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SACRIFICE : CORE OF VEDIC RELIGION AND CHRISTIANITY

Introduction: Sacrifice in General

Sacrifice is indeed a universal phenomenon both in the secular as well as religious sense. Every religion has some form of cult, ritual action or sacrifice so much so that, according to Van de Lieuw, "the idea of sacrifice is inseparable from any form of religion."¹ We also speak about sacrifices in life, e.g. about some body who sacrifices his time, energy, comfort, money etc. for the sake of his fellowmen; about some one who makes sacrifice for the sake of truth, honesty, justice, freedom, fellow-feeling etc. Thus there is a generality of human experience, ritual and actual, of sacrifice. But it appears next to impossible to determine and define what exactly sacrifice is or means. Victor Warnach has therefore rightly said: "Sacrifice is a complex multi-faceted phenomenon embracing a variety of forms such that any attempt to define it in terms of univocal categories will be tantamount to a criminal act."² While we are fully aware of this fact about the concept of sacrifice, in the present study we are trying to cast a glance at it relating it to Vedic Hinduism and Early Christianity. And we hope to derive some benefit from it for our religious and liturgical praxis and actual life today.

The discussion will be in two parts. In the part I different shades of meaning and significance of *yajna* will be discussed and in part II the New Testament and Early Christian understanding of sacrifice in general, and Eucharist as sacrifice in particular will be examined. Since the subject is so vast, the discussion will be brief and general.

1. Van der Lieuw, *Phänomenologie der Religionen* (1956), p. 394.

2. "Vom Wesen des kultischen Opfers," in *Opfer Christi und Opfer der Kirche*, ed., by Neunheuser (Düsseldorf, 1960), p. 30.

Part I

1. Sacrifice: Core of Vedic Hinduism

Raymundo Panikkar who has done some serious study on this question observes: "If one had to choose a single word to express the quintessence of Vedic Revelation, the word *yajna*, sacrifice would perhaps be the most adequate."³

Meaning and Significance of Sacrifice, yajna

According to W.D. Whitney the verb *yaj* of *yajna* "appears to be related with roots *yam*, *yach* and *yat* and to mean originally "reach out," "extent."⁴

A preliminary observation, therefore on the meaning of *yajna* is this: Originally it meant a gesture or action of reaching out or extending and so of offering, but not necessarily of immolation or ritual killing as this is later associated with it. Probably Emil Beneveniste means the same when he defines *yajna* as "an operation by which one transfers an element from the human world to the divine world to establish communication between the two realms of reality."⁵ The opening verse of the earliest Veda, viz. *Rgveda* sheds some light in this regard:

I magnify God, the Divine Agni
the Priest, Minister of sacrifice (*yajnasya devam*)
the Offerer of oblation, supreme Giver of treasure (I,1,1).

In this simple invocation to Agni, we get a glimpse of the earliest Vedic form of *yajna*. Agni is here the unique mediator between Gods and human kind, who transforms all material human offerings into spiritual realities and take them to their endless destination. Vedic people poured clarified butter (*ghrta*) into Agni who transformed it into his own nature and extended his body rising towards the Gods. So we read in *Rgveda* "O Agni sacrifice (extend) thine own body" (*agne yajasva tanvam tava svam*, RV. VI, 11, 2). This idea of

3. Raymundo Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience* (London: DLT, 1979), p. 347.

4. *The Roots, Verb-forms and Primary Derivatives of the Sanskrit Language* (Leipzig: 1885), p. 20.

5. *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes I*, 1969, p. 205.

self-extension of the verb *yaj* which is only implicit here is made explicit elsewhere relating to the creative act of God, Visvakarman. "Sacrifice thyself augmenting thy body" (*svayam yajasva tanvam vrdhanah*, RV. X, 81,5).⁶

In this most ancient Vedic fire sacrifice we have an act of extending, reaching, that is offering in several ways: Man offers or pours clarified butter or ghee into the fire; the fire reaches it extending itself (*tanvam vrdhanah*) and rises in growing flames towards the Gods. Simultaneously man (offerer) extends himself (longs for) to the beyond spiritually in the very act of putting the offer-material into Agni so that he become sacrifice himself (*yajamano va esha nidanena yat paśuh/yajnah* – cfr. AB 2.4; see also SB III, 7,1,11; AB = *Aithareya Brahmana*; SB = *Śatapata Brahmana*). When Marcel Mauss criticised Tylor's theory of 'Gift Sacrifice' as a *do ut des* commercial business, he must have grasped this spiritual dimension of *yajna*. This self-offering of the sacrificer (*yajamana* = he who sacrifices himself) is also symbolized or ritually enacted in various ways. For example the *prastara*, seat of the sacrificer which represents him during the *yajna* is thrown into Agni, only saving himself from actual consumption, by an invocation to God Agni (cf. SB I, 9, 2, 17; III, 4, 3, 23). Again the rite of preparing sacrificial cake (*purodasa*) in the shape of man the offerer, now called "mock-man" (*kimpurusha*) to offer it into the fire instead of himself (*purushasthane* – *Sayana*) (cf. SB III, 8,3,1) as well as the preparatory rite of *diksha* for the *yajamanah* etc. make it abundantly clear that these later developments have their origin in the simple Agni cult of the Rgveda in which the real offerer is man himself – his self offering.⁷

2. Oblation through Immolation .

Sooner or later we have the more difficult Soma sacrifice. The shoots of a mythical plant called soma are pressed or crushed and ground, and the strained and purified juice is poured into the

6. See also RV I, 1, 8, where *tanvam vrdhanah* is mentioned with respect to Agni. Brown. "Theories of Creation in Rigveda" in *Journal of American Oriental Society*, pp. 30f, relates these two texts – X, 81, 5 and I, 1, 8 – as parallels.

7. Cf. A.K. Coomaraswamy, "Atmayajna: Self-Sacrifice," in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 6, 1942, pp. 358–98.

fire. And it is here perhaps that we can detect the connection between *yajna's* original meaning of "extending" or "reaching" and the later idea of immolation (ritual killing) that came to be associated with it. Satapata Brahmana in its discovery of a curious etymology for the word *yajna* throws some light on this point:

Now concerning why Soma is called sacrifice (*yajna*): They slay him when they stretch him out (On fait le pressurage - Levi); when they do that, then he is caused to be born; he is born, being stretched out: he is born in the movement (*yan-ja*), whence his name: *yan-ja*, they say, is the same as *yajna* (III, 9, 4, 23).⁸

Thus during the Brahmanic period presumably sacrifice, *yajna* came to imply also the aspect of ritual killing and destruction or immolation as part of oblation or offering the *havis* or sacrificial material. In this sense sacrifice involves a necessary death and disintegration the offer-material before being transformed into a new form of existence. It is through a "passion" and "death" that the soma plant is transformed, "transsubstantiated" into the real soma or sacred soma.⁹ Through a sacrificial death soma is born again. In the process the plant is literally emptied out (*arirecit*) to give rise to the sacred soma.¹⁰

This natural association of immolation or ritual killing with the act of offering or oblation seems to be probably because man the sacrificer needs a symbolic affirmation of his inner disposition, that he is in fact offering himself as his name *yajamana* does signify. And this can be expressed in a unique way only through *atma-yajna* (self-sacrifice or martyrdom in the Christian sense). But it can be done at least in a lesser way by the ritual destruction and offering of other objects - animal or plant, flower, leaf or water (*patram pushpam phalam toyam* cf. BG 9, 26).

8. Cf. S. Levi, *La doctrine du sacrifice dans les Brahmanas* (Paris: 1966), p. 79; R. Panikkar, *op. cit.*, p. 388.

9. The soma juice at a certain stage of its preparation has to be purified passing it through a hot filter; the raw stuff which is not heated will not reach its goal (cf. RV IX, 83, 1).

10. According to Coomaraswamy, in this whole process, there is a real analogy of the Soma mill to the wine-press, and of Soma juice to the "pure blood of the grape" (Deut. XXXII, 14) and of the rite, to the "drink offering" of the wine in the Fire (Lev. XXIII, 14). . . . and of the slaying of Soma to the killing of the grain when it is threshed and ground (cf. *op. cit.*, p. 362).

3. Substitution and Spiritualization

In the last paragraph we have incidently touched on another important aspect of Vedic sacrifice, viz. the idea of (vicarious) substitution. *Satapata Brahmana* declares that "sacrifice is man" (Cf. I, 3, 2, 1). It probably means that sacrifice is the very origin and source of Reality (*Purusha* = Man). Individual man is indeed part of this Reality and so are other beings and even Gods, as another Vedic text explains: "Sacrifice (*yajna*) is the soul (atman) of all created beings and of all Gods" (SB XIV, 3, 2, 1). Now, as Panikkar puts it, it is not only the cosmic *purusha*, the primordial Man who can be termed both sacrifice and sacrificer; the concrete human being also is said to be the sacrifice because sacrifice links him with the whole of existence and enables him to perform his duties and fulfill his obligations as Man.¹¹

Now, this fulfillment of all obligations will require the immolation of the little *purusha*, the individualistic ego or all that constitutes individuality (*bhutatman*). And this is ritually accomplished by means of a "borrowed body" so that substitution forestalls actual killing of any human being (cf. AB II, 3), and by the immolation of one victim all are considered to be sacrificed (SB I, 2, 3, 6). Moreover, what is more important here again is not the offering as such, but the inner disposition and the knowledge. So it is said, "If one sacrifices, knowing not this Agnihotra, it is for him as though he pushed aside the coals and made oblation in the ashes."¹²

This thought leads to a spiritualization process of sacrifice. First a distinction is made between ritual sacrifice as such, and ritual sacrifice as the support of contemplation, between mere objective performance on stated occasions and a subjective incessant sacrifice or we may say "subjective interior burnt-offering (*adhyatmikam antaram agnihotram*) (cf. SB X, 4, 2, 31). We have an interesting example of this stage of sacrifice in the dialogue between king Janaka and Yajnavalkya with regard to the ultimate choice of offer-material for the Agnihotra. When Yajnavalkya was asked what would have to be done to find a substitute when nothing of the material world remains, his reply is

11. R. Panikkar, *op. cit.*, p. 390.

12. A.K. Coomaraswamy, *op. cit.*, p. 380.

that *satya*, truth or reality remains and that is to be offered in faith (*sraddha*) (cf. SB XI, 3, 1, 2-4). And Panikkar here rightly observes: "the sacrificer and the sacrifice coalesce when there is nothing else to offer."¹³ This spiritualization process reaches its climax in the Upanishads.

4. Karma-yajna

This is yet another dimension of Vedic sacrifice. For every man in the world this is probably more important than the foregoing aspects of sacrifice because of its bearing on every day life of man.

Describing the Fire-Building sacrifice (*agni-cayana*) *Satapata Brahmana* includes "all kinds of works" (*visva karmani*) as necessary for its accomplishment. It is an elaborate rite to symbolize re-integration of the world (the dismembered body of Purusha-Prajapati) to its original source. All kinds of works – indeed it requires many skilled and unskilled workers, religious as well as secular – in this ritual building are considered to be part of that one sacrifice. What we notice here is that the distinction between ritual action and non-ritual action (sacred action and secular action) does not count.

We may require here a little reflection on the meaning of *karma* (or *karman* more primitively). In fact primitively at least in the Indo-European group of languages a word denoting work or action had the primary meaning of creative or sacred action.¹⁴ In particular the verb *kr*, to do or to make and the noun *karma* has the primary meaning of and application to sacrificial operation. It is well known that in the *karma-yoga* doctrine of the Gita, karma is full of sacrificial implications (cf. ch. IV in particular). But this is no discovery

13. *Op. cit.*, p. 399.

14. The present writer has examined this question with regard to three verbs – *erdein* (Greek), *agere* (Latin) and *kr* (Sanskrit) – all meaning "to work/to make," and has shown that primitively action or work meant any productive activity, something personally fulfilling and creative, and consequently divine. It is in this sense, the Creator is called *Visvakarma* in Rgveda. Other work is no work at all; it is destructive, non-action. This is so whether the work belongs to the religious sphere (cult, ritual, sacrifice) or to the non-religious sphere (science, culture, technology). And the trademark of such work is *kenosis* in the Christian tradition and *naishkarmya* in the Hindu tradition, both pointing to selflessness in one's action which is admittedly the core of the concept of sacrifice.

of the Gitakara, but a legacy of the Vedic concept of *karman*. If the *karma* of the *Gita* is essentially a work according to one's nature (*svabhavanīyatam*, XVIII, 47), this had been already true in the Vedic period when the sacrificial operation involved different kinds of work, and the acts of the carpenter, doctor, fletcher, priest . . . all had been regarded as ritual operations, *vrtani*.¹⁵ The very name *Viśva-karma* given to Indra as Creator of all things and the sacrificial context of his creative activity (cf. RV X, 81-82) make clear that every authentic human action, *karma* is indeed sacrificial. Hence there is also the advice of the Gitakara expounding his *naishkarmya* - doctrine, to do *karma* (*svadharma*) as *yajna* (*yajnarthat . . . karma samacara*). That *yajna* is sacrifice not only in the ritual sense but in the vital sense also is well established by that great model of *yajna* called *panca-mahayajna* (five great sacrifices). And needless to say, these five forms relate human life and fellowship to all creatures - from plants and animals to God himself.¹⁶

Part II

Sacrifice: Core of the Christian Religion

In this section we are trying to understand the meaning and significance of sacrifice for Christianity. We shall see that sacrifice, as it emerged from the New Testament context, especially in St Paul and the Eucharist in the earliest Christian community had a more spiritualized meaning than external cultic sense.¹⁷ The theme is divided into two sub-topics: 1. sacrifice of Christ including the last Supper and 2. sacrifice of the Christians including the Eucharist. Each topic is highlighted drawing on biblical and early Christian sources, wherever necessary. Since the theme is very vast discussion will be brief and in general.

15. Cf. Grassmann, *Wörterbuch zum Rīgveda* (Wiesbaden: 1964).

16. Cf. *SB* XI, 5,6,1-3; *Manu Smṛti* III, 70-71.

17. "Spiritualization" is a term so broad in potential meaning that it can hardly be defined in a few words. It is not "dematerialization", "ethicization", "rationalization", etc. We are using it in the much broader sense, emphasizing the true meaning of sacrifice, i.e. the inner, spiritual or ethical significance of cultic sacrifice over against the merely material or merely external understanding of it. In other words there is a great shift in emphasis from the material to spiritual, external to the internal aspects of sacrifice.

5. The Sacrifice of Christ

i. *Jesus' Attitude Towards Cultic Sacrifice*

In the Gospels we can detect at least two attitudes of Jesus towards cult and sacrifices of the Jewish religion of his time. 1. *Jesus approved or at least tolerated cult*, probably because it helped people to keep their religious fervour, provided it did not go against the law of love and concern for one's fellow-men. Sample texts may be noted:

- a) So if you are offering your gift at the altar . . . go, and first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift (Mt 5, 23f).
- b) Go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded . . . (Mk I, 44 = Mt 8, 4; Lk 5, 14; 17,1).

This positive attitude of Jesus toward Jewish cult may also be found in his praising of the poor widow's offering (Mk 12, 41-44 and Lk 21, 1-4). 2. *Jesus made a radical criticism of the sacrificial system*. This is his second attitude to cult. Some Gospel passages may be noted:

- a) Mt 12, 1-8 and parallels - Jesus justifies the action of the disciples who plucked the ears of grain on the Sabbath.
- b) Mk 11, 15-19 and parallels - the cleansing of the temple. The synoptic quote from Isias 56, 7: "My house shall be called a house of prayer," shows that Jesus gave the incident a spiritualizing thrust, making it an implicit criticism of the sacrificial system (Did Jesus at any time offer sacrifice in temple . . . ?).
- c) Lk 10, 29-37 - the Good Samaritan. Does not the parable imply condemnation of the cultic system which fostered such insensitivity of the priest and levite (they seem to have acted according to legal prescription on defilement by contact with a corpse (cf. Lev. 2, 1-12; Num 5, 1-4)).¹⁸

18. Cf. Robert J. Daly, *Christian Sacrifice* (Washington: Cath. University of America Press, 1978), p. 215.

These and similar passages from the Gospels give the impression that the coming of Jesus has done away with the cultic system of the Old Testament replacing it with a liturgy of love and service.

ii. *Jesus' Own Life-Sacrifice*

Jesus' own life coupled with his teachings on this matter is the supreme revelation, for us, of the New Testament meaning of what sacrifice is. Right from the beginning of his preaching of the Kingdom he proclaimed his self-emptying vision of life as Lk puts it beautifully:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives . . . (Lk 4, 18f). Lk later also puts these words into Jesus' mouth: "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Indeed through out his life afterwards Jesus was a man for others, and so Matthew has recorded it saying:

The Son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (10, 45; 20, 28).

According to C.F.D. Moule this verse is one of the "two great sacrificial sayings of Jesus" (the other being the Eucharistic words of institution).¹⁹ The phrase "to give his life as a ransom for many" (*dounai ten psychen autou lytron anti pollon*) according to Daly, seems to be an allusion to Is 53, 10-12, thus calling up associations of the Servant of God, sacrifice and martyrdom of that text.²⁰ These and other parallel passages in the Gospels make it abundantly clear that the entire life of Jesus was a sacrificial self-offering which is culminated in his death on the cross. True sacrifice to God is a free gift of oneself to him, not of any other creature (compare the Vedic idea of atma-yajna and the true sacrificer's name *yajamana/atmayaji*).

This is also what St Paul seems to be telling us in different ways, e.g. he says: "Christ our Paschal lamb has been sacrificed" (I Cor. 5, 7). True, the imagery is cultic, but the content is spiritualized. Similarly he calls Christ as our "sin-offering" (*hatta't/amartia*) and expresses the idea in different ways:

19. Cf. *The Sacrifice of Christ* (Philadelphia: 1964), p. 11.

20. Cf. Daly, *op. cit.* p. 217, quoting Moule, *op. cit.*, p. 11, See also the repeated use of the expression, "Good Shepherd lays down his life" (*tithemei ten psychen . . .* Jn. 10, 11. 15. 17).

- 2 Cor 5,21 : For our sake he (God) made him (Christ) to be sin, that is sin-offering . . .²¹
- Rom 8,3 : God sending his Son "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (*en homoiomati sarkos amartias*)
- Gal 3,13 : Christ redeeming us "becoming a curse for us"
- Rom 3,24 : God justifying us through Christ as "an expiation.... by his blood" (*hilasterion . . . en to autou haimati*)

Thus in these and parallel passages not only is Christ's redemptive activity, especially his death seen as a sacrificial action, but it is seen under the aspect of two particular ritual sacrifices: the passover and the sin-offering. This merely illustrates the conviction of the Early Church that Old Testament, especially its soterological institutions, was both fulfilled and superseded in the person of Jesus Christ. Since the Passover and the sin-offering were the two rites of the Jews of New Testament times, most closely associated with redemption and forgiveness of sin, it was natural for the Christians of that time to consider Christ both as their Passover (lamb) and their sin offering.²²

In the other books of the New Testament, especially in the letter to the Hebrews and the writings of John we can find more evidences to confirm these ideas. Chapters 8, 9 and 10 of the Hebrews spell out clearly that Jesus redeemed us by offering himself to God as a sin offering in the full, realistic Old Testament sense of the word. He carried out this sacrifice physically as well as spiritually, i.e. in obedience to the will of the Father. In the writings of John (Gospel and the letters), sacrifice of Christ is discussed (implicitly or explicitly) in terms of the many *hyper*-formulas and the concept of sin offering.

iii. *Last Supper and Institution of the Eucharist*

It is important to note that all the New Testament accounts on

21. The double use of the word *hamartia* in this sentence: "God made him to be sin-offering, who knew no sin . . ." (*ton me gnonta hamartian hyper hemon hamartian epoiesen . . .*), suggests *hattat*, the Hebrew word very commonly used both for sin and sin-offering. Furthermore, the two occurrences of *hamartia* are sandwiched around the typically sacrificial expression, *hyper hemon*. Hence it is submitted that the second use of *hamartia* in this sentence means "sin-offering" (cf. also Daly, *op. cit.*, p. 237-39).

22. Cf. Daly, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

the last Supper and Institution of the Eucharist occur in the context of the Passion. And this association is not a literary accident, but rests on the fact that the "Last Supper was presented as a prophecy-in-act anticipation of Jesus' death, a revelation of Christ's saving action which pointed towards and explained the significance of his death."²³ Both events—the Supper and the death on the cross—are sacrificial; only the modality is different: one is ritual and symbolic and the other actual and existential, but the two make only one reality—the supreme sacrifice of Christ.

The sacrificial nature of these two events is made explicit by a number of cultic terms and sacrificial allusions in these accounts. Here we can only broadly outline this under the following heads:

- a) the portrayal of the Supper and the Passion as a Paschal event, which is indeed a unique sacrifice of the Old Testament.
- b) the mention of the blood of the (new) covenant, recalling the Old Testament covenant sacrifice, shedding blood.
- c) the Servant of God theme.
- d) the emphasis on Jesus' personal self-giving in the Eucharist and on the cross.

We may conclude this section on the sacrifice of Christ with the following comment of Daly: "The most sublime ideas on the nature of a perfect sacrifice and on the importance of the interior dispositions of the offerer which are found in the figure of the Suffering Servant, the Maccabean martyr-theology and above all in the Akheda, find their perfect expression and fulfillment in the New Testament doctrine of the sacrifice of Christ."²⁴

6. The Sacrifice of Christians

i. Life as Sacrificial Oblation

With Jesus' death seen so clearly as sacrificial, the early Christians easily related this idea with their lives. Already, from the Gospels, a

23. Cf. J. Betz, *Die Eucharistie in der Zeit der griechischen Väter* 1/1 (Freiburg: 1964), p. 35).

24. *Op. cit.*, pp. 224f.

number of texts on the "cost of discipleship," (Mt 8, 18f: 10, 16-24; 37-39; 16, 24-26 for examples) and Jesus' teaching on the "greatest commandment" (Mt 22, 36-40) were sufficient indications for them to believe that the life of the followers of Christ was sacrificial.

Pauline letters in many contexts compare christian life and death with the sacrificial death of Christ (cf. Rom 8, 36; 2 Cor 4, 10f; Gal 2, 20; Phil 2, 17; 2 Tim 4, 6). From the last two texts particularly we see Paul's understanding of his own life and impending death as sacrificial self-offering. But it is in Rom. 12, 1 that this sacrificial nature of christian life is most clearly and emphatically expressed by Paul. Moreover, Paul would see almsgiving and charity-collections to help the poor (churches) as an offering and so speak in the language of sacrifice (cf. Rom 15, 25-32). Further he also understands all his efforts to preach the Good News of Christ (shall we say, efforts at evangelizing peoples) as an offering acceptable to God (cf. Rom 15, 15f). Similarly in 2 Cor 2, 14-17, where he considers his apostolic activity as "aroma of Christ," he understands it as a cultic offering, i.e. sacrificial.

An important witness in this regard comes from I Pt 2, 1-10, especially vv. 4-5 on "the living stones," which evokes the Pauline image of "the living sacrifice" in Rom 12, 1; but here the application of the image of living stones to all christians makes it part of the community-as-temple theme. This powerful imagery seeks to establish that true christian sacrifice is putting oneself totally at God's disposal. In the letter to the Hebrews, the author seems to spiritualize the idea of sacrifice as we find it chiefly in the paraenetic part of the letter. He seems to be saying that the christian life lived in the community itself is the sacrifice of the christians. In general we notice the author's concern to present christian life not only as a sacrificial act, but also as an act of cult understood in a spiritualized sense (cf. 13, 10-16).

It may be worthwhile to examine what the earliest Christian writers (of the first two centuries) think about this point. We can only make some hints here within the limit of this short paper. Ignatius of Antioch certainly understood life this way, but he concentrates his attention on the idea of martyrdom as the closest possible imitation of and union with the sacrifice of Christ (cf. Rom 2, 2; 4, 1f). Justin the Martyr's main idea of christian life seems to be centred on Eucharist and it seems to be difficult to find passages where he speaks clearly about life as sacrificial offering. Iranaeus, speaking of the "new oblation of the new

covenant," presents Eucharist as the sacrifice which is now offered by the Christians throughout the world. However, he seems to include other things also under the idea of Christian sacrifice, though by no means with the clarity with which it is dealt with by Paul or the author of the Hebrews.

ii. *Eucharist as Sacrifice*

Earlier we have said that the Eucharist in the context of its institution was a thoroughly sacrificial event. Now, in what sense is the Eucharist Christians offer a sacrifice? The institution narratives of the Eucharist, we have seen, present a sacrificial tone and language, and these narratives are largely taken from liturgical contexts of the early Christians. If so, a further question is: In what sense or to what extent did the early Christians understand the Eucharist as sacrifice?

The *Didache*, presumably the earliest Church Order calls the Sunday as the Lord's day for sacrifice:

On the Lord's day assemble in common to break bread and offer thanks, having first confessed your sins so that your sacrifice (*thusia hymon*, may be pure (14, 1).

In the *Didache* 14, 2 again there is the command for reconciliation before the celebration of the Eucharist: "that your sacrifice may not be defiled." Further in 14, 3 the prophecy of Malachi about pure sacrifice is added as the Lord's command. He neither describes the context of this Eucharist (or Eucharistic prayer) nor explains his understanding of the term sacrifice. It appears that the sacrifice of Did. 14 has primarily only the spiritualized meaning of praise and thanks recited over the elements of bread and wine which evokes the Lord's saving presence.

Justin the Martyr affirms repeatedly that Christians do offer sacrifice (against pagans who accused Christians), and that Eucharist is their sacrifice. Further he points out that the prophecy of Malachi can be verified only when they celebrate the Eucharist of the bread and the cup. To know what he understands by this we must turn to his theology of the Eucharistic prayer. In Apol. 66 he says that the president makes a thanksgiving prayer over the eucharistic gifts at the end of which "what till then had been bread and wine has become the body and blood of

Christ. This food we call Eucharist." Quasten has therefore rightly described Justin's idea of the Eucharist as a Christian *logike thusia*.²⁵

Iraeneus who has a positive attitude towards the Old Testament sacrifices surely sees Eucharist as sacrifice of the new covenant fulfilling the old. He speaks of Eucharist as "oblation of the Church;" he leaves us in doubt whether he is speaking primarily of Eucharist or not. It seems that for Iraeneus as for Justin the Eucharist was a sacrifice precisely in its *euchai kai eucharistiai* (prayers and thanksgiving).

In Hippolytus' theology one of the central themes is that the Eucharist is sacrifice. Apostolic Tradition presents Eucharist as a highly institutionalized sacrificial rite. For him it is by the Pneuma (for Hippolytus, the divine mode of being of the Logos) that the Logos effects both his physical incarnation and his sacramental or Eucharistic incarnation.

It can be seen that the idea of the Eucharist as sacrifice reaches a high point in Hippolytus. Simultaneously, the centre of emphasis in the idea of christian sacrifice shifted away from the actual human situation of practical christian life. In his mode of the Eucharist comes up clearly the idea of the presiding bishop or priest offering the Eucharist, i.e. Eucharistic prayer of praise and thanks, and Eucharistized gifts of bread and wine which are the body and blood of the Lord. According to Daly we find here highly controversial developments in Eucharistic theology: the idea that the Eucharist is a sacrifice which can be offered only by a priest specially ordained for that purpose, and the idea that this sacrifice offered by the priest is a fully real, cultic sacrifice.

7. Observations

We have seen that at the origin of Vedic religion and Christianity sacrifice was a key concept. In the *Rgvedic* Agni-cult there was already the necessary external and ritual setting for a *homo religiosus* to experience and express in symbols and signs his inner disposition of obedience, admiration, homage and self-surrender to God, the author of the world. And to that extent we can say that this relatively simple sacrifice of the

25. Explaining what he means by attributing this expression to Justin, Quasten says that for Justin Eucharist is the long cherished spiritual sacrifice, the *logike thusia*, because the Logos himself, Jesus Christ, is here the victim; it is not any material sacrifice of creatures as practiced by the Jews and pagans (cf. *Patrology* I-III (Utrecht-Antwerp-Westminster, 1960), Vol. I, p. 218.

Vedic time enshrined in it not only the ritualistic developments of the later sacrifices in a seminal form, but also the seeds of speculation (contemplation in the cult-context) which gradually became expressive and articulate, giving rise to a long process of spiritualization of sacrifice.

This spiritualization process seems to have gone in two directions: First of all there is a gradual de-emphasis of the importance of the external and ritualistic side of sacrifice and a simultaneous emphasis on the internal and vital aspects of it. Here the role of the ritual (offering/sacrifice/prayer) is not denied, rather its authentic function is re-discovered and explained as powerful means for experiencing the true meaning and value of life-sacrifice for the sake of the other. The *panca-mahayajna* model of sacrifice of Brahmanic Hinduism (both SB and MS emphasize this model) offers an integral vision of cult and life as sacrificial. But it is the *karma-yajna* model of sacrifice of modern Hinduism that has reached the climax of this spiritualization process. The *Gita* with its emphasis on the doctrine of *naishkarmya* (*nishkama-karma*) does not lose sight of the role of cult of the rishis of old, but advises us to do whatever we do (*karmani*) as ritual operations (*vrtani/yajnāh*), even as the sages did in ancient times and do them all "for the sake of God" (*yat karoshi yad aśnasi . . . tat kurushva mad arpanam* (Gita 9:27).

A radical dematerialization of sacrifice is the second direction of the spiritualization process of sacrifice in the Indian tradition. It is a tendency which questions or even denies altogether the relevance of any ritual/material offering/sacrifice. In this view worship/sacrifice is perfect only to the extent that it is mental or speculative and freed from material elements, and gives all importance to knowledge as the only means of liberating the Self from the phenomenal non-self. This extreme meaning of spiritualization (as upheld by some Indian philosophical systems) seems to be at odds with the incarnational perspective of the New Testament and of Paul and Fathers like Irenaeus.

As for Christianity, it is rooted in the ritual sacrifice of Jesus at the Last Supper and his life-sacrifice on the cross (as culmination of his sacrificial life). If the former, would have been an empty ritual without the latter, the latter in a certain sense would have been an 'incomplete act' without the repeatable rich symbolism of the former, a symbolism which gives us the Eucharist as sacrifice again and again.

The Eucharistic celebration of the primitive Church was in some way a sacrificial event or an event laden with sacrificial connotations. In this context it is worth asking ourselves, whether our present-day understanding of Eucharist as sacrifice is the same as that of the primitive Church; if not, what is the difference and when was the possible deviation started? Does not the New Testament reflection on the incident of the widow's mite and its emphasis on Jesus' carrying out the will of the Father show that Christian sacrifice is that interior liturgy of the heart and spirit by which a christian offers himself, all his prayers, works, words and thoughts through Christ to the Father? But is this a belittling of the sacrificial value of the Eucharistic liturgy? If not, what is wrong in our present-day understanding and praxis of it? These are a few issues which will take us a long way deep into our life in the Spirit.