

The Offering of Christ in the Roman Liturgy

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1. Introduction

It is both an honour and a call to humility for me to be invited to discuss the Offering of Christ in the Roman Liturgy. This subject, in my view, is undoubtedly central to the liturgy of worship celebrated by the Church. It has long occupied a fundamental place in my understanding of the Mass and in my own spiritual life. But, what is far more important, it concerns nothing less than the touchstone of the life of grace granted to the Church. Its implications extend not only to the liturgy but also to Christology and the theology of the Most Holy Trinity, to our identity as the Body of Christ and our role in cooperating with the offering of his unique sacrifice, and to our understanding of grace and our collaboration in that grace.

Christ's offering to the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit, which took place on Calvary, is a fundamental tenet of the faith, clearly taught in Holy Scripture, by the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, by theologians and by mystics throughout the history of the Church; it is presented to our faith by the Church with the authority she derives from her infallible magisterium. It is attested to by all the approved Eucharistic forms of the all the rites of the Catholic Church. It is commemorated, and indeed made present anew, in every valid celebration of the Holy Mass. It is in the offering of Himself to the Father in the Holy Spirit that Jesus essentially acts as High Priest, that He accomplishes the ultimate and perfect act of His mediation on our behalf; this is the very source of our salvation.

As I began to explore this vast subject and endeavoured to classify its modes of expression within the Roman liturgy, I nevertheless rediscovered that (...) it is a mystery which, even when revealed, remains hidden. The truth of Jesus' self-offering must necessarily be expressed in human words, and yet it is a reality so great that it can never be fully exhausted. In many respects, it seems to be attested to in the Roman liturgy at least as much by what is said as by what is left unsaid. It is truly that *mysterium fidei* accessible to simple souls, even as it eludes the wise of this world, and becomes a stumbling block, at least to some extent, for those who are outside the house of faith (1 Cor. 1:22–25).

In the reflections that follow, I am aware that I am only able to deal with this subject in a rather summary manner, highlighting some of the main aspects of the mystery but certainly not all of them, even when considering how this mystery is manifested in the Roman liturgy. I hope, at the very least, that this essay, whilst it may not succeed in shedding any light on the mystery, will not obscure it.

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2. Magisterium

To guide us, let us consider the concise description of Christ's offering in the Catechism of the Catholic Church: first of all, the offering made once and for all by Jesus to the Father is re-presented in the Eucharist.

The Eucharist is thus a sacrifice because it re-presents (makes present) the sacrifice of the cross, because it is its memorial and because it applies its fruits: [Christ], our Lord and our God, was once and for all to offer Himself to God the Father through His death on the altar of the cross, in order to accomplish redemption for ever. But, because His priestly office was not to end with His death, at the Last Supper, 'on the night He was betrayed' [He wished] to bestow upon the Church, His beloved spouse, a visible sacrifice (as required by human nature) through which the bloody sacrifice He was to accomplish once and for all on the cross would be re-presented, its memory perpetuated until the end of the world, and its saving power applied to the forgiveness of the sins we commit daily.

The substance of this document derives directly from the Decree of the Council of Trent, which felt the need to clarify the Church's teaching on the Eucharist in order to respond to the objections of the supporters of the Reformation.

The expression of the mystery is simple in itself, yet it is also profound: Jesus died long ago on the cross; now, 'having been raised from the dead, he will never die again' (Rom. 6:9). He cannot die again in the Mass, and yet his sacrificial death is made present in a mystical way every time the Mass is celebrated.

Secondly, 'the sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one and the same sacrifice':

There is but one and the same Victim; the one offered through the ministry of the priests is the very same who offered himself on the cross. Only the manner of the offering changes... In the divine sacrifice that is the celebration of the Mass, the same Christ who once offered himself in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and offered in an unbloody manner.

This clarification presents Christ explicitly as the Victim and implicitly as the One who offers the sacrifice, or as the Priest; given that He is at the same time both priest and victim, we are justified in logically distinguishing His priestly office of offering (oblatio) from His immolation as a victim (immolatio). Indeed, we would do well to consider the remarks of Pope John Paul II in his Letter to Priests for Holy Thursday 2000. They comment on and develop this theme excellently:

The Jubilee invites us to contemplate the intimate connection between the priesthood of Christ and the mystery of His person. The priesthood of Christ is not 'incidental'; it is not a task which He could have, or would have been able to, avoid assuming. It is an integral part of His identity as the Incarnate Son, as God made man. From now on, humanity's

relationship with God passes entirely through Christ: ‘No one comes to the Father except through Me’ (John 14:6) . This is why Christ is a priest whose priesthood is eternal and universal. The priesthood of the First Covenant was a foreshadowing and a preparation for it (cf. Heb. 9:9). Christ has been fully exercising His priesthood from the moment He began to sit as High Priest ‘at the right hand of the throne of Majesty in heaven’ (Heb. 8:1). From that moment on, the very nature of the human priesthood has changed. There is now but one priesthood, that of Christ, which can be shared and exercised in various ways.

Sacerdos and Hostia

At the same time, the meaning of sacrifice—the priestly act par excellence—attained its perfect fulfilment. On Golgotha, Christ made His life an offering of eternal value, a redemptive offering that has forever reopened the paths of communion with God, previously blocked by sin.

The Letter to the Hebrews sheds light on this mystery by having Christ speak the words of Psalm 40: ‘You did not desire sacrifice or offering. Instead, You prepared a body for Me. .. Here I am... I have come to do Your will, O God’ (Heb. 10:5, 7; cf. Ps. 40:7, 9). According to the author of the letter, these prophetic words were spoken by Christ when He came into the world. They express his mystery and his mission. They begin to be fulfilled from the very moment of the Incarnation and reach their fulfilment in the sacrifice on Golgotha. From that moment on, every priestly offering merely re-presents to the Father the unique offering of Christ, made once and for all.

Thirdly, the Eucharist is also the sacrifice of the Church

The Church, which is the Body of Christ, shares in the offering of Him who is its Head. Together with Him, she offers herself entirely. She unites herself to His intercession before the Father on behalf of all people. In the Eucharist, Christ’s sacrifice also becomes the sacrifice of the members of His Body. The lives of the faithful—their praise, their sufferings, their prayers and their labours—are united with those of Christ and with His total offering, thereby acquiring a new value. The sacrifice of Christ present on the altar enables all generations of Christians to be united with His offering.

In our exploration, we shall discover that it is sometimes virtually impossible to clearly distinguish between the offering of Christ and that of His bride, the Church.

3. Theories of Sacrifice

Ever since the Council of Trent consolidated the Catholic faith in the Mass as a sacrifice, theologians have continually developed new approaches to understanding how the Mass is a sacrifice or in what way *the immolatio*, or Christ’s self-offering, is made present in the Mass. This an authentic exercise in *fides quaerens intellectum*. Yet we must still acknowledge that we are always dealing here with a mystery, the very *mysterium fidei*. Theories may enable us to delve

deeper into the mystery, to draw nearer to it, but the mystery, which is by definition inexhaustible, always remains. The sober language of the Magisterium affirms this reality, whilst the concise language of the Roman liturgy celebrates it, though without ever explaining it. Colman O'Neill, O.P., put it well on this point:

The Mass involves neither a purely symbolic nor a physical immolation of Christ; it truly involves an immolation, but a sacramental one. There is nothing else on earth comparable to it. We are therefore compelled either to find new words that can be applied to the mystery, or to adapt old words to a new meaning... We must not forget that no theologian sets out to prove that the Mass is a sacrifice. All accept this fact as a revealed truth; they may seek to illustrate the meaning of this truth by comparing the sacrifice in question with Calvary, by comparing its mode with the form of reality appropriate to the sacraments, and by indicating the role assigned to the Mass in the plan of salvation. They approach the mystery through all manner of converging paths and thus endeavour to construct a composite image in which its significant character will be revealed.

It would be impossible to mention here all the theories that have been put forward to explain how Christ's self-offering is made present in the Mass. I should, however, like to draw attention very briefly to the contribution of what is known as the French school of spirituality, founded by Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle [1575–1629], and further developed by his disciples, notably Charles de Coudron [1588–1641] and the Venerable Jean Jacques Olier [1608–1657]. Their thinking, which developed over several centuries, was brilliantly summarised and defended by the French Sulpician M. Mepin [1870–1953].

Without denying the significance of *the mystic immolation*, they emphasised the inner self-giving practised by Christ throughout (...) a self-giving which He continues to practise in His heavenly life. In the Mass, too, the crucial event consists in the fact that, by virtue of the words of consecration, Christ becomes present under the visible species, with this voluntary self-surrender, and that, moreover, He includes the Church in this self-surrender.

Whilst the theory attributed to the French school in Lepin's synthesis may be criticised insofar as it effectively reduces the sacrificial element to Christ's inner disposition,² it nevertheless seems to me that it has much to offer if it is considered in light of what the Holy Father emphasised in his letter to priests for the Jubilee Year regarding Christ's sentiments upon his entry into this world, and regarding the need to cultivate these sentiments for all those who wish to participate actively and fruitfully [*actuose et fructuose*] in the holy sacrifice of the Mass.³

I would also like to draw attention to a different and complementary approach to the mystery, based on the thought of Saint Thomas Aquinas, which, in my view, is well in keeping with

² See Piolanti's criticisms in ME 434 and those of Maurice de la Taille, S.J. [1872-1933], cited in CC 122.

³ See SC #11, 14 and Cardinal Ratzinger's comments on the true meaning of the expression 'active participation' in the liturgy, in his work *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. John Saward (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2000), 171-177.

the entire tradition. Unlike many of their post-Tridentine predecessors, a number of theologians from the neo-Thomist school that developed during the twentieth century refrain from entering into the debates sparked by the so-called ‘theories of destruction’ , preferring instead to present the Mass directly as a ‘sacramental sacrifice’ in accordance with the views of the Angelic Doctor. Here is an example of this type of presentation, from Colenan O’Neill, O.P.:

Since the visible elements are a symbol of Christ’s violent death on the cross, and since, by virtue of Transubstantiation, the elements truly contain what they represent, the Church offers on her altar the Victim of the New Covenant in sacramental form. The Eucharist does not contain Christ’s death; that is a past historical event. Transubstantiation does not affect the body of Christ: it affects only the bread and wine in accordance with the words spoken by the priest. Consequently, in the Mass, the Eucharist refers to Christ’s death insofar as the two distinct species constitute a symbol of that death, and insofar as each species makes Christ present in two different ways, one referring to His flesh, the other to His blood. The hosts kept in the tabernacle after Mass do not, strictly speaking, constitute a symbol of Christ’s death: for that, the simultaneous presence of the chalice of His blood is required.

Indeed, it is the separate consecration of the two species that signifies Christ’s death. This point was clearly demonstrated by the Reverend Father Abbot Anscar Vonier, O.S.B. [1875–1938] in his classic work: *Key to the Doctrine of the Eucharist*. Dom Anscar illustrates this position by clarifying St Thomas’s view on concomitance, a term also used by the Council of Trent.

The theological significance of the Eucharistic doctrine of concomitance is as follows: the Eucharistic Body and the Eucharistic Blood of Christ are accompanied; they are not isolated; they come, so to speak, escorted by friends. These holy things, Body and Blood, are like the centre of a group; they are surrounded by other holy things without which they do not exist.

The author continues, commenting on a text by Saint Thomas:

As we shall now see, by virtue of real concomitance, one cannot say either that the Body is without the Blood, or that the Blood is without the Body; but this association occurs solely by virtue of real concomitance. It does not interfere with the sacramental process whereby, directly and exclusively, the bread is changed into flesh and the wine into blood—a twofold process in which the entire sacramental representation resides. ‘Although the whole Christ is present under both species (by virtue of concomitance), it is not in vain (that the sacrament is of two kinds), for, firstly, it is necessary in order to represent the Passion of Christ, in which the blood was set apart, separated from the body, and, consequently, in the form of the consecration of the blood, it is said that this blood is poured out.’

He then draws his conclusion, which he addresses specifically to the proponents of theories of sacrifice based on ‘destruction’:

Here is the example of concomitance in which the sacrifice of the Mass is most directly concerned: henceforth, the Body is never bloodless and the Blood is never without the Body in the Eucharistic sacrifice. For many people, the fact of dogma has obscured the notions of the Eucharistic sacrifice. They seem to imagine that, given the inseparability of the Body and the Blood, the the Eucharist is not a sufficiently drastic immolation unless one looks elsewhere for treatises on sacrifice. The sacramental Body and Blood do not seem to satisfy their ardour for reality—I might even say, almost, their zeal for ethical feats. This is a strange misinterpretation of the Eucharistic mystery, not to say of the very nature of sacrifice.

In fact, a long tradition within the Church—as we have just seen represented by O’Neill and Vanier—maintains that the separate consecration of the bread and wine at Mass is the primary sign of Christ’s self-offering and bears witness to his sacrifice. This (...), whilst not absolutely proven, by (...)

In the account of the [Eucharistic] institution, the power of the words, the action of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit make the Body and Blood of Christ—His sacrifice offered on the cross once and for all—sacramentally present under the species of bread and wine.

The theories of another Benedictine, Dom Odo Casel, O.S.B. [1886–1948], have also been a major source of enrichment for liturgical thought over the last fifty years. Josef Jungmann summarises his contribution as follows:

According to this theory, to a certain extent and in certain respects, the Eucharistic celebration is analogous to the mystery cults of antiquity. From this perspective, what becomes present at Mass is not only Christ but (without the veil of the rite or ‘in mystery’) the entire work of redemption accomplished by Christ, together with His death on the cross, which lies at the heart of that work. And this presence is not merely subjective: it is also objective.

By performing this rite, the Church participates in the work of salvation. Although many objections have been raised on many points against Casel’s theory, the fruitfulness of the postulate concerning ‘that which is made present’ has become apparent; for if, at every Mass, the death on the cross is simply made present, the unity of the sacrifice follows of its own accord, and the Church’s participation is likewise illuminated in a new light.

4. The Liturgical Context

Having thus laid the groundwork with considerations on Christ’s offering based on certain fundamental dogmatic principles and some key theories put forward on the subject, we must now turn our attention to the way in which the Roman Liturgy bears witness to this offering. The task may seem straightforward; in fact it is complex, for the liturgy—particularly in its classical Roman form—often embodies the mystery even as it presents it. It would appear that the Roman liturgy

developed in the spirit of the ancient *disciplina arcani*, or ‘discipline of secrecy’, which obliged the disciples of Christianity in the early centuries not to reveal to pagans the essential truths of their religion, and in particular the liturgical practice of the Eucharist, for fear that the sacred mysteries might be profaned (cf. Mt 7:6). In his classic work, *Missarum Sollemnia*, Joseph Jungmann presents this aspect as follows:

The fact that the Mass is also the sacrifice of Christ is, in the *ordo* of the Roman Mass, merely implicit; it is never expressly stated. In fact, there is a stark contrast between the language of the liturgy and that which we are accustomed to hearing today in sermons, catechisms and other religious writings. Today, the preference is to emphasise that, on our altars, Christ renews His Passion and His death in a bloodless manner. We speak of the renewal of the sacrifice of the cross, an oblation in which Christ offers Himself to His heavenly Father. But the Church’s sacrifice is mentioned only in very general terms. This is why even our theological textbooks, when addressing the resulting problem of precisely defining how Christ consummates His sacrifice, refer—without examining the matter too closely—to His presence in the consecrated Host.

In fact, the classical Roman liturgy is quite reserved regarding the mystery of faith, whilst it places much greater emphasis on the Church’s offering. Jungmann pursues this idea in his final work, which highlights the third point discussed in the introduction to the present study, namely: the fact that the Eucharist is at the same time the sacrifice of the Church:

In the overall picture of the liturgy of the Mass, there is no doubt that the sacrifice of the Church is emphasised much more strongly than the sacrifice of Christ... The sacrifice of the Church has no other meaning than to offer the sacrifice placed in the hands of that Church by Christ. The entire action of the Church is directed towards the sacrifice which Christ offers, by including his Church therein. The sacrifice of the Church thus remains entirely and absolutely subordinate to the sacrifice of Christ and is realised only through the initiative of Christ himself, who has authorised the Church to offer it, and who acts within the Church through his Spirit.

In *Missarum Sollemnia*, Jungmann draws attention to a point that will be of paramount importance for the rest of this work:

The very same act that brings about Christ’s sacrifice also brings about the Church’s sacrifice, but with this difference: the sacrifice of the Church begins to take shape right from the very start of the Mass and (...) receives the divine seal and divine approval when, at the consecration, Christ takes charge of it and, having immensely ennobled it, offers it to his heavenly Father as his own.

5. The Rite of the Offertory

Just as I have so far had to offer only a rough outline of the dogmatic and liturgical background to Christ's offering, I must now proceed in the same summary manner to show how the Roman liturgy deals with this theme. This makes its first major appearance in the Offertory of the Mass as found in the 1962 Roman Missal. The subject has been admirably treated from the perspective of its historical development by Dom Paul Tirot O.S.B. and, from a historical-doctrinal perspective, by Father Franck Quoëx at the fifth international colloquium held by the International Centre for Liturgical Studies in 1999. I can do no better than refer readers who are interested to their studies, limiting myself to commenting on a few specific points.

Firstly, during the first millennium, the 'offertory' of the Roman rite consisted of a procession of the faithful bearing the offerings, accompanied by a responsorial psalm concluding with the *Oratio super oblata*. The prayers of the current Offertory, as found in the 1932 Missal, date from a relatively late period in the history of the development of the Roman liturgy. Dom Tirot traces their evolution from the seventh to the sixteenth century. Abbé Quoëx, drawing on Dom Tirot's research, points out that the prayers result from the fusion of two German sources—one from the Rhineland, the other from Mainz—and that they were incorporated into the Missal of the Roman Curia in the thirteenth century, and from there into that of Saint Pius V. It is probably because of their relatively late origin that they do not appear to have been influenced by the early Roman austerity, and perhaps by the spirit of the *disciplina arcani*.

According to Jungmann, these prayers anticipate the thinking behind the canon and, consequently, are somewhat redundant. Admittedly, it was not until the end of the Middle Ages that the term 'petit coucou' (or 'minor canon') was applied to the rites of the Offertory, but the idea had long existed implicitly, underlying the new formulation.

However, he continues, according to Father Quoëx, to justify the place of these prayers in the Tridentine Missal:

All things considered, the prayers of the Offertory in our current Ordo Missae can only be regarded as unnecessarily duplicating the Canon if we focus our attention on the missa lecta, where the dominant and secondary elements of the service are all placed on the same level, and consequently accord these prayers as much importance as the central words of the Canon. These prayers do not seek to anticipate the Canon but rather to suggest its various themes.

In his final work, *The Mass: A Historical, Theological and Pastoral Study*, Jungmann effectively summarises the Offertory rite of the Tridentine Missal (as well as the preparation of the gifts in the Missal currently in use) as 'a sort of opening of the sacred act':

It is at least permissible to allow the oblation to begin before its actual fulfilment and not to limit the [celebrant's] activity to the practical task of preparing the gifts, which must, of course, be arranged. However, in this case, what must be clearly understood is that the

Offertory is not merely the Church's sacrifice, isolated and independent of Christ's sacrifice; nor is it merely a preliminary announcement of the sacramental event, but rather it is in fact a sort of 'overture' [in the musical sense of the term] to the sacred act. As such, a well-structured Offertory, proclaiming at the very least the imminence of the sacrifice, is an excellent opportunity for all those present to understand what the Mass, as the Church's sacrifice, ought to be: the expression of the orientation of our whole life towards God—with its joys and sorrows, its hopes and longings—and an awareness that all these elements [of our lives] are intertwined and united with the sacrifice that Christ, our High Priest, has offered, and continues to offer with us.

With these considerations in mind, one is able to appreciate the graceful nuances of these Franco-Rhenish prayers. The admirable 'Suscipa, Sancta Pater... hanc immaculatam hostiam' serves as a prelude to the immolation of the victim, whilst recalling the principal intentions for which this sacrifice is offered. The 'Deus qui humanae' looks towards the outcome of the sacrifice: so that we may be *ejus divinitatis consortes*. The 'offerimus' is a prayer that our sacrifice may rise up to the divine majesty *pro nostra et totius mundaе salutae cum odore suavitatis*. The 'in spiritu humilitatis' is yet another prayer that the sacrifice may be pleasing *in conspectu tuo hodie*. The 'veni sanctificator' anticipates the epiclesis, the transformation of the gifts, accomplished by the Holy Spirit. The *Suscipe, sancta trinitas* reminds us that we are celebrating the entire Paschal Mystery: the Passion, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ our Lord. Finally, with the *Orate fratres*, the priest exhorts the faithful to pray that the sacrifice may be acceptable *apud Deum Patrem omnipotentem*.

The difference between the two forms of the *Suscipe* is fascinating: these forms represent two ways of presenting Christ's relationship to the other Persons of the Holy Trinity. The first of these prayers is addressed to the Father. It follows the earliest Christological schema expressed in the New Testament, in the Nicene and Constantinopolitan Creeds, and by the Greek Fathers—a schema which places Christ at the centre of the Trinity, between the Father and the Holy Spirit. This is reflected in the classical orientation of the Roman liturgy: *ad Patrem per Filium in Spiritu Sancto*. This approach may be regarded as a theocentric and Trinitarian Christocentrism. The second 'suscipe' is addressed directly to the Holy Trinity and represents a later approach to Christological discourse, which has its origins in Saint Augustine's *De Trinitate* and is expressed in the *Quicumque* creed formerly attributed to Saint Athanasius. To characterise it, one might say that it unites theocentrism and Christocentrism. It became established in the West mainly through the work of Saint Thomas Aquinas.⁴ The first 'suscipe' contemplates the offering of Christ, the spotless victim, to the Father. The second implores the Holy Trinity to accept the oblation of the Church as it commemorates the Passion, the Resurrection and the Ascension.

⁴ See SC #11, 14 and Cardinal Ratzinger's comments on the true meaning of the expression 'active participation' in the liturgy, in his work *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. John Saward (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2000), 171-177.

It is worth noting that these two approaches to Christ's offering are also commonly found in popular piety of our own time. The first, which corresponds to the approach of the *Suscipe, Sancta Pater*, is found in the decade prayer of the 'Pietà Divina' rosary of Saint Faustina Kowalska:

Eternal Father, I offer You the Body and Blood, the Soul and Divinity of Your Son, our beloved Lord Jesus Christ, in expiation for our sins and those of the whole world.

The second, similar to the '*Suscipe, Sancta Trinitas*' invocation, is one of the prayers taught by the angel to the three little shepherds of Fátima in 1916.

O Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I adore You profoundly. I offer You the most precious Body, Blood (...) in the tabernacles throughout the world, in reparation for the outrages, sacrileges and indifference which offend Him...

Jungmann points out that those entrusted with the liturgical reform called for by the Second Vatican Council wondered whether to restore the original simplicity of the Offertory by returning it to what it had been during the first millennium, or whether to retain the elaborate prayers developed during the Carolingian period. As we know, the new Mass adopts a middle course. The symbolism inherent in the act of placing the gifts on the altar has not been removed but clarified. The offertory procession of the faithful is encouraged. The very gesture of raising the gifts in a movement of offering has been retained.

On the other hand, almost all the prayers that had accompanied this gesture since the Carolingian period have been dispensed with; only a short phrase now accompanies the procession and the elevation of the offerings. The formulas introduced for this purpose date back to very ancient times; they are probably the very words used to bless the bread and wine at a Jewish meal in the time of Christ. Ligies has reconstructed this Jewish blessing of the bread as follows: *Benedictus Tu Deus noster, rex universi, qui produces panem de terra* ('Blessed are You, our God, Lord of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth') and of the wine... *rex universi creans, fructum vitis* ('Lord of the universe who brings forth the fruit of the vine') (Hängi-Pahl 6.7).

In other words, the revised Offertory formula contains a threefold idea: bread and wine are the fruits of this earth on which we live; they are thus symbols of our world and our life; they also signify the labour of our hands and our daily work, and they are offered here as matter, as a material medium for what they are to become in the Eucharistic mystery: the bread of life and spiritual drink. The new rite of the Offertory, or *praeparatio donorum*, does not emphasise Christ's offering as clearly as the Carolingian prayers do. It is evident that those who drafted the new *ordo missae* did not wish to do so; they intended that this aspect be reserved for the Canon or the Eucharistic Prayers (...) this aspect. It should be noted, however, that the current prayers contain a clear reference to the offering: *de tua largitate accipimus panem, quem tibi offerimus... de tua largitate accipimus vinum, quod tibi offerimus*. This allusion is quite precise in the English translation.

‘Through your goodness we have’ [etc., that is to say] ‘It is from your goodness that we have received this bread to offer to You, this wine to offer to You’, whereas many other translations into modern languages opt for a form of the verb ‘to present’ rather than the verb ‘to offer’.

6. The *Oratio super oblata*

As regards the *Oratio super oblata*, or *secret* prayer, as it has come to be commonly called, Jungmann tells us that

in the ancient Roman liturgy, the prayer over the offerings (‘*oratio super oblata*’) was the only prayer situated within the confines of the Offertory rite and, like any prayer, it was recited aloud.

However, when, under Eastern influence, it became customary during the Carolingian period to recite this prayer in a low voice—because it was thought that, as a sacrificial prayer, it was already part of the sacred mystery—the entire act of preparing the offerings came to include other prayers recited silently, but, for a long time, these prayers were regarded as purely private.

In *Missarum Solemnia* he further explains that the secret prayer is the prayer which concludes the offering and the act of presenting the material gifts. It explains their significance by translating them into the language of prayer. The creation of this prayer can be regarded as natural, if not self-evident, given that the natural gift itself was regarded as an oblation to God and that, through the inclusion of the congregation, its symbolic significance was emphasised. Thus, even in the oldest Roman sacramentary—the Leonianum, to be precise (?)—we find these clearly marked features which, even today, distinguish the secret prayer. Whatever the variations in the wording, the same idea is invariably found expressed in different terms: we offer gifts to God—*dona*, *munera*, *oblationem*; less frequently (and, when this is the case, clearly simply to vary the expression): *hostias*, *sacrificium*... but the gifts do not constitute an independent sacrifice: they are offered solely to be united with the sacrifice of Christ.

We may here examine some of these wonderfully evocative prayers, as they pertain to our subject. Whilst their classical structure is easily recognisable, they display a remarkable richness in speaking of Christ’s offering about to take place, in which the faithful wish to participate. These prayers are a manifestation of the ‘genius’ of the Latin rite.

The announcement of Christ’s sacrifice is the subject of a marvellous allusion in the Epiphany Secret, which has been preserved in the Missal of Paul VI. God is asked to look favourably upon the gifts of the Church—no longer gold, frankincense and myrrh, but rather the One to whom these gifts point, namely Jesus Christ, proclaimed, sacrificed and received through these very gifts:

Ecclesiae Tuae, quaesumus, Domine, dona propitius intueri, quibus non jam aurum, thus et myrrha profertur, sed quod eisdem muneribus declaratur, immolatur et sumitur Jesus Christus.

The Quinquagesima secret prayer earnestly implores that this offering of our gifts may make us worthy to offer the sacrifice of Christ:

Haec hostia, Domine, quaesumus, emundat nostra delicta: et ad sacrificium celebrandum, subditorum tibi corpora mentesque sanctificet.

The prayer over the offerings for Ash Wednesday in both Missals effectively asks for the same thing. May the offering of these gifts make us worthy to celebrate the beginning of this sacrament of sacrifice which marks the start of Lent, so that we may be deemed worthy to devote ourselves entirely to the celebration of Your Son's Passion.

Grant us, we pray, Lord, grant that we may be suitably prepared through the offering of these gifts: by which we celebrate the very beginning of that venerable . We solemnly offer the sacrifice marking the beginning of Lent, beseeching You, Lord, that through the labours of penance and charity we may restrain ourselves from vain pleasures, and, cleansed of our sins, may we be worthy to be devout in celebrating the Passion of Your Son.

In the Secret Prayer for Whit Monday, we find a striking example of how these offerings (and, with them, the offering of ourselves) will be transformed to become part of the perfect spiritual sacrifice: *We beseech thee, O Lord, in thy mercy, to sanctify these gifts and, through the offering of these sacrifices, to make us ourselves an eternal offering to thee.* It is remarkable that almost the same terminology is found in the third Eucharistic Prayer: *Ipse nos tibi perficiat munus aeternum.*

The Secret of the second Sunday after Pentecost clearly foreshadows what this offering will become. May the offering about to be made purify us and, day by day, lead us towards eternal life: *Oblatio nos, Domine, tuo nomini dicanda purificet: et de die in diem ad caelestis vitae transferat actionem*; The same formula, apart from the minor change from *dicanda* to *dicata*, is found in the Prayer over the Offerings for the fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time. The prayer in the Tridentine Missal, however, seems more precise, emphasising that the offering is 'about to be made' rather than simply stating that it 'is made'.

The *oratio super oblata* of the second Votive Mass of the Holy Eucharist is particularly beautiful in its expression: Grant us, we pray, Lord, that we may be worthy to partake of these mysteries, for as often as this presentation of the Victim is celebrated, the work of our redemption is accomplished: *Concede nobis, quaesumus, Domine, haec digne frequentare mysteria, quia, quoties huius hostiae commemoratio celebratur, opus nostrae redemptionis exercetur.* The secret of the Votive Mass of the Holy Cross offers yet another variation on this theme of the Victim about to be offered. May this oblation purify us from all sin, we beseech You, O Lord, just as, on the cross, it took away the sins of the whole world: *This oblation, O Lord, we beseech You, may purge us of all our sins: for on the altar of the Cross it also bore the sins of the whole world.*

It was not my intention here to systematically examine all the *Orationes super oblata* in the Roman Missals of 1962 and 1970; rather, I wished to draw attention to the way in which they direct

our focus towards Christ's offering. Dom Basile Valuet has taken the examination of this question further; I am pleased to refer those interested in the subject to his work.

To conclude this brief survey of the *Orationes super oblata*, let us quote Jungmann's insightful commentary on them in *Missarum Sollemnia*:

Throughout the entire tradition of the Roman sacramentaries, two constants are firmly maintained: the secret prayer is always formulated in the plural, as a prayer of the entire congregation: *Offerimus, immolamus, munera nostra, oblationes populi tui*; secondly, it is always addressed to God and concludes with *Per Dominum*.

The countless formulations of this prayer are a constant confirmation of the Catechism's assertion that the Eucharist is also the sacrifice of the Church.' The aim is to transform our material offerings so that they are united with the perfect sacrifice of Christ, our offering of our lives being at the same time joined to the offering of His own.

7. The Preface

Whilst it is true that it is rare to find (...) the 1962 Roman Missal,

the conciliar reform was not merely aimed at providing greater variety; it was more specifically focused on the qualitative enrichment of the Eucharistic celebration, and of the very heart of that celebration, which is the Eucharistic Prayer.

I should like to examine here four prefaces from the Missal of Paul VI which speak explicitly of Christ's offering. The Latin text, the liturgical background, the biblical context, the patristic sources and translations into modern languages in *The Prefaces of the Roman Missal: A General Examination of the Sources with Concordance Tables and Index*, by Anthony Word, S.M., and Cuthbert Johnson, O.S. B.

The first is the Preface of the Holy Eucharist prescribed for Maundy Thursday. In it, Christ is described as the true and eternal Priest who instituted this sacrifice that shall have no end [*verus aeternusque Sacerdos, formam sacrificii perennis instituens*] and who first offered himself to the Father as a sacrifice for our salvation [*hostiam tibi se primus obtulit salutarem*], and then taught us to make this offering in memory of him [*et nos, in sui memoriam praecepit offerre*]. The text then mentions the immolation of Christ's flesh for us [*cuius carnem pro nobis immolatam*].

(...) Preface of the Holy Eucharist, which may be used for the Solemn Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ [Translator's note: Corpus Christi?] and for votive Masses of the Holy Eucharist. It recalls the Last Supper which Christ shared with his apostles [*qui cum Apostolis suis in novissima cena convescens*], and Christ's desire that the memory of the cross, the bearer of our salvation, be perpetuated for ever [*salutiferam crucis memoriam prosecuturus in saecula*]. For this reason, He offered Himself to the Father, the spotless

Lamb, the acceptable gift of perfect praise [*agnus sine macula se tibi obtulit perfectae laudis munus acceptum*].

The classic formula of the traditional Easter Preface, *cum Pascha nostrum immolatus est Christus*, proclaims that Christ, our Paschal offering, has been sacrificed. This Preface is to be used, in a slightly extended form, during the Easter Octave in the Missal of Paul VI, and may be used, along with four others, until the end of the Easter season. Each of the new texts retains the same introduction and concludes with *cum Pascha nostrum immolatus et Christus*. The third and fifth of these new Prefaces for the Easter season emphasise Christ's sacrificial offering in a particular way.

The third beautifully summarises Christ's immolation on the cross (...). He ceaselessly offers himself up for us and intercedes for us before the Father with an unending plea [*qui se pro nobis offerre non desinit, nosque apud te perenni advocacy defendit*]. Once offered as a sacrifice, He dies no more. Though slain, He lives for ever [*qui immolatus iam non moritur, sed semper vivit occisus*].

In the fifth, attention turns to the fulfilment of the ancient sacrifices through the offering of Jesus' body on the cross [*qui, oblatione corporis sui, performed the ancient sacrifices in the truth of the cross*], on His offering of Himself to the Father for our salvation, through which He showed that He was the priest, the altar and the sacrificial lamb [*commending Himself to You for our salvation, He revealed Himself as priest, altar and lamb*].

Each of these marvellous prefaces is, in its own way, a meditation on the mystery of Christ's offering, which is about to be made present once more on the altar.

8. The Roman Canon

The heart of every celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the Eucharistic Prayer, in which the bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ, thus fulfilling Christ's offering to the Father, the sacrifice of the New Law. 'The core from which the most important part of the Mass has developed,' says Jungmann, (...) in person,

It is the account of the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper, which the sacred words of consecration have framed within a prayer of thanksgiving.

If the prayers of the Carolingian Offertory and the oratio super oblata to some extent anticipated the offering even before the words of consecration were spoken, it is hardly surprising that these are also announced in the Roman Canon. Indeed, from the very first prayer, the *te igitur*, the offerings are presented as *haec dona, haec munera, haec sonata sacrificia illibata* (these offerings, these holy and spotless sacrifices) . Similarly, in the *hanc igitur*, the priest implores the Lord to accept *l'oblationem servitutis nostrae* the offering of our servitude (of our servitude). This is yet another indication of how the offering of ourselves is intertwined in the liturgical prayers with the offering of Christ, of whom the Eucharist is at once both the offering of Christ and that of the

Church. Finally, in the ‘quam oblationem’, the priest prays that the Father may accept our offering and thus transform it into the Body and Blood of Christ.

Jungmann tells us that

in almost all liturgies, two ideas are used to define the mystery, these two ideas being used in conjunction and contrasted in various ways. The mystery is a commemoration or anamnesis; it is at the same time an oblation, a sacrifice...

As a general rule, however, the commemoration is mentioned first, but in a participatory form, so that, although it comes first, the main emphasis is nonetheless on the oblation, expressed by a verb such as *offerimus* or *prospheromen*.

It is clear that both elements are present in the ‘unde et memores’, the first prayer of the Roman Canon following the Consecration. The remembrance of Christ’s Passion, His Resurrection from the dead and His glorious Ascension come first. As Jungmann says,

the second point expressed in the ‘unde et memores’, which is then taken up and developed in the prayers that follow, is the oblation, or offering. Here we have a sacrificial prayer that lies at the heart of the entire Mass; the primary liturgical expression of the fact that the Mass is indeed a sacrifice. In this regard, it is worth noting that reference is made here to a sacrifice offered exclusively by the Church. Christ, the High Priest, remains entirely in the background. It is only during the rites of Consecration, when the priest suddenly begins to present the actions of our Lord, step by step, acting as Christ’s spokesperson as he recites the words of transubstantiation, is it only then that the veil is momentarily lifted, revealing the full depth of this mystery.

(...) to the divine majesty the pure victim, the holy victim, the holy victim, the immaculate victim [*hostiam puram, hostiam sanctam, hostiam immaculam*] which has become the bread of life and the chalice of eternal salvation. In the following prayer, the ‘supra quae’, we implore God to accept the offering, the holy sacrifice, the immaculate victim [*sanctum sacrificium, immaculatam hostiam*] just as He accepted the sacrifices of Abel, Abraham and Melchizedek.

Finally, in the ‘supplices’, we ask that the sacrifice be carried by the hands of an angel to the altar on high — a somewhat mysterious reference: who is this angel: Michael, Christ Himself? the Holy Spirit? Let us simply see this as a reminder that every Mass on earth stands at the crossroads of Calvary and the liturgy of the heavenly Jerusalem. It is therefore fitting to recall the presence of the angels who worship God with us and bear our offering to Him.

Jungmann’s views on the classical Roman Liturgy seem to me to be essentially correct. He is right to think that there is a certain reticence discernible in the prayers, which reveal what they simultaneously conceal, and that they were formulated under the influence of the *disciplina arcani*. The Carolingian offertory prayers, however, stemming from a different cultural background, are not

imbued with the same spirit. They are significantly more explicit regarding the offering about to be made

9. The new Eucharistic Prayers

One cannot, of course, expect the Eucharistic Prayers introduced after the Second Vatican Council to exhibit the original reticence that characterised the Roman Rite during its formative period. These prayers were drawn up in accordance with the specific guidelines of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, for example:

In this [general] restoration of the liturgy, texts and rites are to be formulated in such a way as to express more clearly the sacred realities they signify. The Christian people, as far as possible, should be able to understand them easily and take part in them fully, actively and as a community.

The rites should be characterised by noble simplicity. They should be brief, clear and free from unnecessary repetition. They should be accessible to the understanding of the people and should not, normally, require further explanation.

Commenting on these recommendations, Josef Jungmann observes that

today we have realised that we had gone too far in our desire to veil the mystery, to the detriment of the kerygmatic aspect—that is, the proclamation of the Good News, which cannot be separated from the Eucharistic celebration. A counter-movement, which gained momentum during the twentieth century, seeks to reveal and explain what is hidden and mysterious in the rites. Vatican II endorsed this movement and made it a fundamental principle of liturgical reform... The liturgical reform that followed endeavoured to put this intention of the Council into practice as systematically as possible, and one is even beginning to wonder whether the aim of rational clarity has not already been taken to extremes. Forms of worship that had become ossified have been set aside, which is to be welcomed; however, with the exception of the new Eucharistic Prayers and Prefaces, we do not yet see new shoots springing up from the cleared ground.

It should be noted that Father Jungmann died in Innsbruck on 26 January 1975 and that his book, from which I have taken the above quotation, as well as many others—*The Mass: A Historical, Theological and Pastoral Study*—was published posthumously. One would like to know the opinion of this great liturgist today.

In any case, it is in the precise light of the Council's provisions that we must (...)

The second is an adaptation of *The Apostolic Tradition*, attributed to Saint Hippolytus of Rome and which may date back to 215. It contains the necessary epiclesis — the institution narrative — and the anamnesis with the commemoration of the living and the dead, apart from that,

very little else. Its extreme reticence regarding Christ's offering may well stem from the *disciplina arcani*.

The third Eucharistic Prayer, says Jungmann

is the one that most successfully combines the Roman tradition on the one hand, and on the other, the rediscovered ideal of the Eucharistic Prayer. Its text begins only after the Sanctus; it therefore adheres to the traditional structure of the Roman Canon: a variable Preface and a fixed Canon... A particular advantage of Canon III is the balance achieved by its transition from the Sanctus to the Institution narrative, striking a middle ground between the brevity of Canon II and the length of Canon IV, whilst offering a successful synthesis of both.

Clear references to Christ's offering abound in this admirable anaphora. After the consecration, the priest says: We offer to you, in thanksgiving, this living and holy sacrifice [*offerimus tibi, gratias referentes, hoc sacrificium vivum et sanctum*] ; look favourably upon the offering of your Church and deign to recognise the victim, by whose immolation you have deigned to be appeased [*Respice, quaesumus, in oblationem Ecclesiae tuae et agnoscens hostiam, cuius voluisti immolatione placari*]. May he make us an eternal offering to you [*Ipse nos tibi pesficiat munus aeternum*]. Lord, may the sacrifice that has reconciled us with you promote peace and salvation for the whole world [*Haec Hostia nostrae reconciliationis proficiat, quaesumus, Domine, ad totius mundi pacem atque salutem*].

Regarding the Fourth Eucharistic Prayer, Jungmann tells us that it was modelled on the Byzantine-style anaphora of Western Syria. This is why, in contrast to the entire Roman tradition, it contains a description of the history of salvation, not in the Preface but in the 'post-sanctus' section '. This account begins with the history of the First Covenant in a style rich in biblical turns of phrase and expressions that presuppose a close familiarity with the language of the Holy Scriptures. The call for ecumenism was, in part, decisive in its composition.

This Eucharistic Prayer also contains numerous specific references to Christ's offering; for instance, in the celebrant's prayer: 'We offer You His Body and His Blood, the sacrifice that is acceptable in Your sight and a salvation for the whole world' [*Offerimus tibi eius corpus et sanguinem, sacrificium tibi acceptabile et toti mundo salutare*]; 'Lord, look upon this Victim whom You Yourself have prepared for Your Church [*Respice, Domine, in Hostiam, quam Ecclesiae Tuae ipse parasti*]; Lord, remember all those for whom we offer this sacrifice [*Nunc ergo, Domine, omnium recordare pro quibus tibi hanc oblationem offerimus*].

10. A few closing words

However briefly, I hope to have provided some insight into the theme of Christ's offering in the Roman liturgy. I hope to have spoken a 'first word'; I certainly do not claim to have spoken 'the last word', and I have not been able to explore the implications of the need for priests and the faithful to

unite themselves to Christ's offering in the Mass. On this subject, my friend, the late Father Colman O'Neil, O.P., wrote so aptly, particularly regarding Mary, the Co-Redemptrix, and the model she is meant to be for us.

By way of conclusion, I would simply like to offer two quotations. The first is taken from the late Josef Jungermann: the ideal form of celebrating Mass—whether before a large congregation, whatever their differing concerns and backgrounds, or before smaller congregations, brought together on the basis of all manner of concerns and diverse backgrounds—this ideal form will never be found. To satisfy all requirements, it must result neither from initiatives from below nor from instructions from above. It is a task that will never be fully accomplished. All we can hope to achieve is a constant compromise that sketches out, or even comes close to, the unattainable ideal.

Whilst this conclusion may seem somewhat discouraging, the fact remains that it contains a great deal of truth. The only perfect liturgy is the liturgy of heaven. A second quotation, taken from the Catechism of the Catholic Church, seems to me to provide a welcome counterbalance to Jungmann's:

The mystery of Christ is of such unfathomable richness that no liturgical tradition can, on its own, -on its own fully express it. The history of the flourishing and development of these rites bears witness to a remarkable complementarity. When the Churches have lived out their respective liturgical traditions in the communion of faith and the sacraments of the faith, they have enriched one another and have grown in fidelity to tradition and to the common mission of the whole Church.