

Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Social Imagination in Early Modern Europe

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Sometimes it is best just to give in to the obvious. When I was asked to be part of a series on sacrifice sponsored by the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, my theological antennae immediately began picking up strong signals from the Reformation debate over sacrifice in the Mass. I was initially loath to go rummaging through such a standard textbook debate, on the assumption that it had already been picked clean, but I eventually succumbed to the sheer appropriateness of the topic. Here, after all, is a major, public, and—for fun—acrimonious debate over sacrifice which stands precisely at the transition from the medieval to the early modern. And as I have been recently combining my interests in eucharistic theology with the way the political is imagined,¹ I thought it might be a worthwhile exercise to see what light, if any, the debate over eucharistic sacrifice could shed on the transition of the European social and political imagination from the medieval to the modern.

Standard theological approaches to the Reformation debate over sacrifice tend to treat the theological issue in abstraction from larger cultural and political changes, limiting the historical nature of the argument to an analysis of previous scriptural, patristic, and medieval theological writings on eucharistic sacrifice. Other approaches concentrate on the economic implications of cutting off the system of mass stipends associated with repeated offering of the sacrifice.² Yet another possibility is relegating the question of eucharistic sacrifice in the Reformation to the class of essentially intractable theological controversies which led to violence and the consequent necessity of the secular state to keep the peace.³

By way of contrast, I would like to treat the issue of the sacrifice of the Mass as a theological question with its own integrity—one admitting of greater and lesser approximations to truth based on criteria of the Christian

tradition—while simultaneously exploring doctrines of eucharistic sacrifice as metaphysical images which both reflect and shape the social and political imagination of early modern Europe. I am not interested in establishing causality in either direction, from politics to doctrine or doctrine to politics. For the purposes of this essay, I will accept Raymond Williams's judgment that material and cultural production are only formally separable, thus working on the assumption that the way in which a community envisions and embodies sacrifice is part of its larger social and political imagination.⁴ My explorations will proceed by way of showing the "fittingness" of the rise of the modern social order with certain conceptions or misconceptions of sacrifice in the Reformation era.

I will begin with an examination of Martin Luther's critique of the Mass as sacrifice. Then I will show how Luther's arguments on sacrifice—as well as those of his opponents—serve as a bridge from the medieval to the modern, specifically in partially reflecting the shift from an organic idealization of society to a contractual conception of social processes. Finally, I will conclude with some brief comments on alternative Christian conceptions of sacrifice which do not succumb to the modern logic of gift and exchange.

Receiving the sacrifice

No other sin, according to Luther, not even "manslaughter, theft, murder or adultery is so harmful as this abomination of the popish Mass."⁵ To call the Mass a sacrifice is to deny Christ's sacrifice, yet the papists fail to see "what a terrible abomination the repulsive devil is carrying on every day and everywhere in the secret mass."⁶ The idea that the Mass is a sacrifice is the third captivity of the sacrament of the Eucharist, "by far the most wicked of all," which abuse has "brought an endless host of other abuses in its train." Luther adds, in a somewhat different tone, "As I have received the truth freely, I will impart it without malice."⁷

We who inhabit a different world might be surprised by the vehemence of Luther's rhetoric over this issue, given modernity's general indifference to the niceties of liturgical form. Luther, nevertheless, understood that the stakes were high and that liturgical reform had ramifications beyond the Mass itself. In his 1522 treatise entitled *Against King Henry of England*, he wrote, "Once the Mass has been overthrown, I say we'll have overthrown the whole of Popedom."⁸ To understand the centrality in Luther's thought of abolishing the Mass as sacrifice, it is essential to see its connection to the doctrine of justification by grace through faith alone, the "chief article" of the

Schmalkald Articles, upon which “stands all that we teach and practice against the pope, the devil, and the world.” It follows, then, Luther continues, that “the mass under the papacy has to be the greatest and most terrible horror, as it directly and violently opposes this chief article.”⁹

It does so because the Mass becomes a “work” done by human beings and offered to God, a work credited as merit to particular persons. Luther defines the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper as a testament rather than a sacrifice; his first attack on the Mass as sacrifice in 1520 is called a *Treatise on the New Testament, that is, the Holy Mass*. A testament is a promise that involves the death of the one who makes it. At the last supper, Christ made an irrevocable promise of the forgiveness of sins, and then confirmed that promise with his death, once and for all, so that we might be absolutely certain of it. The only proper human response to the promise is to have faith in it. Our faith is not a work but a sheer response of gratitude for the gift of mercy received.¹⁰

The key difference between a sacrifice and a promise, according to Luther, is that a sacrifice is something we give, whereas a promise is something we receive. Because the Mass is a promise, it is not a sacrifice, because as Luther says in the *Babylonian Captivity*, “the same thing cannot be received and offered at the same time, nor can it be both given and accepted by the same person.”¹¹ This kind of zero-sum logic is essential to Luther’s attempts to safeguard our absolute dependence on God for our justification; the Mass as sacrifice threatens the sheer gratuitous mercy of God. He repeats this zero-sum logic often in his polemic against sacrifice, emphasizing the passive nature of the human being before God’s action in the Lord’s Supper. “[I]n the mass we give nothing to Christ, but only receive from him; unless they are willing to call this a good work, that a person sits still and permits himself to be benefited, given food and drink, clothed and healed, helped and redeemed.”¹²

Of course, this does not mean that the person *remains* merely passive, for we are meant to offer a response of praise and thanksgiving. In fact the proper response is to offer a sacrifice of ourselves to God and to one another. This is how Luther assimilates the language of sacrifice associated with the Eucharist in Paul, Hebrews, and in the church fathers. The apostles gathered food and other necessities and distributed them to the needy in connection with the Eucharist; always, in accordance with the ancient Old Testament custom, these offerings were lifted up to God, blessed, and thanksgiving was offered. For these “external sacrifices” only, according to Luther, the Mass was called a sacrifice, but not for the sacrament itself.

We should, therefore, give careful heed to this word “sacrifice,” so that we do not presume to give God something in the sacrament, when it is he who in it gives us all things. We should bring spiritual sacrifices, since the external sacrifices have ceased and have been changed into the gifts to churches, monastic houses, and charitable institutions. What sacrifices, then, are we to offer? Ourselves, and all that we have, with constant prayer, as we say “Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”¹³

We cannot return this offering directly to God, but lay it on Christ, who offers it for us. I can only be said to offer Christ in that I have faith that he accepts me and my praise and presents them to God. “And in order to strengthen this faith of mine he gives me a token that he will do it. This token is the sacrament of bread and wine.”¹⁴ Each Christian is a priest in this sense, then, that the faith of each one makes the offering by relying on Christ, but this faith first is strengthened by the “sign” or “token” of the sacrament (the German word is *Zeichen*, usually translated as “sign”).¹⁵ Faith, then, is only a *response* to the sacrament itself, which is always and exclusively a gift from God to us, and therefore never is a sacrifice.

A further consequence of this view of the Mass is the elimination of all the late medieval trafficking in the transferability of merit, for if we cannot offer the Mass to God, neither can we offer it to other people, dead or alive, for the satisfaction of sins, for the release of souls from purgatory, or for any needs whatsoever. Because the reception of the Mass depends on the faith of the recipient,

every one takes and receives of it for himself only, in proportion as he believes and trusts. Now just as I cannot give or receive the sacrament of baptism, of penance, of extreme unction in any one’s stead or for his benefit, but I accept for myself alone the blessing therein offered by God—and here there is no *officium* but *beneficium*, no work or service but reception and benefit alone—so also no one can observe or hear mass for another, but each one for himself alone. For there is nothing there but a taking and receiving.¹⁶

At the Mass we can certainly still pray in faith for others, and even pray for the souls in purgatory, Luther allows, but the Mass itself will be of no benefit to these others, alive or dead.¹⁷ “There is therefore a great difference

between prayer and the mass. Prayer may be extended to as many persons as one desires, while the mass is received only by the person who believes for himself, and only to the extent that he believes. It cannot be given either to God or to men.”¹⁸

Early in his career (1520), Luther was willing to allow the possibility of purgatory, provided the commerce between this life and the next be limited to prayer, which God can either accept or reject. By the time Luther penned the Schmalkald Articles in 1537, he was willing to jettison purgatory altogether as a “manifestation of the devil,” one of the “noxious pests” produced by “this dragon’s tail, the mass.” Luther complained that the “mass seems only to be used on behalf of the dead, although Christ founded the sacrament only for the living.” The problem again, Luther says, is the violation of the chief article about justification; “Christ alone” ought to help souls. “Beyond this, nothing about the dead is commanded or encouraged.”¹⁹

As Lutheran theologian Paul Althaus comments, Luther brought the community of saints “out of heaven and down to earth.”²⁰ We are meant to serve one another on earth. Luther says, “Whatever it is that you want to do for the saints, turn your attention away from the dead toward the living.”²¹ The connection of the earthly church with the church triumphant in heaven and the church suffering in purgatory was largely severed. We can neither sacrifice on behalf of the souls in purgatory, nor benefit from the merits of the saints. The dead saints are meant only to be examples, not of especially meritorious lives, but of God’s mercy in dealing with us sinners. The whole system of the circulation of merits among heaven, purgatory, and earth is an abomination because it relies on human works and because it implies egotism and partiality.²² Picture old-style Chicago machine politics, God as Mayor Richard J. Daley. To get things done, you’ve got to know the right saints at the heavenly city hall. I call in favors to get a building permit; you don’t get your garbage picked up because you voted Republican.

Luther sweeps away this trafficking in merit with his emphasis on the all-sufficient “once-and-for-allness,” the *ephapax* (Heb. 7:27, 9:12, 10:10) of Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary. Christ’s sacrifice on the cross is not repeatable on earth or in heaven. Christ is the high priest of Hebrews who has abolished all other sacrifices and all other works. Because of the importance of this constellation of ideas for Luther, he tends to de-eschatologize not just the communion of saints, but Christ’s priesthood as well. Especially in his later writings, there is a strong emphasis on Christ’s earthly sacrifice and a definite reserve regarding his heavenly priesthood.²³ The Lord’s Sup-

per is not the reproduction or representation of Christ's earthly sacrifice on the heavenly altar; rather, Luther says, in his treatise *Against the Heavenly Prophets*, that the benefits of the cross are "distributed" in the Lord's Supper.

We treat of the forgiveness of sins in two ways. First how it is achieved and won. Second, how it is distributed and given to us. Christ has achieved it on the cross, it is true. But he has not distributed or given it on the cross. He has not won it in the supper of sacrament. There he has distributed and given it through the Word, as also in the gospel, where it is preached. . . . I find in the sacrament or gospel the word which presents, offers, distributes and gives to me that forgiveness which was won on the cross.²⁴

Note here that it is not the sacrifice of Christ that is made present, but the fruits of that past sacrifice, which are the forgiveness of sins. Although Luther maintains the real presence, he continues on to say that the sacrament is effective for sinners "not because of the body and blood of Christ, but because of the word which in the sacrament offers, presents, and gives the body and blood of Christ, given and shed for me. Is that not clear enough?"²⁵ If only the word were present, and not the body and blood, the forgiveness of sins would still be present in the sacrament. As Luther explains in his *Treatise on the New Testament*, the body and blood are an "external" sign or token to help our faith as sensible creatures. The sign however is not essential to our salvation, for "Christ is more concerned about the word than about the sign."²⁶ Only in later controversy against the Zwinglians would the real presence assume an integral role in Luther's theology, precisely as a way of countering Zwingli's dependence on human attitudes and abilities in receiving the gift of Christ's presence.²⁷

The sacrifice of Christ for Luther is a past event, the fruits of which are made present today in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Luther's theory of substitutionary atonement is displayed here. The cross is the decisive moment in history when Christ in his mercy substitutes himself for us and receives the punishment due to us. Reconciliation with God is our unmerited reward for this sacrifice, a reward which is a result or fruit of the sacrifice, but external to the punishment involved in the sacrifice itself.

Luther's rejection of the Mass as sacrifice was clearly mirrored in his liturgical reforms. His two-part revision of the canon of the Mass—the *Formula missae et communionis* in 1523 and the *Deutsche Messe* in 1526—

effectively expunged all the sacrificial prayers of the old canon.²⁸ The *Te igitur* is removed on the grounds that our offering mocks the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice. The *Communicantes* is thrown out because it makes the dead saints into mediators. The *Quam oblationem* asks that God for the first time be gracious to his Son and make him acceptable, as if this had not already taken place; out it goes.²⁹ When Luther was through with the *Deutsche Messe*, all that remained of the canon was the institution narrative. As Louis Bouyer commented, in his zeal to eliminate sacrifice from the Mass, Luther thus ironically maintained and highlighted one of the most problematic aspects of high and late medieval worship—an almost exclusive focus on the words of institution as a singular moment when the body of Christ became present on the altar.³⁰

A bridge from the medieval to the modern

Martin Luther stands somewhere in the midst of what we broadly call the transition from the medieval to the modern.³¹ Of course, the terms *medieval* and *modern* are problematic, each covering many centuries and many different sensibilities in art, politics, economics, theology, and every field of human endeavor. For the purposes of this essay, however, I will use the terms *medieval* and *modern* to signal two different ways of imagining the social, and more specifically, modes of exchange between and among persons. In doing so, I do not wish to suggest that medieval and modern societies are in practice monolithic and homogeneous. Rather, I will assume that, insofar as the *medieval* and *modern* mean anything at all, they signal two relatively distinct *idealizations*—if only sporadically realized—of social relations.

The medieval social imagination is dominated by the image of the body, drawn from both classical and Christian sources.³² Most influential is Paul's image of the Body of Christ, a variegated body in which each member has a different function, but all members suffer and rejoice together (1 Cor. 12:12-26). In the medieval period, this organic imagination of society is fused with a hierarchical social ordering in which the three estates of clergy, lords, and peasants are arranged from superior to inferior, but are bound together by mutual obligation. The health of the whole body is ensured only by the fulfillment by each of his or her proper role, which is divinely ordained. Thus Marie de France in the twelfth century tells a fable of the body politic in which the hands, feet, and head rebel against the belly, who eats the hard-won fruits of their labor. They starve the belly, but the

hands, feet, and head soon weaken, too, from lack of sustenance. If the moral is not yet perfectly obvious, Marie draws it out for the reader:

From this example, one can see
What every free person ought to know:
No one can have honour
Who brings shame to his lord.
Nor can his lord have it either
If he wishes to shame his people.
If either one fails the other
Evil befalls them both.³³

Eucharistic sacrifice played an important role in constructing this social imagination, because it was in the Mass that all were incorporated into the Body of Christ. Communal celebration of feast days, Corpus Christi processions, the passing of the Pax all reinforced both the sense of belonging to one body and the hierarchical ordering of that body. Eucharistic rituals could serve either to construct exclusionary boundaries against different classes of people or to resolve social conflicts inherent in the hierarchical social ordering.³⁴ In the eucharistic sacrifice, nevertheless, the people were ritually incorporated into the slain Body of Christ, sacrificed for their redemption, and became “bloody bretheren, for God boughte us alle.”³⁵

What we have come to call the “modern” social imagination begins not from a divinely ordained, organic body but from a hypothetical “state of nature,” in which each member begins as an individual. Thus John Locke:

To understand political power aright, and derive it from its original, we must consider what estate all men are naturally in, and that is, a state of perfect freedom to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of Nature, without asking leave or depending upon the will of any other man.³⁶

With such a radical differentiation between what is mine and what is thine, exchange can only be understood as the mutually beneficial, spatial transfer of goods between individuals; property is commodified and made alienable. Gift can only be construed as an exception to exchange which does not draw individuals together, but rather assumes the negation of one for the benefit of another or others. A social “body” may be constructed—Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau all use the metaphor, most famously in Hobbes’s “Leviathan”—

but it is constructed on the basis of contract, into which each individual enters to protect person and property from all the others. The social contract creates a state that polices a certain territory and defends its sovereignty with violence. Accompanied by the rise of the market, public exchange now takes place on the basis of contract, not divinely preordained, mutual obligation. This does not necessarily mean that altruism—that is, self-sacrifice—is extinguished. On the contrary, now the basis for altruism is finally established, since on the private level each individual deals with each other individual freely, not on the basis of obligation. What is modern about this arrangement is the opening of an impassible breach between contract on the one hand and free gift on the other.

In some of its manifestations, Luther's eucharistic theology is deeply informed by the medieval imagination of an organic social body. Indeed the point of Luther's de-eschatologization of the Mass was to encourage the community to care more about the living than the dead, to build a body of mutual concern. Kyle Pasewark has argued that the position Luther develops against Zwingli and the radicals constitutes an organic, even ecstatic, union of the social body. Luther's insistence on the presence of Christ's natural body in the Eucharist—over against the radicals' doctrine that Christ's presence is a matter of interior "remembrance"—leads him to posit remembrance as an external social performance of love which completes the spiritual body of Christ. The two actions of the Eucharist are the physical eating of Christ's flesh and the consequent accomplishment of the spiritual body. Pasewark argues that for Luther (at least in his anti-Zwinglian writings) the connection between these two actions is so strong that the benefit to the individual communicant is vitiated unless the spiritual body is completed through the charitable incorporation of others into the body. The fruitfulness of the sacrament is therefore logically, if not temporally, dependent upon the incorporation of the neighbor into the spiritual body of Christ.³⁷

To make this argument, however, Pasewark must ignore Luther's writings on sacrifice. Furthermore, as Pasewark admits, Luther's organic sacramental body does not translate into his social theory: "in contrast to his sacramental theology, Luther's political theology of the 'station' or 'estate' (*Stand*) . . . is a veritable paradigm of static social thought. . . . Luther's deep immersion in organic-charitable language seems to have made more difficult a return to noncstatic and mundane forms of love and otherness."³⁸

Part of the difficulty here is that—as Bouyer's comment above indicates—Luther was beginning from a late medieval eucharistic practice

in which the dynamic social effects had been muted and the Body of Christ increasingly confined to the altar. It is clear that in the controversy over sacrifice Luther was reacting to a set of problems not of his own making. The transition in eucharistic theology and practice can trace its ancestry back well before the Reformation split the family tree. The focus on the consecration of the elements can be dated back to the eleventh century reaction against Berengar of Tours and his denial that real presence need be explained by material changes in the elements. In the twelfth century, as Henri de Lubac's classic study *Corpus Mysticum* shows, there is an inversion of the patristic and early medieval assignation of the *corpus verum* to the Church and the *corpus mysticum* to the consecrated elements. De Lubac describes a decline in the Eucharist as ecclesial practice of participation in the sacrifice of Christ, and as an increase in a thingly realism that locates Christ's presence not in the community but on the altar.³⁹ Ernst Kantorowicz's *The King's Two Bodies* shows how, as the Church became a merely mystical body, its essence hidden behind its increasing institutionalization, the temporal power began to emerge as a body in its own right, severed from its previous liturgically sanctioned role. The temporal power was no longer thought of as the ordering power of Christendom *temporarily* necessary as we await the second coming of Christ; rather, the temporal power began to be seen as a space outside the Church asserting its own independence and perpetuity. In other words, the confinement of the Body of Christ to the altar allows for the invention of "modern" politics based on the privatization of the organic-charitable body and the public assertion of the sovereign territorial state.⁴⁰

What I have called the confinement of the Body of Christ to the altar, then, predates Luther, and Luther's explicit intention was undoubtedly to undo such a state of affairs, to take the focus off the work of the altar and put it on the reception of God's work through active faith. Yet as John Bossy comments on the Reformers:

[A] sense of fatality, of results achieved which were the opposite of those intended, hangs over their efforts: as if the current of social and cultural evolution which was carrying them forward was at the same time pushing them aside into shallow waters. In the Lutheran case the ambition to restore a communal eucharist resulted in a practice of communion as individualist and asocial as that of the Counter-Reformation.⁴¹

As evidence, Bossy offers the sad career of the communal kiss of peace, which in the high Middle Ages still held an important function of social integration. By the late medieval period, the Pax ritual had devolved into the passing of a pax-board to be kissed in order from the most prominent members of the community to the lowliest, thus giving rise to quarreling and discord. Luther eliminated the congregational kiss of peace in his *Formula Missae*, and reinterpreted the *Pax Domini* as an announcement of forgiveness by God to the individual sinner, in accordance with his abhorrence of the transferrability of the merits of the Mass. In the *Deutsche Messe*, the Pax was eliminated altogether.⁴²

Luther's reaction against late medieval practices often shares in some of the problems associated with those practices. Luther's emphasis on the once-and-for-all self-sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice is meant to counter what the Reformers saw as an attempted repetition of Christ's sacrifice in every mass. Though it has been thoroughly documented that no recognized Catholic theologian of the pre-Reformation period actually taught that Christ was sacrificed anew at the Mass,⁴³ an inadequately articulated doctrine of the repeated *application* of the one sacrifice of Christ in the saying of masses—a doctrine in which the ancient concept of *anamnesis* had become thoroughly attenuated—led to a concentration on the fruits of the Mass, and an endless series of popular enumerations of such fruits for faithful individuals.⁴⁴ Those who attended Mass regularly were assured they would not die a sudden death; if they died, thirty masses could get their souls out of purgatory.⁴⁵ Unfortunately, Luther's doctrine shares with these practices an emphasis on the fruits of the Mass for the individual. Precisely because he wishes to avoid the appearance of the repetition of Christ's once-and-for-all sacrifice on Calvary, Luther speaks of the Lord's Supper as that ritual in which the living Word distributes the fruits won in that long ago sacrifice. Furthermore, in wishing to guard against the trafficking in merit, Luther feels compelled to argue that the benefits accrue only to the individual believer, for no one can "hear" Mass for the benefit of another. Luther wished to overcome the egotism which saw the Mass as a system of rewards which, through skillful use, could earn individuals and their family and friends valuable prizes, none more valuable than their redemption. For Luther, one of the fruits of the Lord's Supper is therefore the disinterested self-sacrifice of the individual for others. The sacrifice of Christ itself, however, is carefully guarded against participation by the human individual, precisely to protect the gratuity of Christ's gift to us, which we in turn give to others.

It is precisely here, in his analysis of sacrifice as gift, that Luther's view of sacrifice most closely anticipates the modern social imagination. For modernity, as mentioned above, is marked by a sharp distinction between gift and exchange. For modern ethics, the gift can only be defined as that which somehow escapes the overriding economy of exchange defining the West since the rise of the market. Self-sacrifice is the only way of stepping outside the logic of exchange, for it is defined as the pure gift of the self without any reciprocal reception on the part of the giver.

Altruism is often assumed to be the heart of the Christian conception of *agape*, the ultimate expression of which is the willingness to lay down one's life not merely for one's friends but for any and all with impartiality. In fact the impartial gift is assumed to be the purer gift, because it is free of any taint of exchange. It is thus assumed that one can always overcome the vicissitudes of time and of "moral luck" through self-sacrifice—and can do so as an individual—because one's life is the one thing of which one cannot be dispossessed. Martyrdom is an act of pure self-giving, and therefore assumes pure self-possession.⁴⁶

Martyrdom takes on such prominence in this account of morality because death is the only way to secure self-giving against the threat of exchange. This is the case not only in some Christian ethics, but for thinkers such as Jacques Derrida. For a gift to take place, according to Derrida, "some 'one' has to give some 'thing' to someone other."⁴⁷ To have a return would mean that we are not dealing with a gift, but an exchange, a *quid pro quo*. The difficulty, according to Derrida, is that the mere recognition of the gift as gift annuls it as gift. If the giver has recognized it as such, she has already paid herself back with satisfaction; if the recipient recognizes it as such, he has already given a return of gratitude, or a conviction that he will reciprocate in the future. Paradoxically, the only condition of possibility for the gift is an absolute "forgetting" of the gift, that the gift go unrecognized, leave no trace behind and therefore cease to be.⁴⁸ According to this account, the gift cannot be consummated in time; only in death is one securely beyond the possibility of return and beyond the vicissitudes of moral luck. Death through self-sacrifice is therefore the supreme gift, for it is self-annulling and unreturnable.⁴⁹

Much of modern moral theory oscillates between utilitarian self-interest and Kantian self-sacrifice. Kant's concept of duty assumes—*pace* Aristotle and Aquinas—that the moral rightness of an act is most secure when it goes directly contrary to the inclinations of the agent, that is, when the act regards only the other and not the self. The choice we have is appar-

ently between altruism and egotism, but neither escapes the logic of self-possession, for pure altruism is parasitical on the misfortunes of others to demonstrate its heroism. Indeed, the attempt to give without receiving in return contradicts its own other-regarding ethic by obliterating the other in the other's particularity. By closing off the possibility of receiving from the other, the other cannot be known as other, but only as an occasion for the exercise of duty by the self.

Self-sacrifice in its modern mode preserves self-possession and precludes mutual participation because there must be an unreturned transfer from one discrete self to another. Self-sacrifice reinforces the boundaries between what is mine and what is thine—even if I give all—because it remains crucial that the absolute distinction between giver and recipient be maintained in order to identify self-sacrifice as such. *Agape* thereby appears to exclude *eros*, the desire of the giver to *be with* the recipient. Distance must be preserved. Furthermore, a breach is opened between charity and justice—justice in the classical definition of “giving one his due”—because questions of debt must be excluded from the gift to protect its purity.⁵⁰

Luther's concern that the sacrament of the Lord's Supper be understood only in terms of passive human receptivity reflects some of this modern anxiety to quarantine the gift from the logic of exchange. For Luther the same gift cannot be both given and received at the same time by the same subject. To imply a human return given to God in the form of sacrifice would annul the gift by proffering a human work in exchange for it. Luther does allow for a return to God outside the Mass itself, but he must protect the fundamental asymmetry produced by God's justification of miserable sinners. Faith, as well as our offering of praise and thanksgiving to God, is therefore not something given back to God, but a sheer effect of God's gift of self in the individual believer. We can only speak of sacrifice outside of the sacrament itself, and the only way in which we can speak of sacrifice is in the self-sacrifice which believers must offer to each other and to other people. The sacrifice of self which originates from God at Calvary cannot be returned, but must rather be passed on.

And yet apparently the benefits of the same sacrifice of Calvary cannot be passed on, for Luther is quite clear that the sacrifice cannot be communicated from one individual to another; individual believers can only receive the benefits of the sacrifice for themselves, in proportion to their faith. Luther intends to break our self-sacrifice out of the context of self-interest and put it at the service of the community; indeed, he says

although such a sacrifice occurs apart from the mass, and should so occur—for it does not necessarily and essentially belong to the mass, as has been said—yet it is more precious, more appropriate, more mighty, and also more acceptable when it takes place with the multitude and in the assembly, where men encourage, move, and inflame one another to press close to God and thereby attain without any doubt what they desire.⁵¹

Nevertheless, it seems that we can only encourage each other to approach God, each on his own; the action of the Church as a whole is muted. We are each and all priests, Luther continues, those who have faith that Christ's one sacrifice has forgiven our sins. "Faith alone is the true priestly office. It permits no one else to take its place."⁵² If the priesthood of all believers is recognized, we may offer Christ to one another, and the mediation of the sacrifice by a priestly class is rendered unnecessary; the faith of each one makes the offering through Christ alone. But if this is the case, there is an ambiguity in our offering. By implication, what is offered to the other is not Christ, strictly speaking, but one's self, transformed by faith in Christ. The modern logic of self-possession haunts Luther's account here. Without a stronger rendition of human participation in the sacrifice of Christ, self-sacrifice is in danger of becoming mere altruism. If an other cannot share in the "merits" of my reception of Christ's sacrifice in the Lord's Supper, then the other is only the object of my philanthropy. The danger is that the other may become only an occasion of my self-gift. My self-offering to another is merely the fruits of my justification; whether or not that other is justified is between God and the other.

It is certainly not Luther's intention to arrive at this point. His ideas on sacrifice, however, were formed in the heat of controversy in reaction against what he saw as the exchange character of late medieval piety, which led him into the dualism of exchange and gift. His use of the *ephapax* helped paint him into this corner, for it is the death of Christ, the finality of the once-and-for-all sacrifice on Calvary, that guarantees for Luther that the gift cannot be returned. Unlike for Derrida, death is not a ceasing to be, for Luther believes that Christ is resurrected and very much alive, continuing to bestow the benefits of his sacrifice on those who have faith. But although the fruits of Christ's sacrifice are always fresh and constantly distributed in the Lord's Supper, it is the *pastness* of the sacrifice that delivers it from the taint of exchange.

The temporal sequence of God's gift followed by our reception is

not sufficiently nuanced in Luther's account. For while it is true that there is a logical absolute priority of God's grace to human reception, it is nevertheless the case that God's gift of grace simultaneously creates the conditions of its own reception. As John Milbank points out, in Luke's account the arrival of the Messiah is dependent upon human receptivity in the form of Mary's *fiat*. And yet this receptivity does not stand outside of God's gift of Jesus Christ. If the Church, of which Mary is the prototype, is the Body of Christ, then the human and ecclesial reception of God's gift begins as soon as Christ arrives.⁵³ The gift of Christ's sacrifice on our behalf is therefore "infected" with the logic of exchange, or, better said, the gift/exchange dichotomy is transcended in the participation of humans in the intratrinitarian exchange between the Father and the Son through the earthly sacrifice of the Son.

A more adequate account of sacrifice

Luther's rendition of sacrifice is ill-served by an undeveloped eucharistic eschatology shared with his Roman Catholic opponents. The nuances of the patristic understanding of *anamnesis* had long faded into a two-dimensional account of the Eucharist as the re-presentation of the past historical process by which redemption had been achieved, in order to gain access to the graces secured in that event.⁵⁴ In patristic writings on the Eucharist we find, by contrast, a conception of full human participation in the sacrifice of Christ because the historical imagination is superseded by the eschatological imagination. Rather than past and present being linked "horizontally" across historical time, past, present and future are linked "vertically" by participation in the eternal "liturgy" of the Trinity. There is no separation between Calvary and the eternal offering of the Son to the Father; neither is our Eucharist separable from Christ's eternal action on the heavenly altar.

The sense of participation in Christ's sacrifice is strong in Irenaeus, who makes no clear distinctions between our offering and Christ's offering in the Eucharist. What we offer is the "beginning of the new creation's harvest—the humanity of Christ, in which the deification of human nature is perfected and offered to us."⁵⁵ *Pace* Luther, the same thing *can* be both received and offered at the same time by the same subject. There is no causality or work to our offering, nor is our offering simply a response to God's offering. Our offering simply *is* being drawn into the divine life—deification. Our giving glory to God in sacrifice adds nothing to God, as Ire-

naeus says, but is a gratuitous sharing in the overflow of glory that the Father and the Son constantly give to each other.⁵⁶

For Augustine, too, there is no question of the eucharistic sacrifice as an external response to God's sacrifice. Sacrifice is that by which we are united to God.⁵⁷ Therefore there is no tension between sacrifice and mercy, as there is in Luther. Sacrifice is not a penalty which God in his mercy pays on our behalf, to which we respond with a self-offering of praise and thanksgiving. Rather, as Augustine says, "mercy is the true sacrifice" (X, 5; 309). According to Augustine, sacrifice is commended to the person who loves himself, for if he loves himself he will wish to draw near to God (X, 3; 307); sacrifice is then obviously not a matter of pure altruism. Furthermore, in Augustine there is no tension between "sign" and "work," as there is in Luther. In Book X of the *City of God*, Augustine refers to eucharistic sacrifice as both "sacred sign of an invisible sacrifice" (X, 5; 308) and a "work done that we may be united to God" (X, 6; 309). Eucharistic sacrifice is neither a mere "token" of another sacrifice, nor a work attributable to human effort that elicits a reward from God. As Augustine explains in his treatise *On Christian Doctrine*, signs do not only point to something else but are also always things in themselves which have a use in themselves.⁵⁸ The sacrament is an effective sign in which what is signified is made present. Our "work" is not an external cause of union with God, but is simply internal to the sign itself. In the sacrifice of the God-man, the zero-sum distance between divine agency and human agency is collapsed into the Body of Christ. In his treatise *On the Trinity*, Augustine writes:

Since there are four things to be considered in any sacrifice: to whom it is offered, by whom it is offered, what it is that is offered, and for whom it is offered, so the One True Mediator, who reconciles us to God by the sacrifice of peace, remained one with him to whom he offered; made one in himself those for whom he offered; and was himself both the offerer and the thing which was offered.⁵⁹

Gift, giver, and recipient are all one in the Body of Christ. In the Eucharist, human persons receive the Body of Christ from Christ and are thereby incorporated into the very same Body and become its members (1 Cor. 12). Luther is quite right to say that humans cannot make a return to God, but this is only because there is nothing "outside" of God such that a transfer is made between another thing and God. Because God creates

everything *ex nihilo*, God does not give “to” anyone; rather, God’s very being is sheer gratuity, which establishes creatures as themselves gifts. A return is inevitably made, since the very being of creatures is constituted in a return of praise to God. As Milbank puts it, “The Creature only is, as manifesting the divine glory, as acknowledging its own nullity and reflected brilliance. To be, it entirely honours God, which means it returns to him an unlimited, never paid-back debt.”⁶⁰ The antinomy of gift and exchange is overcome in the Body of Christ, for no thing is transferred from one to another. In the intratrinitarian relations, the exchange of love is simply the return of God to Godself, the infinite return of the Son to the Father through the Holy Spirit. Human creatures’ return to God is only our participation in the perfect return of the God-man to God. The sacrifice of Christ is not limited to his death on Calvary; the Incarnation itself is sacrifice, for it unites us to God. The sacrifice turns bloody at Calvary only because of the opposition of sin, not because sacrifice is necessarily violent.

Luther’s account of the individual appropriation of the benefits of Christ’s sacrifice does not adequately articulate the patristic sense that the eucharistic sacrifice is that of the *whole* church, which is Christ’s Body. Augustine explains it in the following complex passage:

Since, therefore, true sacrifices are works of mercy to ourselves or others, done with a reference to God, and since works of mercy have no other object than the relief of distress or the conferring of happiness, and since there is no happiness apart from that good of which it is said, “It is good for me to be very near to God,” it follows that the whole redeemed city, that is to say, the congregation or community of the saints, is offered to God as our sacrifice through the great High Priest, who offered Himself to God in His passion for us, that we might be members of this glorious head, according to the form of a servant. For it was this form He offered, in this He was offered, because it is according to it He is Mediator, in this He is our Priest, in this the Sacrifice. (X, 6; 310)

Works of mercy are not altruistic self-sacrifices of some on behalf of others; sacrifice is simply a *becoming whole*, with God and with one another. Sacrifice is an action of the whole Body, which is simultaneously Christ, the community, and the bread and the wine that we offer. Augustine concludes, “This is the sacrifice of Christians: we, being many, are one body in Christ.

And this also is the sacrifice which the Church continually celebrates in the sacrament of the altar, known to the faithful, in which she teaches that she herself is offered in the offering she makes to God" (X, 6; 310).

For Augustine, this unity of the Church applies to a fundamental unity between the Church on earth and the Church beyond. Says Augustine, "There is no doubt that the dead are helped by the prayers of the Holy Church, by the saving Sacrifice"; this applies to all who "have died in the communion of the Body and Blood of Christ."⁶¹ The Church on earth is also helped by the Church in heaven, for together they form one sacrifice, one City of God, "the human part sojourning here below, the angelic aiding from above" (X, 7; 310–11). Patristic literature is filled with the image of the Eucharist as a feasting with our fellow-citizens of the heavenly kingdom.⁶² The earthly sacrifice is just a manifestation in time of the sacrifice offered in heaven by the eternal High Priest; it is where the future kingdom breaks into present time. Eucharistic sacrifice already is an anticipation of the final consummation of history in which all is reconciled with God. For Augustine, the politics of the City of God is therefore marked out from Roman politics by a sense of pilgrimage of the heavenly city through the fallen world, and an anticipation of the unity of all in the eternal sacrifice (XIX, 21–23; 699–706).

It may be possible after all, then, to embrace a conception of sacrifice which does not fall prey to the modern imagination of social exchange and its politics of oscillation between public self-interest and private philanthropy. At the same time, there is much in patristic ideas of sacrifice that transcends the static hierarchical organicism of medieval Europe. Constructing a social body of dynamic exchange between inside and outside, self and other, may not be contrary to the spirit of sacrifice; indeed, it may be the essence of true sacrifice.

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Notes

- 1 My book *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) is an exploration of the Catholic Church's use of eucharistic resources to resist the Pinochet regime in Chile. The forthcoming *Eucharistie et Mondialisation* (Geneva: Editions Ad Solem, 2001) is a reworking of some of my essays on the Eucharist as a reimagining of political space.
- 2 See J. F. McHugh, "The Sacrifice of the Mass at the Council of Trent," in S. W. Sykes,

- ed., *Sacrifice and Redemption: Durham Essays in Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 157–58.
- 3 Though he doesn't mention the debate over eucharistic sacrifice explicitly, Jeffrey Stout subsumes all doctrinal disputes under the category of matters incapable of rational agreement that led to the religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Therefore, "[o]ur early modern ancestors were right to secularize public discourse in the interest of minimizing the ill effects of religious disagreement." The rise of reason has "left theology unable to step meaningfully again into the public arena." Stout, *The Flight from Authority: Religion, Morality, and the Quest for Autonomy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 241.
 - 4 Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 62.
 - 5 Martin Luther, *Werke*, Weimar ed., vol. 15, 774; quoted in Francis Clark, S.J., *Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Reformation* (Westminster, Md.: The Newman Press, 1960), 101.
 - 6 Martin Luther, *The Abomination of the Secret Mass*, trans. Abdel Ross Wentz in *Luther's Works*, vol. 36, ed. Abdel Ross Wentz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 314.
 - 7 Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, trans. A. T. W. Steinhäuser, in *Three Treatises* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 152–53.
 - 8 Martin Luther, *Werke*, Weimar edition, vol. Xb, 220; quoted in Clark, *Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Reformation*, 101.
 - 9 Martin Luther, *The Schmalkald Articles*, trans. William R. Russell, in William R. Russell, *Luther's Theological Testament: The Schmalkald Articles* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 121–22.
 - 10 Martin Luther, *A Treatise on the New Testament, that is, the Holy Mass*, trans. Jeremiah J. Schindel, in *Luther's Works*, vol. 35, ed. E. Theodore Bachmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960); also Luther, *Babylonian Captivity*, 155–60.
 - 11 Luther, *Babylonian Captivity*, 172.
 - 12 Luther, *Treatise on the New Testament*, 93.
 - 13 *Ibid.*, 98.
 - 14 *Ibid.*, 100.
 - 15 *Ibid.*, 99–100.
 - 16 *Ibid.*, 94. See also an extremely similar passage in Luther, *Babylonian Captivity*, 167–68.
 - 17 Luther, *Treatise on the New Testament*, 102–3.
 - 18 Luther, *Babylonian Captivity*, 170.
 - 19 Luther, *Schmalkald Articles*, 124.
 - 20 Paul Althaus, *Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schulz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 298.
 - 21 Luther, *Werke*, Weimar ed., vol. 10, 407 ff.; quoted in Althaus, *Theology of Martin Luther*, 298 n. 18.
 - 22 Althaus, *Theology of Martin Luther*, 297–303.
 - 23 See Christopher Hancock, "Christ's Priesthood and 'Eucharistic Sacrifice'—An 'Historical' Axe to a 'Metaphorical' Root?" in Colin Buchanan, ed., *Essays on*

- Eucharistic Sacrifice in the Early Church* (Bramcote, Nottinghamshire: Grove Books, 1984), 17–18.
- 24 Martin Luther, *Against the Heavenly Prophets*, trans. Conrad Bergendoff, in *Luther's Works*, vol. 40, ed. Conrad Bergendoff (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958), 213–14.
 - 25 *Ibid.*, 214.
 - 26 Luther, *Treatise on the New Testament*, 104.
 - 27 Althaus, *Theology of Martin Luther*, 382–403.
 - 28 In his 1522 treatise *Receiving Both Kinds*, Luther admonishes “priests who celebrate mass to avoid every word in the canon and the collects which refer to sacrifice”; *Luther's Works*, vol. 51, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 261.
 - 29 In his *Abomination of the Secret Mass* (1525), Luther works his way step by step through the canon of the Mass, showing how nearly every component contributes to the blasphemous view of the Mass as sacrifice (*Luther's Works*, ed. Wentz, 314–27).
 - 30 Louis Bouyer, *Eucharist: Theology and Spirituality of the Eucharistic Prayer*, trans. Charles Underhill Quinn (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 384–88; see also Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 329.
 - 31 Heiko Oberman and Steven Ozment tend to champion the view of Luther as “medieval.” Werner Elert and Karl Holl present a more “modern” Luther. For the debate, see Oberman, *The Reformation: Roots and Ramifications* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), esp. chap. 1, “The Quest for the Historical Luther,” and chap. 3, “Martin Luther: Between the Middle Ages and Modern Times.”
 - 32 See Otto Gierke, *Associations and Law: The Classical and Early Christian Stages*, trans. George Heiman (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977).
 - 33 Marie de France, “The Fable of a Man, His Belly, and His Limbs,” in *Medieval Political Theory—A Reader: The Quest for the Body Politic, 1100–1400*, ed. Cary J. Nederman and Kate Langdon Forhan (London: Routledge, 1993), 25.
 - 34 For examples of the former tendency, see Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture, and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (London: Routledge, 1993); and Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). For examples of the latter, see Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400–1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).
 - 35 *Piers Plowman*, quoted in Frederick Bauerschmidt, *Julian of Norwich and the Mystical Body Politic of Christ* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 17.
 - 36 John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, Book II §4 (New York: Dutton, 1924), 118.
 - 37 Kyle Pasewark, “The Body in Ecstasy: Love, Difference, and the Social Organism in Luther's Theory of the Lord's Supper,” *Journal of Religion* 77 (1997): 511–40. Pasewark's argument is based on Luther's anti-Zwinglian writings and does not take into account Luther's polemics against sacrifice.
 - 38 *Ibid.*, 538.
 - 39 Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: L'Eucharistie et L'Église au moyen âge*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Aubier, 1949).
 - 40 Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

- 41 John Bossy, "The Mass as a Social Institution, 1200–1700," *Past and Present* 100 (Aug. 1983): 60.
- 42 *Ibid.*, 54–57.
- 43 Francis Clark's 1960 book *Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Reformation* exhaustively documents the orthodoxy of pre-Reformation Catholic thought on this issue. According to Clark, the Reformers were not simply rejecting abuses of sound doctrine, but were rejecting sound eucharistic doctrine itself, based on their own faulty theological presuppositions, especially the doctrine of justification. However, given the practical abuses of eucharistic piety in this period, which Clark admits, we might at the very least say that "official" theology was not clear enough to prevent the widespread abuses.
- 44 Bouyer, *Eucharist*, 381–82.
- 45 Clark, *Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Reformation*, 56–64.
- 46 See John Milbank, "The Midwinter Sacrifice: A Sequel to 'Can Morality Be Christian,'" in *Studies in Christian Ethics* 10.2 (1997): 13–16.
- 47 Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 11.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 13–20.
- 49 Jacques Derrida, "Donner la Mort," in Jean-Michel Rabaté and Michel Wetzel, *L'éthique du don: Jacques Derrida et la Pensée du Don* (Paris: Métailié-Transition, 1992), 48–49.
- 50 See John Milbank, "Can a Gift Be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic," *Modern Theology* 11 (Jan. 1995): 132. Perhaps one manifestation of the exclusion of *eros* and justice from *agape* is manifested in the reduction of charity to putting a check in the mail to some distant, unseen worthy cause.
- 51 Luther, *Treatise on the New Testament*, 98.
- 52 *Ibid.*, 101.
- 53 Milbank, "Can a Gift Be Given?" 136.
- 54 Bouyer, *Eucharist*, 382–83; Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: Dacre Press, 1945), 305.
- 55 Rowan Williams, *Eucharistic Sacrifice—The Roots of a Metaphor* (Bramcote, Nottinghamshire: Grove Books, 1982), 10.
- 56 *Ibid.*, 9–10.
- 57 St. Augustine, *City of God* X, 6, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Modern Library, 1950), 309. Subsequent citations from *The City of God* are given in the text, including book and chapter numbers and page number from the translation.
- 58 St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, I, 2, trans. D. W. Robertson Jr. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958), 8–9. Thanks to Kelly Johnson for pointing me to this text.
- 59 St. Augustine, *On the Trinity*, IV, 14, 19; trans. Stephen McKenna (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1963), 155–56.
- 60 Milbank, "Can a Gift Be Given?" 135.
- 61 St. Augustine, quoted in Sykes, ed., *Sacrifice and Redemption*, 111.
- 62 Geoffrey Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

