

## **Jesus Christ: Priest and Victim**

by Msgr. Arthur B. Calkins

### **I. The Mystery of Mediation**

An attentive study of God's revelation to us in both the old dispensation and the new discloses that God chooses to deal with his people through certain men whom he designates to represent him to them and to represent them before him. We might describe this as the "mystery of mediation". After the sin of our first parents, which was subsequently to be multiplied billions of times over by the personal sins of all their descendants, the Old Testament shows us numerous instances in which a representative is designated by God himself to intercede on behalf of his people in order that God's wrath, stirred up on account of their sins, might be turned away from them and that his people may receive instead his blessings. Among the many instances, "the prayer of Moses becomes the most striking example of intercessory prayer, which will be fulfilled in 'the one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus'."<sup>1</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* adroitly sketches the role of Moses as mediator:

From this intimacy with the faithful God, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, Moses drew strength and determination for his intercession. He does not pray for himself but for the people whom God made his own. Moses already intercedes for them during the battle with the Amalekites and prays to obtain healing for Miriam. But it is chiefly after their apostasy that Moses 'stands in the breach' before God in order to save the people.<sup>2</sup>

The priests, prophets and kings of the Old Testament, each according to his particular office, all shared in this role of mediation. In varied circumstances and with an ever clearer manifestation of God's plan these chosen mediators reveal to us both (1) the divine dispensation of mediation which God established in order to show mercy to his people and (2) at the same time the provisional role of this mediation.

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<sup>1</sup>CCC #2574.

<sup>2</sup>CCC #2577.

## A. Priestly Mediation

We have already alluded to the fact that most probably the greatest of all the mediatorial figures of the Old Testament was Moses, the lawgiver, who in a certain sense combines in himself the categories of prophet, priest and king. Functioning in a priestly perspective, he offered sacrifice (cf. Ex. 24) and was empowered by God to "ordain" his brother Aaron high priest (cf. Ex. 29). In the course of time it eventually became established that it was exclusively the priest who offered sacrifice to God on behalf of the people and through whom the bounty of God was dispensed to them.<sup>3</sup> Here is how the eminent Dominican theologian, Father Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, sketched the divine institution of priestly mediation:

To accomplish the exterior and social worship due to God, the priestly mediation must both ascend to Him and descend from Him. Man, being composed of soul and body, owes God both interior and exterior worship, and living by nature in society, owes Him, too, social worship, God being no less the author and benefactor of human society than of our soul and body. We need the priest to bind into a single whole the prayers of all the people, to unify their acts of adoration, of praise, and of reparation, and to make up for the imperfection of the acts of the faithful. His sanctity, that is, his special consecration to the Lord for this purpose, makes him capable of offering the prayers of the people to God as an expression of their whole soul.

The priest is no less necessary to bring to the people the things of God, divine light and grace, without human alteration or adulteration.<sup>4</sup>

## B. Sacrifice

While the duties of the priest in the Old Testament included a number of functions related to the sanctuary,<sup>5</sup> by far their most important function was to offer sacrifice. Because this was also true for the priests of many pagan religions, it would be possible to approach the

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<sup>3</sup>Cf. Albert Vanhoye, S.J., *Old Testament Priests and the New Priest according to the New Testament* trans. J. Bernard Orchard, O.S.B. (Petersham, MA: St. Bede's Publications, 1986) 24-25.

<sup>4</sup>Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *The Love of God and the Cross of Jesus*, Vol. 2, trans. Sr. Jeanne Marie, O.P. (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1951) 298.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Vanhoye 20-26.

question of sacrifice from the perspective of comparative religion and philosophy as well as from that of the Old and New Testaments and of Christian theology.<sup>6</sup> We follow here the descriptions developed by Monsignor Antonio Piolanti, abstracting from the biblical, philosophical and theological data.

Sacrifice, which constitutes the supreme act of external and public worship, may be defined as the offering and immolation to God of something sensible (fruits, liquids, animals) in order to recognize his absolute lordship and in order to atone for sin. Sacrifice, consequently, has two aspects: one material and sensible because it is an external and public act; the other internal and spiritual because in order to have an effective moral value it must be motivated by a spiritual and intimate content. The offering especially of something living such as fruits and, even more, animals and then the consequent immolation or destruction of these offerings is the counterbalance to the creative act of God. As God has given life to all things, man symbolically restores life back to him. Particularly in the immolation to God of a victim such as a lamb, a goat, a calf or a bull through the mediation of a priest, man expresses his total dependence and dedication to God. The ultimate end of the sacrifice is the mystical union of man with his God.<sup>7</sup>

Let us listen to Garrigou-Lagrange comment on the offering of sacrifice:

The twofold priestly mediation takes place especially in sacrifice, the offering of the sacrifice forming the ascending mediation, and the sharing of the victim offered with the faithful by communion forming the descending mediation. Just as the priesthood constitutes the pre-eminent sacred function, so sacrifice, as its name indicates, forms the pre-eminent sacred action. Without sacrifice, no priesthood; without the priesthood, no sacrifice; for sacrifice supposes an offering priest and an offered victim.<sup>8</sup>

### **C. The Shedding of Blood**

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<sup>6</sup>Cf. *NCE* 12:831-842.

<sup>7</sup>Antonio Piolanti, *Dio Uomo* (Pontificia Accademia Teologica Romana: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995) 575-577.

The pre-eminent way of atoning for sin in both ancient pagan religions and also in the Old Testament always involved the shedding of blood. Here is a fascinating analysis of the rationale for this from the late Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen:

Pagan people, without knowing it explicitly, sensed the truth that "unless blood is shed, there can be no remission of sins" (Heb. 9:22). From the earliest times, through the kings and priests, they offered animals, and sometimes even humans, to turn away the anger of the gods. As in the Levitical priesthood, however, *the victim was always separate from the priest*. The sacrifice was a vicarious one, the animal representing and taking the place of the guilty humans, who thus sought to expiate their guilt in the shedding of blood.

But why, it may be asked, did the pagans, without the help of revelation, reach the conclusion expressed by St. Paul under Divine inspiration that "without the shedding of blood there was no remission of sins"? The answer is that it is not hard for anyone who ponders on sin and guilt to recognize: first, that sin is in the blood; and second, that life is in the blood, so that the shedding of blood expresses appropriately the truth that human life is unworthy to stand before the face of God.<sup>9</sup>

While it was clear that God required an acceptable reparation in order to restore man to his friendship, it also became clear to the thoughtful man of the Old Testament that no mere man could ever definitively "breach the chasm" which sin had caused between God and his creatures. As the inspired author of the Letter to the Hebrews tells us:

Since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices which are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered? If the worshipers had once been cleansed, they would no longer have any consciousness of sin. But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin year after year. For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins (Heb. 10:1-4).

Sin, an offense against the infinite God, in effect required a reparation which man, left to his own devices, remained incapable of making. No mere human creature could really succeed in mediating between God and his people except in incomplete and partial ways which could, at

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<sup>8</sup>*The Love of God* 2:298.

<sup>9</sup>Fulton J. Sheen, *The Priest is Not His Own* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1963) 3-4.

best, foreshadow the full, complete and definitive mediation which was needed.

## **II. Jesus the Perfect Mediator**

At the very heart of the mystery of our redemption is the fact that Jesus Christ is the "one mediator between God and men ... who gave himself as a ransom for all" (I Tim. 2:5-6).

Why is Jesus the unique and perfect mediator? This affirmation from the new *Catechism* provides us with the fundamental elements needed to formulate a response:

No man, not even the holiest, was ever able to take on himself the sins of all men and offer himself as a sacrifice for all. The existence in Christ of the divine person of the Son, who at once surpasses and embraces all human persons, and constitutes himself as the Head of all mankind, makes possible his redemptive sacrifice *for all*.<sup>10</sup>

One with God in his divinity, Jesus is at the same time one with man in his humanity.<sup>11</sup> In his divine person he unites the two natures of the two parties who had become separated by man's sin: he represents God to man and man to God. As the Word who is one with the Father from all eternity, the Son is not a mediator, but he becomes one from the moment he begins to take flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

### **A. Jesus the Priest**

The position of being a mediator, according to St. Thomas, and indeed, according to the undivided Christian tradition, is in a pre-eminent way exercised by the priest.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the inspired author of the Letter to the Hebrews would come to grasp that, even though he was not sprung from the priestly tribe of Levi and never referred to himself explicitly as a priest,<sup>13</sup> Jesus was the perfect high priest who succeeded in bridging the

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<sup>10</sup>CCC #616.

<sup>11</sup>Cf. *D-S* #301; *TCF* #613.

<sup>12</sup>*ST* III, q. 22, a. 1.

<sup>13</sup>Cf. Vanhoye 47-52.

gap between God and his people in a way that no other priest ever could.

Meditating upon this fact, the Fathers of the Church came to an ever deeper appreciation of the fact that precisely by virtue of the Incarnation, Jesus became the perfect mediator, the perfect priest. He was not so from all eternity as the Word coequal to the Father and to the Holy Spirit, but only from the time when he took on our human nature.<sup>14</sup> We can speak, then, of the ontological nature of Jesus' priesthood, that is to say of his being a priest by virtue of his assumption of our human nature. This understanding, in fact, was solemnly defined by the Council of Ephesus in 431.<sup>15</sup> Thus Father Clément Dillenschneider says that

By his union with human nature, the Son of God is ontologically constituted the Sovereign Priest of humanity, and God the Father recognizes him as such in the mystery of the Incarnation. As Son of God made flesh, he is priest forever, according to the order of Melchisedec, although the consummation of his priesthood was attained only after the sacrifice on the cross (Heb. 5:9-10).<sup>16</sup>

One with the Father from all eternity, Jesus became one with us in an irrevocable way at the moment of Mary's *fiat*, hence by virtue of the hypostatic union. Garrigou-Lagrange puts it thus: He [Jesus] is a priest, therefore, because of the Incarnation itself, and His priesthood, like His sanctity, is substantial. God decreed the Incarnation and called Jesus to the priesthood and to His universal mediatorship by one and the same act.<sup>17</sup>

## **B. Jesus, Priest and Victim**

I believe that it was the special merit of Archbishop Sheen, in what he described in his autobiography as the third [and last] stage of his life, to have meditated at length on Jesus'

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<sup>14</sup>*ST III*, q. 26, a. 2.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. *D-S* #261; *TCF* #606/10.

<sup>16</sup>Clement Dillenschneider, C.Ss.R., *The Holy Spirit and the Priest* trans. Sister M. Renelle, S.S.N.D. (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1965) 12.

<sup>17</sup>*The Love of God* 2:310.

priest-victimhood and to have drawn out the implications for Catholic priests of today.<sup>18</sup> Hence it is to him that I turn for another crucial insight into the person of Jesus:

The sin-bearing character of Christ did not begin on the cross. He was not first a Priest and then, during the last three days, a Victim. His Victimhood was never at any one moment divorced from his Priesthood.<sup>19</sup>

Whichever way we look at Christ, we never find Divinity isolated from humanity or humanity from Divinity. Neither are priesthood and victimhood ever separated. Arianism would deny Divinity as the new Arianism would deny victimhood.<sup>20</sup>

Jesus could offer the perfect sacrifice to the Father precisely because he is one with the Father in his Godhead and one with us in our humanity and also because he is uniquely and simultaneously both priest and victim.

Here is the answer as to how Our Lord differs from all the other priests -- pagan and Jewish. *All other priests offered a victim distinct from themselves: e.g., a goat, a lamb, a bullock, but Christ offered Himself as a victim.* "He offered Himself without blemish to God, a spiritual and eternal sacrifice" (Heb. 9:14).

Everyone else who ever came into this world, came into it to live; He came into it to die. Hemlock juice interrupted the teaching of Socrates. But sacrificial death was the goal of His Life, the gold that He was seeking: "I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until the ordeal is over!" (Lk. 12:50).

He is both Offerer and Offered; both Priest and Victim. This deep secret of the Suffering Servant He did not develop in His public utterances, but reserved it for His disciples and future priests. To them alone did He unveil Isaiah 53, and only to them does He interpret His death as vicarious dying for sinners.<sup>21</sup>

With his marvelous rhetorical gifts Sheen presents this paradoxical truth that Jesus is simultaneously both priest and victim as if he were slowly revolving an exquisitely cut gem. From every angle we see a different facet which helps us to enter into the mystery from yet another perspective. Permit me to share a lengthy excerpt in which he sets forth his theme and

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<sup>18</sup>Fulton J. Sheen, *Treasure in Clay: The Autobiography of Fulton J. Sheen* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1980) 335-339.

<sup>19</sup>*TMP* 37.

<sup>20</sup>*TMP* 41.

<sup>21</sup>*TMP* 29.

develops it with rare skill.

As a *Priest* He was sinless: "Which of you can prove me in the wrong?" (Jn. 8:46). "The angel answered: the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the Holy Child to be born will be called Son of God" (Lk. 1:35). "I shall not talk much longer with you, for the prince of this world approaches. He has no rights over Me" (Jn. 14:30). "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know Who You are .. the Holy One of God" (Mk. 1:24).

As a *Victim* He was identified with sinners: "God made Him one with the sinfulness of men, so that in Him we might be made one with the Goodness of God Himself" (2 Cor. 5:21).

As a Priest, He was holy with the Holiness of God;

As a Victim, He was "made sin."

As a Priest He was "separated" from the world;

As a Victim He came into it to fight against the Devil, the Prince of the world.

On the Cross, He was upright as a Priest;

On the Cross, He was prostrate as a Victim.

As a Priest, He mediated with the Father,

As Victim, He mediated for the sins of men.

Before Pilate, He spoke seven times as the Priest-Shepherd;

Before Pilate, He was silent seven times as the Victim-Lamb.

As a Priest He has vertical relations with heaven;

As a Victim He has horizontal relations with earth.

As a Priest He had dignity;

As a Victim He suffered indignity.

As a Priest: God is alive;

As a Victim: God is dead.

As a Priest He prays to the Father that the Cup pass;

As a Victim He drinks it to its dregs.

St. Augustine, in his *Confessions*, interprets it well: *Ideo Victor Quia Victima*. As the ministry of Christ approached its climax, He more and more insisted that the victory over principalities and powers had to come through His sacrifice and death.

Christ *personally* was sinless, but He voluntarily bore imputed guilt. If He were only a priest, He would have stopped short of the Cross and the Resurrection. As our Representative, He was found guilty of blasphemy because we blasphemed; at the courts of Annas and Pilate, we sinners were on trial in the person of the Sinless Substitute. Though *personally* sinless, He was *officially* guilty. ...

The *very sinlessness of His priesthood was the necessary basis of His work of sin-bearing*. "Christ was innocent of sin, and yet for our sake God made Him one with the sinfulness of men, so that in Him we might be made one with the goodness of God Himself" (2 Cor. 5:21).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>TMP 29-31.

### III. Jesus' Heavenly Priesthood and Victimhood

Now there is another very important aspect of Jesus' priesthood and victimhood which we must consider: the heavenly dimension. In the Letter to the Hebrews, which is our most important source in the New Testament on the priesthood of Jesus, we are informed that

The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office: but he [Jesus] holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues for ever. Consequently he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them (Heb. 7:23-25).

Since his priesthood began when Christ took on our human nature and that human nature is now at the right hand of the Father in heaven, even so Jesus continues to exercise his priesthood there. This exercise is described in the Letter to the Hebrews in terms of the liturgy performed by the high priest on the annual Day of Atonement, the day which the Lord had appointed for expiating for the sins of Israel.<sup>23</sup>

In terms of this ritual the Epistle presents an image of Christ the King entering the heavenly sanctuary as a priest. Risen from the dead, he crosses the heavens, "a tent not made by human hands, not of this creation" (Heb. 9:11), that is, the place where God dwells, and he enters definitively the presence of God, the sanctuary (Heb. 9:12). The blood he bears which wins him admission is not the blood of goats or calves but his own blood which has won for us eternal redemption (*ibid.*). Christ has entered within the veil to the Holy of Holies into the presence of God (Heb. 6:20; 9:3; 10:20). It is in terms of this comparison with the liturgy of Expiations that Hebrews lays more stress on Christ's bearing his blood into the presence of God than on the actual shedding on Calvary. The slaughter outside the tent was secondary in the Jewish ritual; what constituted the sacrifice was the sprinkling of blood in the Holy of Holies. "This is why Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people by his own blood, suffered outside the gate" of Jerusalem (Heb. 13:12). Christians are come "to Jesus the mediator of the new Alliance and to the sprinkling of blood more eloquent than that of Abel" (Heb. 2:24). Evidently, the metaphor is maintained here; what is expressed by the sprinkling of blood is the presence of Christ, body and soul, before the Father, the submission of his humanity to Him and the intercession

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<sup>23</sup>The prescriptions for the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*) are given in Lev. 16 and 23:26-32 and in Num. 29:7-11. For a detailed consideration of Christ's sacrifice as fulfilling these prescriptions, cf. André Feuillet, *The Priesthood of Christ and His Ministers* trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1975) 49-79.

which he makes for us in virtue of his sacrifice.<sup>24</sup>

Admittedly, we are dealing with a mystery here. We are not saying that Jesus' death on Calvary was one sacrifice and that in heaven he offers another, that of his blood. We are rather speaking of two phases of the same exercise of his priesthood: the earthly phase and the heavenly one. As St. Paul emphatically states: "Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him" (Rom. 6:9). Yet, by the same token he continues as a priest to intercede for us at the right hand of the Father (cf. Heb. 7:25).<sup>25</sup> Here is the way our Holy Father put it in an Angelus address on 13 August 1989:

Jesus is the eternal victim. Risen from the dead and glorified at the right hand of the Father, he preserves in his immortal body the marks of the wounds of his nailed hands and feet, of his pierced heart (cf. Jn. 20:27; Lk. 24:39-40) and presents them to the Father in his incessant prayer of intercession on our behalf (cf. Heb. 7:25; Rom. 8:34).<sup>26</sup>

In effect, Jesus intercedes by presenting his sacrifice to the Father who never tires of looking upon the wounds of his Son which are now radiant and glorious and by which the fruits of the redemption continue to be applied to us, especially in the Mass and in the sacraments.

#### **A. Jesus' Priesthood and Victimhood in the Mass**

It is extremely important for us to strive to grasp this heavenly exercise of the priesthood of Christ in order to understand how we continue to benefit in the Mass and the sacraments from the one sacrifice of Jesus. In his ever fascinating manner Archbishop Sheen put it this way:

Using human words to describe Divine things, we can say that each time we offer Mass, Our Lord shows His Heavenly Father the scars in His hands, His feet

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<sup>24</sup>Colman E. O'Neill, O.P., *Meeting Christ in the Sacraments* revised edition by Romanus Cessario, O.P. (New York: Alba House, 1991) 6-7.

<sup>25</sup>Cf. Antonio Piolanti, "La Liturgia celeste e perennità del sacerdozio di Cristo," *Divinitas* XXXIX (1995) 278-281.

<sup>26</sup>*Inseg* XII/2 (1989) 499 [ORE 1107:1].

and His side; for this very reason He kept them. At the Consecration of the Mass, we can imagine Our Lord as saying: "In My Hand I have engraven their hearts. Not for their worthiness, but for My love unto death, grant them graces through the Holy Spirit. My wounds healed, but My scars I kept, that I might always hold them up before Thee, O Father, as pledges of My love. If Thou couldst not strike in justice the sinful people because the uplifted hands of Abraham stood in the way, then shall not My Hands win for them that mercy I won for them on Calvary? I am not just a *Sacerdos in æternum*; I am a *Victima in æternum*."<sup>27</sup>

What the Archbishop expressed in these evocative words is nothing other than a restatement of the Church's traditional teaching on the sacrifice of the Mass. This is exactly what the priest expresses when he prays in the third Eucharist Prayer: "Look with favor on your Church's offering [*oblationem*], and see the Victim whose death has reconciled us to yourself [*Hostiam, cuius voluisti immolatione placari*]."

The new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* presents this doctrine on Christ's state as victim by quoting from the Council of Trent:

The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are *one single sacrifice*: 'The victim is one and the same: the same now offers through the ministry of priests, who then offered himself on the cross; only the manner of offering is different.' 'In this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and is offered in an unbloody manner.'<sup>28</sup>

With particular reference to the separate consecration of the two species of bread and wine, Pius XII had underscored Jesus' state as victim in the Mass in this way in his great Encyclical *Mediator Dei*:

On the cross Christ offered to God the whole of Himself and His sufferings, and the victim was immolated by a bloody death voluntarily accepted. But on the altar, by reason of the glorious condition of His humanity "death no longer has dominion over Him" (Rom. 6:9), and therefore the shedding of His blood is not possible. Nevertheless, the divine wisdom has devised a way in which our Redeemer's sacrifice is marvellously shown forth by external signs symbolic of death. By the transubstantiation of bread into the body of Christ and of wine

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<sup>27</sup>*The Priest is Not His Own* 25-26.

<sup>28</sup>CCC #1367.

into His blood both His body and blood are rendered really present; but the eucharistic species under which He is present symbolise the violent separation of His body and blood, and so a commemorative showing forth of the death which took place in reality on Calvary is repeated in each Mass, because by distinct representations Christ Jesus is signified and shown forth in the state of victim.<sup>29</sup>

After the consecration the priest says: "Let us proclaim the mystery of faith." It is precisely this mystery of faith which we have been trying to elucidate and penetrate. In the strict sense it always remains a mystery, something that is beyond the capability of our finite minds to grasp. Even if we don't know the *how*, we are capable of knowing the *what*. Jesus, who accomplished his role of priest and victim on the cross, is still priest and victim in heavenly glory and on our altars through the ministry of his priests.

### **B. Jesus' Priesthood and Victimhood in His Priests**

There are surely more ramifications of this central mystery of faith. Here I should like to introduce one more and I will let Archbishop Sheen do it in his own inimitable way.

*I was a priest without being a victim.* The priest is one who offers to God; the victim is what is offered. In the Old Testament and in all pagan religions, what was offered was something distinct from the priest himself -- a lamb, an ox, a bullock. But when Our Blessed Lord came to this earth He changed all this. He, the Priest, was also the Victim. He did not offer something *apart* from Himself; He offered Himself. ...

Eventually I came to see that the Lord was teaching me not only to be a priest, but also to be a victim. This explains why two of the books which I authored are on this very subject.

I can remember when, after four months in the hospital, I began to recover; I was reading Mass on an altar constructed over the bed before a few priests and friends. I spontaneously gave a sermon, which I remember so well. I said that I was glad that I had open-heart surgery because when the Lord comes to take us all, He will look to see if we have any marks of the Cross upon ourselves. He will look at our hands to see if they are crucified from sacrificial giving; He will look at our feet to see if they have been thorn-bruised and nail-pierced searching for lost sheep; He will look at our heart to see if that has been opened to receive His Divine Heart. Oh what joy is mine just to have endured the minuscule imitation of His suffering on the Cross by having a wounded side. Maybe He

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<sup>29</sup>D-S #3834; TCF #1566; cf. also O'Neill 196-206.

will recognize me from that scar and receive me into His Kingdom.<sup>30</sup>

Quite evidently Archbishop Sheen considered the beginning of "the third stage" of his life as the point at which he accepted being both priest and victim.<sup>31</sup> He doesn't tell us exactly when this occurred, but indicates in the introduction to *The Priest is Not His Own*, which appeared in 1963, that these thoughts began taking shape while he was writing his *Life of Christ*.<sup>32</sup> His second book, *Those Mysterious Priests*, was published in 1974. I have been quoting extensively from these books in this presentation because I believe that they are prophetic works which have a great deal to say about the nature Catholic priesthood. Sheen analyzes as few others, I believe, the malaise which afflicts the priesthood today. He saw the crisis coming over thirty years ago and so devoted the last years of his life to preaching retreats for priests and promoting among them a daily holy hour before the Blessed Sacrament. I will leave to him once again the specific application. He states the premise succinctly:

In the New Testament there is no priesthood without victimhood. In Christ the two were inseparable; therefore, they are united in every priest called to be an Ambassador of Christ.<sup>33</sup>

Fulton Sheen was surely not the first to recognize the necessary connection between being a priest of Jesus Christ and a victim with him, but he did underscore this nexus in a particularly striking way with reference to the era in which we live. There are any number of luminous figures in the history of spirituality who exemplify this teaching. One thinks, for instance, of Sylvain-Marie Giraud, the second Superior General of the Missionaries of Our Lady of La Salette, whose masterpiece is considered to be his last work, *Jesus Christ Priest and*

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<sup>30</sup>*Treasure in Clay* 335, 339.

<sup>31</sup>Cf. *Treasure in Clay* 332-340.

<sup>32</sup>*The Priest is Not His Own* 1-2.

<sup>33</sup>*TMP* 96.

*Victim*.<sup>34</sup> Again one thinks of Saint Maximilian-Maria Kolbe, who offered one of his Masses his first Christmas as a priest for the intention "*pro amore usque ad victimam* [for love to the point of becoming a victim]"<sup>35</sup> and who received the grace requested by giving his life on behalf of another innocent victim.

Further, one might ponder with great profit one of the most important conclusions which the great Sulpician Scripture scholar André Feuillet draws in his classic book, *The Priesthood of Christ and His Ministers*, which is a sustained meditation on the high priestly prayer of Jesus in chapter 17 of the Gospel of John. This magnificent prayer, Feuillet states,

offers the great advantage, lacking in the letter to the Hebrews, of linking to the consecration of Christ as priest and victim the idea of a participation of the apostles in this consecration. ...

In the priestly prayer of Jesus, the latter makes it clear that he intends to govern, sanctify, and unify his Church through the apostles: to this end he gives them a share in his twofold consecration as priest and victim.<sup>36</sup>

Granting that Fulton Sheen had personally rediscovered what many before him had also come to understand of the mind of Christ Jesus for his anointed ones, let us allow Sheen to draw out some important ramifications of his discovery which seem particularly pertinent to our postconciliar era:

In continuing the Mediatorial office of Christ, the priest-victim, is to be holy and unholy; holy, because in intimacy with the Father; unholy, because He will never deny His responsibility for the wickedness of men. *The basic reason for the confusion in the ministry of Christ in the last few decades has been: the identification of the priesthood with liturgy and ceremony instead of with holiness: and the identification of victimhood with social action rather than with human guilt.* The priest was linked with the altar; the victim with poverty exclusively, rather than with human frailty and ignorance and suffering. Once

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<sup>34</sup>Cf. Jean Jaouen, M.S., *Sylvain-Marie Giraud (1830-1885)* (Rome, 1985).

<sup>35</sup>Cf. Jerzy Domanski, O.F.M. Conv., *For the Life of the World: Saint Maximilian and the Eucharist* trans. Peter D. Felhner, F.F.I. (Libertyville, IL: Academy of the Immaculate, 1993) 66.

<sup>36</sup>André Feuillet, *The Priesthood of Christ and His Ministers* trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1975) 202, 221.

the priesthood no longer meant a vertical relation to the Holiness of God, and the victimhood no longer a horizontal relation to all men who have come short of the glory of God, then the priest was chained in the sanctuary and the victim to the inner city.<sup>37</sup>

His final conclusion is this:

The divorce of husband and wife endangers the children; the divorce of priest and victim harms the Church. But once the priest is holy because the Lord is holy, once the priest is victim because the sinless Christ died for sinners, then the wounds of the Church become glorious scars.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>*TMP* 97.

<sup>38</sup>*TMP* 99.

## ABBREVIATIONS

- CCC* *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994)
- D-S* Henricus Denzinger et Adolfus Schönmetzer, S.I., eds., *Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitionum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum*, Editio XXXII. (Freiburg-im-Breisgau: Herder, 1963)
- Inseg* *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, I (1978-- ) (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1979--)
- NCE* *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 15 vols. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1967)
- ORE* *L'Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in English. First number = cumulative edition number; second number = page
- ST* *Summa Theologiæ*
- TCF* J. Neuner, S.J. and J. Dupuis, S.J. (eds.), *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church* revised edition (New York: Alba House, 1982)
- TMP* Fulton J. Sheen, *Those Mysterious Priests* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1974)