

In Christ's priesthood, two things can be considered: Christ's oblation itself and participation in this oblation.

As for the oblation itself, the legal priesthood, through the shedding of blood, represented Christ's priesthood more expressively than the priesthood of Melchizedek, in which blood was not shed.

But as regards participation in this sacrifice and its effect, in which we mainly consider the excellence of Christ's priesthood in relation to the legal priesthood, it was prefigured more expressly by the priesthood of Melchizedek, who offered bread and wine, signifying, as Augustine says, the ecclesiastical unity that constitutes participation in Christ's sacrifice. Hence, even in the New Law, the true sacrifice of Christ is communicated to the faithful under the species of bread and wine.

### ***The Passion and death of Christ as sacrifice***

The main theme within which St Thomas deals with the question indicated in the title is the Passion of Christ. Our Doctor, in fact, follows chronological order in his exposition of the theology of Christ. He devotes five questions to this Passion (q46 - q49), to which we can add question 50 on the death of Christ.

Question 46 examines the necessity of Christ's Passion and its essence. Question 47 determines its efficient cause. Question 48 highlights the different ways in which Christ's Passion is itself effective: 'The mode of efficiency of Christ's Passion'. The last question details the effects of this Passion.

There are multiple modes of efficacy of the Passion: it brings about our salvation by way of merit (a1), by way of satisfaction (a2), by way of sacrifice (a3), by way of redemption (a4) – and it is specified that being Redeemer is proper to Christ (a5) – and finally by way of efficiency (a6).

As we will only examine the third mode in what follows, it is good to keep in mind that what we are about to say is part of a broader synthesis, so that the examination of one aspect does not cause us to lose sight of the balance of the whole.

### ***The efficacy of Christ's Passion by mode of sacrifice***

St Thomas had already introduced this perspective in the previous question (q47 a4 ad2): *Ad secundum dicendum quod Passio Christi fuit sacrificii oblatio inquantum Christus propria voluntate mortem sustinuit ex caritate*<sup>23</sup> . *Inquantum autem a persecutoribus est passus, non fuit sacrificium, sed peccatum gravissimum.*

At the end of this question (q48 a6 ad3), a summary is provided:

The third objection is answered by saying that the Passion of Christ,

- when compared to his divinity, acts by way of efficiency;
- when compared to the will of Christ's soul, acts by way of merit;
- when considered in the very flesh of Christ, acts
- by way of satisfaction, inasmuch as through it we are freed from the debt of punishment;
- by way of redemption, inasmuch as through it we are freed from the slavery of sin;
- by means of sacrifice, through which we are reconciled with God, as will be explained later<sup>24</sup> .

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<sup>23</sup> Let us emphasise the mention of charity obtaining the offering of sacrifice.

<sup>24</sup> That is, q49 a4.

Let us look at the specific teaching of our article.

The fact itself is presented as revealed, in the *sed contra* which quotes: "Grow in charity by following the example of Christ, who loved us and gave himself up for us as an offering and sacrifice of sweet aroma." (Eph 5:2)

This truth held in faith is then illuminated by what we know – through reason or faith – about sacrifice: "I answer that a sacrifice is properly called something that is done for the honour due to God, with a view to pleasing him. Hence Augustine's statement (*City of God*, X): "The true sacrifice is any work done so that we may adhere to God in a holy society, that is, in relation to that end by which we can truly be blessed."

Now Christ, as is added in the same place, offered himself to the Passion for us, and this work – namely, voluntarily undergoing the Passion for us – was most pleasing to God, as coming from charity. It is therefore clear that Christ's Passion was a true sacrifice.

And, as he himself adds later in the same book, the earlier sacrifices of the saints were varied and multiple signs of this true sacrifice, the one being represented by many (...) ; and, as four elements are to be considered in every sacrifice, as Augustine says (*On the Trinity*, L. 4), namely to whom the offering is made, by whom the offering is made, what is offered, for whom it is offered, the same one who, as the true and only mediator, reconciles us with God through the sacrifice of peace, remained one with the one to whom he offered<sup>25</sup> , made one in himself those for whom he offered<sup>26</sup> , was himself the one who offered and who was offered.

Many points deserve to be emphasised, but we will focus on one central element: Christ's voluntary work, which was his Passion, was greatly pleasing to God. And since it was a work accomplished for the honour due to God, to please and appease him (*ad placandum*), it follows that Christ's Passion was a true sacrifice.

This clarification clearly emphasises that divine acceptance is required for there to be a true sacrifice<sup>27</sup> .

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<sup>25</sup> It should be noted that there seems to be a legitimate basis for recognising that Christ also offered himself as a sacrifice. In the same vein, it should be remembered that St Thomas recognises that Christ, as a man, was subject to himself (ST3 q20 a2).

<sup>26</sup> This unity achieved in him between Christ who offers and those for whom he offers is an important point for the question of the offering of the Eucharistic sacrifice.

<sup>27</sup> On this important question, cf. M. L. Guérard des Lauriers, O.P.: "Principles of the Theology of Sacrifice in The Sacrifice," pp. 30-37. (photocopied booklet, Atelier artisanal, Monastère de la Croix, Étiolles (Seine et Oise))

As already stated, this doctrine of the Passion as a sacrifice is further clarified when we consider the effect of the Passion that directly corresponds to this modality, namely reconciliation with God. This is what St Thomas does in q49 a4:

The Passion of Christ is the cause of our reconciliation with God in two ways.

On the one hand, in that it takes away sin<sup>28</sup>, by which men are made enemies of God, according to Wisdom 14, the ungodly and their ungodliness are similarly hated by God; and in the psalm, you have hated all those who do iniquity.

On the other hand, insofar as it is a sacrifice that is very pleasing to God. This is indeed the proper effect of sacrifice, that through it we please God, as when a man forgives an offence committed against him because of an accepted tribute that has been presented to him. (...) Similarly, the fact that Christ suffered voluntarily was such a good thing that, because of this good found in human nature, God was appeased with regard to all the offence coming from the human race, as far as those who are united with Christ who suffered are concerned, in the manner already explained<sup>29</sup>.

The last remark is important: the specific effect of the Passion as a sacrifice occurs in men who are united with Christ, and not outside of Him.

In general, the Passion produces its effect in those to whom it is applied (ST3 q49 a3 ad1): "The Passion of Christ obtains its effect in those to whom it is applied through faith and charity, and through the sacraments of faith. That is why the damned in hell, who are not united to the Passion of Christ in the manner mentioned above, cannot perceive its effect."

Indeed, the Passion itself is like a universal cause, which acts on subjects through particular causes (ST3 q49 a1 ad4):

Since Christ's Passion preceded as a certain universal cause for the remission of sins, as has been said, it is necessary that it be applied to each individual for the destruction of his own sins. This is done through baptism and penance, and the other sacraments, which derive their virtue from Christ's Passion, as will be shown later (q62 a5).

## **9. The teaching of *De Eucharistia on the sacrifice of the Mass***

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<sup>28</sup> This corresponds to the first effect of the Passion (a1): liberation from sin. The Passion brings about this effect in three ways: 1) by inspiring charity; 2) through redemption; 3) through efficiency.

<sup>29</sup> - a1 ad4: through baptism and penance, and the other sacraments which themselves derive their virtue from the Passion of Christ.

- a3 ad1: through faith and charity, and through the sacraments of faith.

- q48 a6 ad2: through faith and the sacraments of faith.

Modern readers of the *Summa* sometimes express surprise at the relatively little space devoted to the development of the Eucharist as a sacrifice: only one question (q83) out of the eleven that make up the entire treatise (ST3 q73 - q83). Moreover, this question is devoted more to justifying the various rites of the Mass than to deepening the theology of sacrifice.

In response to this latent question, it can certainly be noted that, in St Thomas's time, the sacrificial nature of the Mass had not yet encountered systematic opposition, unlike the "real presence".

But it should be noted more positively that the data already elaborated by St. Thomas in the three places we have covered provide the essential principles on the question, so that little remains to be clarified, especially if we add the developments present in the treatise *De Sacramentis in genere*. Moreover, the idea of the Eucharist as a sacrifice remains present in St Thomas's mind throughout the treatise on the Eucharist, so that the main points of the doctrine are affirmed well before question 83.

The very fact that the Eucharist is the sacrifice of the New Law is accepted as an undisputed truth: we find a beautiful testimony to this in the treatise on the Old Law, ST1-2 q101 a4: "To the second objection, we reply that the SACRIFICE OF THE NEW LAW, THAT IS, THE EUCHARIST, contains Christ himself, who is the author of sanctification, (...). That is why this sacrifice is also a sacrament."

Similarly: "The sacrifice offered daily in the Church is none other than the sacrifice that Christ himself offered, but it is its commemoration. Hence the words of Augustine (City of God, Book X): Christ himself is the priest who offers, and he himself is the offering; and he wanted the sacrament of this reality to be the daily sacrifice of the Church." (ST3 q22 a3 ad2)

Let us note only, on this last text, that St Thomas does not say that the Church is content to commemorate Christ's sacrifice. He states two things in black and white:

- 1) a sacrifice is offered daily in the Church;
- 2) this sacrifice is none other than that of Christ, because it is its commemoration.

Let us therefore endeavour to gather the insights shed on this fact by our Doctor.

## **10. Some information from *De Sacramentis in genere***

We know, and some modern scholars have insisted on this, sometimes with ulterior motives quite foreign to St. Thomas, that our Doctor resolutely recognises in the *Summa* that the sacraments belong to the genus "sign". This characterisation is evident in an overview of the subject, which reveals the necessity of the sacraments for the salvation of the human race, and therefore since the

fall of Adam. It is therefore a specific feature of the sacraments of the New Law that they cause grace: for them, this causal aspect is essential – something that has been somewhat forgotten by the current of thought to which we referred at the beginning. To be convinced that this is indeed St Thomas's thinking, one need only refer to the introductory sentence he gives in the prologue to the *Tertia Pars*:

Since, according to the angel's testimony, our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ, saving his people from their sins, showed us in himself the way of truth by which we can attain the bliss of eternal life through resurrection, it is necessary, for the completion of the entire theological work, that after considering the ultimate end of human life as well as virtues and vices, our consideration then turn to the Saviour Himself of all and to the benefits He has bestowed upon the human race.

On this subject, we must first consider the Saviour Himself; secondly, His sacraments, through which we obtain salvation; thirdly, the end of immortal life which we attain through Him by rising again.

Now, it is important to note, in our present perspective, that for St Thomas, the sacraments as such are ordained for two purposes: as a remedy for sin and for divine worship: "Now sacramental grace appears to be principally ordered to two things: to remove the defects of past sins, insofar as they are transitory in act but remain as a debt; and also to perfect the soul in matters concerning the worship of God according to the religion of Christian life.

Now it is clear from what has been said above that Christ freed us from our sins principally through his Passion, not only in terms of efficacy and merit, but also in terms of satisfaction.

Likewise, through his Passion, he inaugurated the rite of the Christian religion, offering himself as an oblation and sacrifice to God, as it is said in Ephesians V. (ST3 q 62 a5)<sup>30</sup>

In ST3 q63 a6, Saint Thomas specifies that the Eucharist constitutes, in terms of the action itself, and not in terms of the human agent<sup>31</sup>, the principal element of divine worship (according to the "religion of Christian life") precisely because it is the sacrifice of the Church (the "rite of the Christian religion", "initiated" by Jesus, through "his Passion", by "offering himself to God as an oblation and host").

Furthermore, in this article, St. Thomas teaches his great doctrine on "characters" as participation in the priesthood of Christ, a doctrine which, as we know, was fully accepted by Pius

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<sup>30</sup> Same teaching in ST3 q63 a6.

<sup>31</sup> Point to remember for certain aspects of the discussion on concelebration.

XII in *Mediator Dei*, inasmuch as they deputise to act or receive something concerning the worship corresponding to the priesthood of Christ:

"The first objection is answered by saying that through all the sacraments man participates in the priesthood of Christ, insofar as he perceives some effect that comes from it; but it is not through all the sacraments that one is deputised to do something or to receive something that concerns the worship of the priesthood of Christ. Now this is required for a sacrament to imprint a character. " (ST3 q63 a6 ad1; see also ad2)

The existence of the sacrifice of the New Law is therefore well established before *De Eucharistia*. This existence is not problematic: indeed, St. Thomas showed that sacrifice, considered *in genere*, belongs to natural law: divine law therefore does not abolish it, but determines and perfects it. All this was said in the treatise on the Old Law, but in relation to the general relationship between natural law and divine law<sup>32</sup> .

### **Throughout *De Eucharistia***

Saint Thomas studies the Eucharist as a sacrament *directly*; however, as he established in the general examination, the sacrament is a sign, with the New Law adding the specificity of causality. These two essential characteristics must therefore be examined. And, quite naturally, it is from these two perspectives, in succession, that the Eucharist as a sacrifice will also be presented to us.

### **The order of the sign**

The Eucharist-sacrifice is first and foremost – generically – in the order of signs:

"I reply that this sacrament has a threefold meaning.

One in relation to the past, inasmuch as it commemorates the Passion of the Lord, which was a true sacrifice, as stated above. And from this point of view it is called a sacrifice. (ST3 q73 a4)

To the third objection, we respond that this sacrament is called a sacrifice insofar as it represents the Passion of Christ itself." (ST3 q73 a4 ad3)

We should not, for fear of modernist reductionism, seek to diminish this symbolic aspect inherent in the sacrifice of the Mass. St Thomas affirms this many times. And he develops it far beyond the essential act of consecration, since he applies it to the whole rite. He even states this principle, which is truly fundamental to the liturgy of the Mass according to the spirit of the Church:

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. ST1-2 q99 a2 ad1 and ST1-2 q99 a3 ad2.

"To the seventh objection, it is answered that, where it could be done without danger, the Church established for this sacrament what most expressly represents the Passion of Christ." (ST3 q83 a3 ad7)

However, a basic observation leads us to a first insight: baptism too, according to St Thomas, represents the Passion of Christ: "Through baptism, man is configured to the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, inasmuch as he dies to sin and begins a new life of righteousness. And that is why Christ had to suffer and rise again before showing men the necessity of being conformed to his death and resurrection." (ST3 q66 a2)

However, St Thomas never says that baptism is a sacrifice. To justify the difference, we must therefore also point to a difference, in the very order of representation, between the Eucharist and baptism. St. Thomas, of course, did so in his *Commentary on the Sentences*: "The fourth objection is answered by saying that this sacrament is DIRECTLY representative of the Passion of the Lord, through which Christ, as priest and host, offered himself to God on the altar of the Cross." (4 S d8 q2 a1 q1a4 ad4)

This direct relationship of representation of the Passion belongs only to the Eucharist, and this is so because this sacrament was specially instituted to commemorate this Passion, which is the source of all the sacraments:

"To the third question, it must be said that in every sacrament three things must be considered: its origin, its perfection, and the end for which it exists. Now, the origin of all sacraments is the Passion of Christ, from whose side the sacraments flowed when he was hanging on the Cross, as the saints say; the perfection of the sacrament consists in the fact that it contains grace; as for the end of the sacrament, it is twofold: the proximate end, which is the sanctification of the recipient, and the ultimate end, which is eternal life. These elements are found in a certain excellence in the Eucharist. Because this sacrament exists SPECIFICALLY in memory of the Passion of the Lord – hence Matthew 26: 'whenever you do this, you do it in memory of me' – it follows that, as regards its origin, it is called a sacrifice or host. (4 S d8 q1 a1 q1a3)

We can see, then, that this character of image of the Passion is, for the Eucharist, at the very heart of the sacramental order. And since it is in this perspective that St. Thomas presents the Eucharist to us as a sacrifice, we can see that it is legitimate to speak, as several contemporary authors do, of a "sacramental sacrifice."

In particular, it is first and foremost at this level of sacramental sacrifice – that is to say, of representation as it exists in a sacrament – that, as St Thomas does, we must affirm the bloodless immolation in the sacrifice of the altar:

On the other hand, there is the word of Augustine, in Prosper's book of sentences, that Christ was sacrificed once in himself, and yet he is sacrificed daily in the sacrament.

I reply that the celebration of this sacrament is called the immolation of Christ for two reasons.

Firstly, because, as Augustine says in *Simplicianus*, "It is customary for images to be designated by the names of the realities they represent: thus, when we see a painting or a painted wall, we say: this is Cicero, this is Sallust." Now, as we said above, the celebration of this sacrament is a certain image representing the Passion of Christ, which is a true sacrifice. Hence what Ambrose says in his Epistle to the Hebrews: in Christ, the sacrifice that is valid for eternal salvation was offered once and for all. What then of us? Do we not offer it every day in remembrance of his death? (ST3 q83 a1)

### **The order of causality**

The order of the sacraments of the New Law is characterised by its causal efficiency, beyond mere representation. This property must therefore be found in the sacramental sacrifice, which is the highest of the sacraments.

And, it should be noted, it is precisely because it is directly and specially representative of the Passion that the sacrifice of the altar will have a causal and real value corresponding to the only sacrifice divinely willed and accepted by him whom it represents: such is indeed the law of the sacramental order:

"I answer that, as has been said above, the sacraments have, by virtue of their institution, (the power) to confer grace. That is why a sacrament appears to be instituted when it receives the virtue to produce its effect. (ST3 q66 a2)

The second objection is answered by saying that it is the same word of God that worked in the creation of things and that works in this consecration, but in a different way. For HERE IT WORKS SACRAMENTALLY, THAT IS TO SAY, ACCORDING TO THE POWER OF MEANING. (...). (ST3 q78 a2 ad2) The third objection is answered by saying that the above words, by which consecration is accomplished, operate sacramentally. That is why the power of conversion found in the forms of these sacraments FOLLOWS THE MEANING, which ends with the pronounciation of the last word. (ST3 q78 a4 ad3)

Let us try to understand the precise and analytical approach taken by St Thomas.

In a passage already quoted from *the Commentary on the Sentences* (4 S d8 q1 a1 qla3), St Thomas said that the Eucharist is called "*sacrifice and host*" because of its special reference to the Passion. In the *Summa*, our Doctor distinguishes and clarifies: "The third objection is answered by saying that this sacrament is called a sacrifice insofar as it represents the very Passion of Christ. It is called a host insofar as it contains Christ himself, who is a pleasing host, as Ephesians says." (ST3 q73 a4 ad3)

This real presence of the true and only victim pleasing to God in the sacrifice of the New Law had already been emphasised in the treatise on the Old Law, in relation to the union of the two *rationes*, sacrifice and sacrament, in this unique reality:

The second objection is answered by saying that the sacrifice of the New Law, that is, the Eucharist, contains Christ himself, who is the author of sanctification: he sanctified the people with his blood, as it says at the end of the Epistle to the Hebrews. That is why this sacrifice is also a sacrament. On the contrary, the sacrifices of the Old Law did not contain Christ, but prefigured him, and therefore they are not called sacraments. (ST1-2 q101 a4 ad2)

According to St Thomas, it is this real presence of the victim of the Cross, of Christ who suffered, that makes the main difference between the sacrifice of the New Law and the mere figures of the Old Testament:

I answer that the fact that the true body of Christ and (his true) blood are in this sacrament cannot be apprehended by the senses, but only by faith (...). This is fitting, first of all, in view of the perfection of the New Law.

Indeed, the sacrifices of the Old Law contained this true sacrifice of Christ's Passion only in figure, according to this passage from Hebrews 10, the Law had the shadow of future goods, not the image itself of realities.

That is why the sacrifice of the New Law, instituted by Christ, had to have something more, so that it contained Christ himself who suffered, not only in meaning or figure, but also in truth. That is why this sacrament, which truly contains Christ himself (...) is the perfection of all the other sacraments in which the virtue of Christ is shared. (ST3 q75 a1)

It is this link, typical of the sacramental order, between the representation of the Passion and the real content of the one Victim accepted by God, which ensures the unity and distinction of the altar and the Cross. A text already partially quoted here is very powerful:

<sup>33</sup>The fourth objection is answered by saying that this sacrament is directly representative of the Passion of the Lord, through which Christ, as Priest and Host, offered himself to God on the altar of the Cross. Now, the Host that the priest offers is one with that which Christ offered in reality, for it truly contains Christ; the minister who offers it is not really the same as Christ; therefore, he must be the same in representation; and that is why the priest who consecrates, insofar as he takes the place of the person of Christ, pronounces the words of consecration as spoken by the person of Christ, so that the host does not appear to be anything else. (4 S d8 q2 a1 qla4 ad4)

It will of course be pointed out that the "Christ who suffered" remains present in the consecrated hosts even outside Mass; should we then say that the sacrifice continues in the tabernacle?

The error stems from the confusion between sacrifice as a thing (the sacrificed reality, the victim) and sacrifice as an act (the act of offering the sacrifice). The two are linked, because sacrifice as an act must obviously have sacrifice as a thing as its object. But at least in the case of Our Lord, sacrifice as a thing continues beyond the act.

But it is essentially as an act that the Mass is the sacrifice of the New Law: St. Thomas is categorical: "I answer that this sacrament is both sacrifice and sacrament, but IT IS A SACRIFICE IN AS MUCH AS IT IS OFFERED; it is a sacrament in as much as it is consumed." (ST3 q79 a5)

Similarly: "To the third objection, we reply that consumption pertains to the reason for the sacrament, but the oblation pertains to the reason for the sacrifice. That is why, from the fact that someone, or even several people, consume the body of the Lord, it does not follow that there is an increase in help for others." (ST3 q79 a7 ad2)

Is this oblation spread throughout the Mass, or does it take place in a specific act? Whatever has been said about it, St Thomas is again very precise. Admittedly, he shows that many elements of the rite, throughout its course, signify the Passion; but he recognises the *ratio sacrificii* only in the rite of consecration. It is in this central action that the oblates, the bread and wine, are converted into the Body and Blood of Our Lord, in a rite directly expressive of the bloody immolation of the Cross. And so, it is indeed the unique Victim of the Cross who is offered, in and through a sacramental act that realises the sacrificial offering, the bloodless immolation of the Mass, because it signifies the sacrificial offering, the bloody immolation of the Cross:

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<sup>33</sup> In the *Summa*, St. Thomas will say, with greater force: To the third objection, we respond that, for the same reason, the priest also assumes the role of image of Christ, in whose person and virtue he pronounces the words of consecration, as is clear from what has been said above. And so, in a certain way, there is identity between the priest and the host. (ST3 q83 a1 ad3).

The opportunity to offer the sacrifice is not taken only in relation to the faithful of Christ, to whom the sacraments must be administered, but principally in relation to God, TO WHOM THE SACRIFICE IS OFFERED IN THE CONSECRATION OF THIS SACRAMENT. (ST3 q82 a10)

The first objection is answered by saying that the other sacraments are performed for the benefit of the faithful. That is why only those who have been given responsibility for the faithful are required to administer them. But THIS SACRAMENT IS PERFORMED IN THE CONSECRATION OF THE EUCHARIST, IN WHICH THE SACRIFICE IS OFFERED TO GOD, which the priest is obliged to do by virtue of the order he has received. (ST3 q82 a10 ad1)

No doubt some have claimed that the word "*consecration*" in these passages has a broad meaning that more or less encompasses the entire rite. However, in his detailed description of the rite, St Thomas clearly states: "Secondly, he accomplishes the consecration with the words of the Saviour, when he says, 'This is my body...'" (ST3 q83 a4)

See also: "To the first objection, therefore, it is replied that, although Christ is wholly present under each species, this is not in vain. For, first of all, it serves to represent the Passion of Christ, in which the blood was separated from the body. That is why, IN THE FORM OF THE CONSECRATION of the blood, mention is made of its shedding. (ST3 q76 a2 ad1)"

And: "But in this sacrament, the CONSECRATION OF THE MATTER consists in a certain MIRACULOUS CONVERSION OF THE SUBSTANCE, which can only be accomplished by God alone." (ST3 q78 a1)

Moreover, this conclusion is closely linked to another essential aspect of the sacrifice of the Mass considered in its unity with that of the Cross: in offering the sacrifice of the Mass, the priest acts directly *in persona Christi*:

"But the form of this sacrament is pronounced from the person of Christ himself who speaks, to make it understood that the minister, in the performance of this sacrament, does nothing except pronounce the words of Christ. (ST3 q78 a1)

I answer that, as has been said above, this sacrament is of such dignity that it is only performed in the person of Christ. Now, whoever does something in the person of another must do so by a power granted by that other." (ST3 q82 a1)

And, of course, in this acting *in persona Christi*, the priest is only an instrument:

"To the first objection, therefore, it is replied that sacramental virtue is found in several (elements), and not in just one, as the virtue of baptism consists in the words and in the water.

Thus, the consecratory virtue is found not only in the words themselves, but also in the power transmitted to the priest at his consecration or ordination, when the bishop says to him: receive the power to offer sacrifice in the Church, both for the living and for the dead. For the instrumental virtue is found in several instruments, through which the principal agent acts. (ST3 q82 a1 ad1).

The second objection is answered by saying that if each priest acted by his own virtue, the other celebrants would be acting in vain, since one alone would be sufficient to perform the celebration.

But since the priest consecrates only in the person of Christ, and many are one in Christ, it follows that whether this sacrament is consecrated by one or by many is irrelevant, except that the rite of the Church must be observed. (ST3 q82 a2 ad2)

It should be noted that this acting *in persona Christi* is specific to the consecration itself: the other prayers of the Mass are made *in persona Ecclesiae* (and also - cf. ST3 q82 a6 - according to the minister's own devotion):

"To the third objection, it is replied that the priest, at Mass, in the prayers, speaks in the person of the Church, in whose unity he finds himself. But in the consecration of the sacrament, he speaks in the person of Christ, whose place he takes in this act, by the power of Holy Orders.

That is why, if a priest separated from the unity of the Church celebrates Mass, he consecrates the true body and blood of Christ, because he does not lose the power of Holy Orders; but because he is separated from the unity of the Church, his prayers have no efficacy." (ST3 q82 a7 ad3)

Thus, the sacrifice of the Mass is a true sacrifice, being substantially identical to that of the Cross: the offering of the same Victim by the same chief Priest, in a rite which represents – in the sacramental order – the bloody immolation accomplished once and for all on Calvary.

This formal unity of the host, to which must be added the "representative" character on which St Thomas insists greatly, means that the sacrifice of the altar is not added to that of the Cross: it commemorates it: "The same applies to the assertion that there is no repetition: on the contrary, we offer it daily. I reply that we offer no other (host) than that which Christ offered for us,

namely his blood. Therefore, there is no other oblation, but it is the commemoration of that host which Christ offered. Luke 22:19: 'Do this in remembrance of me'. (In Heb 10 lect. 1)"

This very important notion of commemoration in no way diminishes the sacrificial reality of the Mass. This truth was in no way subject to discussion for St Thomas, as we have seen abundantly. The irreplaceable role of this concept is to manifest another aspect of revealed teaching, namely the uniqueness of the sacrifice of the Cross and therefore the substantial identity of the sacrifice of the Mass with that of the Cross.

This identity and reality are confirmed when we consider the sacrifice of the Mass not in itself, but in its effects. And since the sacrifice of the Cross was essentially a redemptive sacrifice, St Thomas generally considers, in an explicit manner, the effect of satisfaction linked to the Mass. This efficacy of the sacrifice of the New Law further distinguishes it from the sacrifices of the Old Law, which were only figurative:

I answer that the celebration of this sacrament is called the immolation of Christ for two reasons.

Firstly, because, as Augustine says in *Simplicianus*, "It is customary for images to be designated by the names of the realities they represent: thus, when we see a painting or a painted wall, we say 'that is Cicero', 'that is Sallust'." Now, as we said above, the celebration of this sacrament is a certain image representing the Passion of Christ, which is a true sacrifice. Hence what Ambrose says in *his Epistle to the Hebrews*: in Christ, the sacrifice that is valid for eternal salvation was offered once and for all. What then of us? Do we not offer it every day in remembrance of his death? (ST3 q83 a1).

In another way, as regards the EFFECT OF THE PASSION, because THROUGH THIS SACRAMENT WE ARE MADE PARTICIPANTS IN THE FRUITS OF THE LORD'S PASSION. Thus, in a secret Sunday prayer, it is said: Every time the commemoration of this host is celebrated, the work of our redemption is carried out.

Therefore, with regard to the first mode, Christ could be said to have been immolated even in the figures of the Old Testament, hence what is said in Rev. 13: "Those whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb, who was slain from the foundation of the world".

But with regard to the second mode, IT IS PROPER TO THIS SACRAMENT that Christ be immolated in its celebration." (ST3 q83 a1)

The doctrine of the efficacy of the sacrifice of the Mass is an essential part of St Thomas's exposition. It is this doctrine that ultimately shows that this sacrifice, while it is very truly a commemoration of the Passion, is not a bare and empty commemoration.

I answer that the effect of this sacrament must be considered, first and foremost, from what is contained in this sacrament, which is Christ. Just as, by coming visibly into the world, He brought the life of grace to the world; (...) so, by coming sacramentally into man, He works the life of grace, (...).

Secondly, it is considered from what is represented by this sacrament, which is the Passion of Christ, as stated above.

That is why THE EFFECT THAT THE PASSION OF CHRIST HAD IN THE WORLD, THIS SACRAMENT HAS IN MAN. Thus, on this passage from John XIX: "Immediately there came out blood and water," Chrysostom says: "Because the sacred mysteries derive their principle from this, when you approach the chalice worthy of religious reverence, you must approach as if to drink from the very side of Christ. Hence what the Lord himself says in Matthew 26: 'This is my blood, which will be shed for you for the forgiveness of sins!'" (ST3 q79 a1)

I answer that this sacrament is both sacrifice and sacrament, but it is a sacrifice insofar as it is offered, and a sacrament insofar as it is consumed.

That is why it has the effect of a sacrament in the one who consumes it, but the effect of a sacrifice in the one who offers it, or in those for whom it is offered.

If, therefore, it is considered as a sacrament, it has a double effect (...). But insofar as it is a sacrifice, it has the power of satisfaction.

Now in satisfaction, the affection of the one who offers is considered more than the quantity of the oblation; hence what the Lord says in Luke 21 about the widow who offered two small coins, that she had given more than all the others. Therefore, although this offering, by virtue of its quantity, is sufficient to satisfy for any penalty, it is nevertheless satisfactory for those for whom it is offered, or for the offerers, "according to the quantity of their devotion, and not for the entire penalty". (ST3 q79 a5)

I answer that, as was said at the outset, this sacrament is not only a sacrament but also a sacrifice.

Indeed, since this sacrament represents the Passion of Christ, through which Christ offered himself as a sacrifice to God, as it is said in Ephesians V, it is rightly called a sacrifice,

while according to the fact that in this sacrament grace is invisibly transmitted under a visible appearance, it is rightly called a sacrament.

Thus, for those who consume it, this sacrament is useful as a sacrament and as a sacrifice, because it is offered for all who consume it; indeed, in the canon of the Mass it is said: when we receive, by participating in the altar, the most holy body and blood of your Son, may we all be filled with heavenly graces and blessings.

But for others, who do not partake (of this sacrament), it serves as a sacrifice, inasmuch as it is offered for their salvation, hence this passage from the canon of the Mass: "Remember, Lord, your servants and handmaids for whom we offer, or who offer, this sacrifice of praise, for them and for all their own, for the redemption of their souls, for the hope of their salvation."

And the Lord expresses both modes by saying (Matthew 26): "which is for you, that is, for those who consume it, and for many others, will be poured out for the remission of sins."  
(ST3 q79 a7)

## **Conclusion**

This already overly long exposition has nevertheless had to omit some essential points. In particular, we wish to recall the importance given by St. Thomas to the Offertory of the Mass, as the offering of the matter of the sacrifice (cf. 4 s d8 q2 a2 qla3, *expos. Text.* Et st3 q83 a4). The Mass is both the sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Church, and this part of the rite is expressly ordered to signify this.

However, the elements encountered throughout our journey amply suffice to show that, according to the Common Doctor, sacrifice occupies an inalienable and essential place in the Christian religion, both according to the nature of things and in view of the fallen state of humanity.

Any attempt to diminish this doctrine would deserve the psalmist's sharp rebuke: *Diminutae sunt veritates a filiis hominum*; every revelation enters into the messianic perspective, announced with jubilation in Malachi, predicting pure oblation in all places. All Christian life, centred on the redemptive sacrifice, imitates Jesus Christ: through suffering with Christ, offered in union with Him in the holy sacrifice of the Mass, Christians prepare themselves to enter with Him into the endless glory of the eternal sacrifice:

If we have placed our hope in Christ for this life alone, we are the most miserable of all men. But now Christ has been raised from the dead; he is the first fruits of those who have died. For it was through a man that death came; it is also through a man that the

resurrection of the dead comes. All die in Adam, and all will be made alive in Christ, but each in his own order: Christ as first fruits, then those who belong to Christ at his coming. Then will come the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every sovereignty and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death, for God has put everything under his feet. But when he says that all things have been subjected to him, it is clear that this does not include the one who subjected all things to him. And when all things have been subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who subjected all things to him. So that God may be all in all. (1 Cor 15:19-28)