

RECENT WORK ON THE MASS

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THE modern liturgical movement has taken many years to find its dogmatic and really deep spiritual basis. It has received its confirmation in this regard from the two great Papal Encyclicals, *Mystici Corporis* and *Mediator Dei*; while the whole movement has depended upon, as well as influenced, the abandonment of the post-reformation, literal explanation of the Sacrifice of the Mass and on the return to the priestly and sacramental understanding of it. This conversion of the theologians, the effects of which are now reaching the ordinary Catholic, is due in the first place to Père de la Taille, S.J., whose heavily documented *Mysterium Fidei* exploded like some doctrinal atom bomb just after the 1914-18 war. It is a happy coincidence that the second volume of the English translation of this revolutionising work should have just appeared,¹ for it deals with the Church's sacrifice as offered by the priest at Mass and united with the unique act of Calvary. Although Père de la Taille did not fully escape from the unreal terminology of the post-reformation disputes he sets forth in this volume the principles which in fact underlie the point of view of the outstanding modern writers on the Eucharist such as Abbot Vonier or Dom Casel. His clear distinction between immolation and oblation has been regarded as his special contribution to the development of Eucharistic doctrine; yet the approach here is still the over-literal one which considers only the present sacrifice here on the altar and fails to appreciate the full significance of a sacramental sacrifice. It was easy to dispose of those almost crude theories of the 'mystic sword' which would slay Christ once again did he not remain impassible, but it was not such a straightforward task to escape being involved in the mechanics of the Mass as though it had to fulfil some man-made definition of a sacrifice. Nevertheless, Père de la Taille did give a sound theological basis for the more sacramental view of the

1. *The Mystery of Faith*. Book II, The Sacrifice of the Church. By Maurice de la Taille, S. J. (Sheed & Ward; 25s.) The first volume appeared at a difficult time at the beginning of the war in 1940. The present production is far more attractively and substantially produced, and it is to be hoped that the first volume will be revised and reprinted as a companion to the present one.

sacrifice by his insistence that Christ does not offer *actually* in each Mass—that is by means of a new and distinct act of his human will—but that he offers *virtually* through the priest who represents him. The importance of the present volume therefore begins with thesis XXIII (p. 186) where the author sets out to consider the relation of the Mass to our Lord's offering. The position may be summed up in his own words:

The offering of Christ is the principal and universal cause in its own order; our offering is the subordinate and particular cause.

Thus it is that Christ offers through us, when we offer, without offering anew in his own person. All that is new is from the Church, while all the power is from Christ. (p. 187.)

This distinction between Christ's not acting anew and the Church's making the actual offering, however, can only be understood if the whole doctrine be firmly fixed once again in its sacramental setting. Père de la Taille evidently had this point of view in mind, for he shows later that only the sacramental character of Christ's priesthood given by baptism admits anyone to the full offering of the victim of Calvary. (cf. especially p. 296.)

Three or four years after *Mysterium Fidei* had made its impact on the theological world, Abbot Vonier brought out the more popular treatment of the Eucharist in which without the same detail or show of historical authorities he returned to the full stream of sacramental teaching, so attenuated by post-reformation literalist disputes. Again, three years later, Père Hérés published his famous book, significantly bearing also the title of 'Mystery', *Le Mystère de Christ*—and the fullness of sacramental theology was once again predominant in the minds of the expounders of the doctrines of the Church. It is surely a mistake that the welcome translation of Père Hérés's book should carry the subtitle 'Our Head, Priest and King',² for his thesis is that the whole Christian mystery is summed up in the sacramental concept of the Priesthood of Christ, in which too may be found his Headship and his Royalty. He limits himself consistently to the Christology of St Thomas—a fact which has made the English translation in places rather stilted—so that inevitably he considers the Eucharistic sacrifice as a sacrament, stoutly maintaining that the Angelic Doctor had no idea of treating it elsewhere in the later and unwritten

2. *The Mystery of Christ. Our Head, Priest and King.* By C. V. Hérés, O.P. Translated by Denis Fahey, C.S.Sp. (Mercier Press, 1950; 15s.)

part of the *Summa*. Without following the whole mystery of Christ's priesthood as here outlined we may quote Père Hérís's conclusions in relation to its practical manifestation in the Mass:

Whenever we speak of the eucharistic sacrifice, we must always remain in the domain of sacramental realities. . . . The priest of the eucharistic sacrifice then is Christ sacramentally represented by the ministers of our altars. . . . His sacerdotal consecration gives him the power to take the place of the sovereign priest in the eucharistic oblation. (pp. 202-4.)

The author continues this line of argument by applying it to de la Taille's distinction of oblation and immolation, thereby giving it a firm foundation.

In more recent times the re-statement of this sacramental theology has been given its greatest emphasis by Dom Casel, but in somewhat more measured terms the work of de la Taille and Heris has been continued and perfected by Canon Masure and others. But the development has not been uniform. It is perhaps significant that simultaneously with the publication in Ireland of the translation of Hérís's work there should appear in the same country this little book from another Dominican—*What Happens at Mass*, by Fr William Barden.³ The book itself is a practical guide to the participation of the faithful in the Eucharistic action, with some excellent applications to action and contemplation, to devotion to the Fatherhood of God and to many other aspects of Christian life; but of particular interest is the way in which the author considers it all in terms of mystery and sacrament. In the present work he argues—indeed in an original and refreshing way—for the theory of the French school which began in the eighteenth century with de Condren and M. Olier and which relates the present offering on the altar with the continual and actual offering of Christ's mind and will in the eternity of heaven. This may serve to illustrate by way of contrast what is meant by a *sacramental* sacrifice, for the theory of the actual and eternal offering is one of those non-sacramental theories which will not face the sacrifice by means of an *effective sign* of the time-completed human act of the sacrifice of Calvary.

Canon Masure, whose original work on the Mass has already enjoyed a deserved success, has on the contrary followed the line of thought opened by Père de la Taille with far greater fidelity.

3. Published by Clonmore and Reynolds; 4s. 6d.

His latest work⁵ sets out to apply certain passages of *Mediator Dei* ('the first encyclical to be devoted to the liturgy') to this modern trend in the theology of the Eucharist. Taking the word 'sacrament' in its earlier and wider sense of 'mystery', i.e. something in sign (*in signo, sub signo*), he works it into the theology of the Mass. The sign of Calvary is not simply over and done with in the instantaneous act of transsubstantiation; the sacrament or sign is manifested in the entire movement of the Mass, the 'Actio' which is referred to in the Missal by the significant heading *Infra Actionem*. The whole rite of the Mass unfolds in sign the immolation and offering of Calvary. This sacramental immolation of the victim is the point which Masure desires to make more precise in his present work so that he distinguishes his own exposition both from Dom Casel's and from Abbot Vonier's. We would like to think that all those who have taken up this fruitful doctrine of the *Sacramentum* of Christ's Passion concur in the idea that on the altar we are given formally the same Victim as Calvary's, immolated by the effective sign of the precious blood poured out for our redemption.

It is an incarnate mystery, that is to say, at once realised and made present and visible in a victim which having passed successively through the conditions of oblation, of immolation, of consecration carries in itself this mystery which we directly apply to ourselves by communicating in it. (p. 151.)

But this opinion still leaves the central problem not fully resolved: how does our Lord act in the Mass as the High Priest offering the unique sacrifice of the world? It is necessary to return again to de la Taille and to assimilate his explanation more thoroughly in order to apply it to this growing realisation of the *Sacramentum* or Mystery of Christ-with-us. Otherwise the word 'sacramentum' or 'mysterium' remains largely unexplained and the home for much loose and confused thought. The one act of sacrifice round which the whole world has centred from the creation of Adam until the Last Day took place in a short space of time, was consummated when our Lord 'gave up his spirit' on the Cross and entered into his glory through the Resurrection—it is that one complete and final act of a human will which is made present in the new reality of a sacrament; this is the 'Real Presence', the reality of the victim offered once by the High Priest.

5. *Le Sacrifice du Corps Mystique*. By Chanoine Eugène Masure. (Desclée de Brouwer.)