

**THE GROWTH OF
SACRIFICIAL IDEAS
CONNECTED WITH
THE HOLY EUCHARIST**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649346790

The Growth of Sacrificial Ideas Connected with the Holy Eucharist by David Morris

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
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*READ BEFORE THE LIVERPOOL CLERICAL SOCIETY
AND PUBLISHED AT ITS REQUEST*

BY THE REV.

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LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.
39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON
NEW YORK AND BOMBAY

1897

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pt. 200nday Feb
9-10-39

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THE growth of the idea of sacrifice in connection with the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is not only an interesting subject of investigation for the historical student, but it is also one of the greatest importance to the Christian believer. I propose to trace the history of this growth during the three following marked periods: (1) to the age of Cyprian; (2) to Gregory the Great; (3) to the Council of Trent.

It is necessary, in the first place, to have a clear idea of the meaning of *sacrifice*, and especially as it was understood by the Jews in the days of our Lord. Various definitions of the word have been given in later times by theologians, to suit their respective opinions; but we must look for the right meaning to scriptural instruction.

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The Old Testament Scriptures, therefore, describe a sacrifice under the four following particulars :—

1. It is a thing offered or rendered up to God, or the act of offering or rendering it up to Him.

2. The thing offered is either visible and material, or invisible and spiritual—visible and material, as a lamb; invisible and spiritual, as praise.¹ And the act of offering is either visible and ceremonial, or invisible and spiritual, as the offering itself.

3. The material thing offered is not anything whatsoever indifferently, but one or more of certain things presented by Divine appointment.

4. The thing offered as a material sacrifice is slain, if it be a living thing; or, if an inanimate thing, the "memorial"² of

¹ Ps. xxvii. 6; l. 23; Jer. xvii. 26; Ps. cvii. 22; cxvi. 17.

² Lev. ii. 2, 12.

it was burnt, and the whole was thus an offering to the Lord made by fire.¹ In both cases, life or being was destroyed.²

Such were the conceptions of sacrifice which the Apostles possessed on the night of the institution of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Now let us consider what took place on that occasion, and endeavour to realize the impressions made upon the minds of the disciples there assembled. The occasion was a feast upon a sacrifice—the joyous commemoration of national deliverance. The festival itself was not a sacrifice, though the blessings, and thanksgivings, and hymns of praise which attended the anniversary were truly invisible and bloodless sacrifices. The partakers of the feast occupied a recumbent position, as became men rejoicing in their freedom, and as expressive of their

¹ Lev. i. 2, 10, 14.

² *Vid.* Vogan, "Doctrines of Eucharist."

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equality and liberty.¹ At such a time as this the Lord Jesus instituted His own special feast, and distributed the same to His recumbent disciples. The latter undoubtedly understood that their old Pass-over commemoration was henceforth to be superseded by this new service. They also perceived the cessation of the material offerings of the Old Dispensation, and the inauguration of the New Covenant of love and fellowship, as well in its human as in its Divine relations.

But it is pertinent to ask how did this institution strike them with reference to their accustomed ideas of sacrifice? Did they look upon our Lord's action as a sacrifice which they, also, were to perform; or, as the sign of a sacrifice which they were ever to keep in memory, and upon which they were to feast with joyous thanksgiving? The facts and circum-

¹ Edersheim, "The Temple," p. 201.

stances of the occasion afford a satisfactory answer. That upper room was no place of sacrifice. It had no altar of sacrifice. It was a time unlawful for sacrifice. The reclining posture of those joining in the meal was no posture of sacrifice. The Lord Jesus offered no words of sacrifice other than the blessings and thanksgivings which the president of the Passover feast was accustomed to offer, as invisible, reasonable, spiritual sacrifices.¹ The disciples, therefore, Jews as they were, could not possibly regard the Lord's action as a sacrifice of Himself then made. The inspired, as well as the uninspired, records, which soon appeared leave no doubt about it in any impartial mind. This is also confirmed by the discussions which took place in the Council of Trent, 1562, when the Fathers and Divines were equally divided in opinion, and the contrary

¹ *Vid.* Dr. Stephens's argument in Bennett case.