

THE EUCHARIST AND THE ATONEMENT

By H. P. C. LYONS

ATONEMENT expresses better than any other word the whole act by which man is made at one with God through, with and in Christ.¹ The Atonement is the gift of God's loving grace. It is first the grace by which the Atoner is constituted – the grace and graces by which the Son is incarnate in a human nature perfectly at one, united in being one divine person, united by the supernatural elevation of his human nature. Next the Atonement is the Atoner's perfect responsive engagement through his human nature in the grace of his mission. This responsive engagement is essentially his perfect human willing of his Father's will, his full gift of himself, in his entire human nature and in his whole human living, to his Father. This is a giving of himself not just as an individual member of the human race but as the fountal head of humanity to be made at one. It is a self-giving not just to fulfil his own individual human 'at-one-ness' but to bring about the at-one-ness of his brethren according to the flesh, to make all God's scattered children 'at one'.² It is an atonement of satisfaction for their sin, an atonement of reconciliation and restoration in life and love.³

When Christ, having lived and loved to the end, has given back to God his fully finished humanity, he has given as the second Adam what the first failed to give: a fully lived obedience.⁴ Now, designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness in all the fulfilment of the resurrection,⁵ he can actually mediate to the rest of his race the graces of atonement. This is the redemption by which we are delivered from sin and re-possessed by God, reconciled in holy friendship and restored as the Father's children in his beloved Son; and by the Spirit of Father and Son we are enabled to offer

¹ Throughout this article, the word atonement (at-one-ment) with its cognates is used in the sense described here, and as defined in the *Spiritual Vocabulary*, *infra*, p. 158. It is not used in its narrow sense, as synonymous with 'expiation'.

² Heb 2, 10 ff.; Jn 11, 52.

³ E.g., Rom 5, 10 ff.; Col 1, 13 ff.

⁴ Rom 5, 19; Phil 2, 8 ff.

⁵ Rom 1, 4.

the same obedience in atoning sorrow and love and finally to be raised to the everlasting life of fulfilled unity.¹

THE SACRIFICE OF THE ATONEMENT

The only positive descriptions in Scripture of the incarnate Son's act of atonement are in terms of obedience and sacrifice.² These two closely allied acts of worship are united as one in Christ's self-giving: 'As Christ comes into the world, he says, No sacrifice, no offering was thy demand; thou hast endowed me, instead, with a body. Thou hast not found any pleasure in burnt sacrifices, in sacrifices for sin. See then, I said, I am coming to fulfil what is written of me, where the book lies unrolled; to do thy will, O my God. First he says, Thou didst not demand victim or offering, the burnt sacrifice, the sacrifice for sin, nor hast thou found any pleasure in them; in anything that is, which the law has to offer, and then: - I said, See, my God, I am coming to do thy will'.³

Christ's obedience is the fullest accord of his whole human living with the Father's will expressed in his mission. His obedience offers fully the humble love disowned by Adam's disloyalty; and, as in Adam mankind's will loses its supernatural orientation to God, so in Christ, the fountal head of restored humanity, man's will is re-directed through Christ's achieved obedience. Obedience is plainly atoning (at-one-ing).⁴

But Christ's obedience is not just an occasional conformity, so to speak, offered only on those occasions when the Father's manifest will demands it. It is a consecrated obedience, the obedience of one who has handed himself over to God in sacrifice. Of itself, obedience may be limited by the nature of one's relationship or engagement, involving a limited part of oneself, a limited period or sphere of service. The obedience of the incarnate Son, who has totally dedicated himself in sacrifice, involves the whole of his human being and the whole of his human living.

Sacrifice is essentially a worshipful gift to God. In recognition of God as God, man gives to God something of man's own, something of himself. God accepts the gift, the worship, the giver. What is

¹ E.g., Heb 5, 9; Rom 8.

² Jn 10, 17 ff.; 14, 30 ff.; Rom 5, 19; Phil 2, 8; Jn 6, 51; Eph 5, 2; 1 Cor 5, 6 (cp. Jn 19, 36); Last Supper narratives.

³ Heb 10, 5 ff. ⁴ Rom 5, 19.

given is not destroyed or diminished by being transferred from man's possession to God's. When it becomes God's, it is consecrated, and participates in God's holiness. And in the measure in which man, in his gift, has given himself to God, man shares through God's acceptance in His holiness and goodness.

If, as is plain from both Old and New Testaments, every sacrifice is an earnest of self-giving, the perfect sacrifice will be the full gift of the whole self, when one's whole being and living are put beyond a purely private owning and disposing and set sacredly in God's. This sacrifice will be a freely willed dedication to divine obedience. Completing a long line of inspired Jewish tradition,¹ the tenth chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews shows us Christ's obedience as the heart of his atoning sacrifice. His sacrifice is the divinely accepted gift of himself in consecrated obedience.

This sacrifice is not an abdication of responsibility or a renunciation of life. It is the assuming of a greater charge and a divinely enlarged living. The atoning high priest dedicates himself to live, not as a private individual in a privately owned world, but as atoning victim giving his life for and to the world. His life cannot be directed towards any purely private fulfilment; it is wholly directed to the Father in sacrificial purpose, in at-one-ment.

The Son through his human will makes this act of self-donation at the first instant of the incarnation.² This sacrificial will makes his whole life one integrated act of worship. It holds together every stage of his human life, all that he does and endures from the first moment of his giving. It persists through all his living out of the life so given, unto his 'finishing' of that living in the supreme achievement of death, and through that moment of achievement to the taking up again of his life in the glorious consummation of the divinely accepted sacrifice. It is this will that makes Christ's suffering and dying not merely satisfaction for a law transgressed, but, in the integrated totality of his whole life, satisfactory *sacrifice*. It is this sacrificial will, too, that integrates in a single atoning charity his love of his Father and his love of us.

The Atoner's sacrificial will is his will to give his humanity over to God. What is the worship of this act? It is not the handing over of inanimate flesh and blood, but the consecration of his whole human existence to a wholly dedicated living of his Father's will in humble,

¹ E.g., 1 Sam 15, 22; Ps 39 (40), 6-8. Cp. Hos 6, 6; Mk 12, 33; Mt 9, 13; 12, 7.

² Heb 10, 9.

loving obedience unto death, both in the sense of a fidelity persevering right up to the moment of death and in the sense of a loyal and loving acceptance of the death of the cross as the martyrdom which consummates his mission to testify to the truth.¹

There is nothing in the physical evil of death as such, any more than in the physical evil of disease, which invests it with the character of worship. The mere fact that, as a penal consequence of Adam's sin, a human being has ceased to be a complete human being, has become separated soul and corpse, is not of itself a religious declaration of God's dominion. But the acceptance of death can be an act of worship, as an act of humility, love, obedience. And the human act of dying can be an act of worship. The ultimate human act of the complete human being, in the last instant before separation of soul and body, may be the supreme as well as the final act of utter detachment from all that is not God, of complete charity in wholly loving only God, God in all and all in God.

Christ's acceptance of death and Christ's act of dying were worship, indeed sacrificial worship. His dying was sacrificial, not because he died or because he was martyred, but because his dying was, as his whole living was, sacrificially consecrated by his priestly human will, and accepted as such by his Father. The sacrificial worship of Christ's dying depends not on the bare fact of death as such, but on these two living facts: that he willed as priest, to give himself to God as atoning victim, and that he willed this consecrated, humble and loving obedience unto the end. That his dying is not simply an act of vicarious satisfaction for our sin, but a sacrificial satisfaction integrated in the satisfactory sacrifice of his whole life, is, in the same way, due to the divinely accepted, persevering will with which he gives himself to the Father in atoning sacrifice.

Christ had made this consecrating transfer of himself at the first moment of the Incarnation, the immediate and total response of his human will to his Father. And the offering of the beloved Son had been accepted as replacing by fulfilment all other offerings ever made.² He could not hand himself over any more totally than at this moment. He must and did live out to the full the life he had so consecrated by his sacrificial will; and, in the physical order, his giving is completed only when his passible living is completed.

Christ's death on the cross rightly holds the Christian mind and heart. It is not simply the termination of a human life. His death,

¹ Jn 18, 37.

² Heb 10, 9.

with its related mysteries, is the physical consummation of his sacrificial self-giving and self-gift: he finishes, ends and achieves the physical living out of his sacrificially given passible life. The Atoner's dying is the final sacrificial satisfaction. With the perfect will of atonement he bears the Sin's sanction of death and takes away its curse.¹ The Son's dying is his atoning loving unto the end of his Father and his brethren.² His dying is the supreme expression and fulfilment of his consecrated obedience, not only as the moral perfection of an individual of the human race but as the fulfilment of the fontal head, on whose obedience depends their atonement: 'in virtue of this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus once for all'.³

What God accepts in sacrifice is not lost through becoming the Lord's. It is perfected by participation in the living holiness of the divine truth and goodness. The Resurrection-Ascension is the Father's fulfilment, through the Holy Spirit, of the sacrifice of the atoning Son.⁴ It is not simply the sign whereby the divine ratification is declared. It is the real fulfilment of the incarnate Son, atoning priest and victim, as his individual sacred humanity is brought to its whole glorified realization. And, his individual atoning life consummated, he is fulfilled as fontal head: 'himself made perfect, he became for all who obey him the author of eternal salvation'.⁵ Glorified, the incarnate Son mediates atonement, gives with the Father their Holy Spirit, God's living charity, to enable us to live and love 'at-one-ingly' and be perfected in their living, loving unity.⁶

CHRIST'S EUCHARIST

Were Christ's sacrifice simply an individual act of worship, of which humanity received the benefit while remaining outside it, there would be no need for what Christ did at the last supper. Had Christ not instituted the Eucharist, we might possibly conceive the Redemption to consist in two intrinsically unconnected atonements. Christ's Atonement might be conceived in isolated solitude, his sacrifice satisfying for our sins and meriting grace for us; and then we, having thus received pardon and grace, individually made at one, might separately make our little acts of acknowledgement and

¹ Rom 5, 10 ff.; 1 Cor 15, 55. ² Jn 10, 15-18; 15, 13; Gal 2, 20; Eph 5, 2, 25 ff.

³ Heb 10, 10; cf. Rom 5, 19. ⁴ Rom 1, 4; Heb 1, 3; 10, 12; cp. Phil 2, 8.

⁵ Heb 5, 9.

⁶ E.g., Jn 7, 37 ff. (Cf. Jn 4, 14; 1 Cor 12, 13); 17, 22-26.

service, our separate little acts of atonement. We should be passive recipients of the fruits of Christ's atoning sacrifice, but inevitably outside it. In instituting the Eucharist, Christ shows us that we are not outside Atoner or atoning sacrifice, but made livingly at one with him and engaged, willingly, in his atoning willing, through him and with him and in him.

The Eucharist of the last supper is not simply a vivid pictorial lesson about the Atoner, a prophecy in action about his atoning death, a lifeless symbolization of a distinct, real sacrifice. At the last supper Christ does use signs, adapted to Jewish mind and history, to the types he is fulfilling (paschal lamb, covenant blood), to the death he foresees, to the atoning purpose he intends. But the signs embody realities and are effectively expressive of his really giving himself in real sacrifice. His real body is really given for us, flesh for the life of the world. His real blood is really offered in expiative atonement to the Father, and, in real sacrificial-communion, really seals man and God in atoning covenant, in atoning Atoner.¹

The eucharistic sacrifice Christ offered at the last supper was not a different sacrifice from that offered at the incarnation, physically completed on the cross, gloriously fulfilled in the Resurrection. He could not be more completely handed over to his Father as our atoning victim than he was by his sacrificial will at the Incarnation. He had no other living body and blood, no other human being to give than that in which he finished his passible living on the cross and in which he rose in fulfilled glory. There is only one atoning high priest, one atoning victim; the unique Atoner offers only one sacrifice: the unique, atoning sacrifice.

What he offered without human witness at the Incarnation he offered at the last supper publicly, socially, liturgically; and he instituted his unique sacrifice as the ritual sacrifice of himself and his Church, the sacrifice of atoning head and atoned body. He offered to the Father for us, not lifeless body and blood, but his whole living humanity. He offered not just the last few days of his passible life, his dying hours and death, but the integrated totality of his whole atoning life. And what he gave to his disciples to eat and drink, in communion of that sacrifice, was the whole atoning victim accepted in atonement by the Father. How otherwise could that flesh and blood give everlasting life and resurrection and living mutual indwelling, be the sealing of a living covenant of atonement?²

¹ E.g., Lk 22, 19 ff. (cp. Exod 24, 8); Jn 6, 51.

² Jn 6, 53 ff.; Lk 22, 20.

The atoning effect of the Atoner's accepted sacrifice is not limited in chronological order to the time sequence of the stages of the physical living out of his sacrifice. All grace is the grace of his fulfilled sacrifice; but his atoning grace is given both before and after its moment of physical consummation.

Christ offers one sacrifice. His eucharistic sacrifice is the sacrifice of Incarnation-Cross-Resurrection. The reason why Christ expresses this sacrifice in the eucharistic rite is that he would have the sacrifice, which integrates and consummates his atoning life, be not simply his individual act of worship but the act of worship of head and body, the sacrificial consecration and fulfilling union of the whole atonement. We are not to be pardoned and made at one with God merely through grace conferred on us in view of a Priest-Victim on whom we must gaze reverently from a distance. We are made at one not only through but *in* the atoning Priest-Victim, not only by his act of atonement but *in* his act of atonement. We are made at one not simply as passive recipients of the grace won by the Atoner's sacrificial obedience, but as actively engaged by that grace to will, through and with and in him, the atonement which he wills. This is why Christ expresses his sacrifice ritually with his disciples at the last supper, gives himself, as sacrificed, in communion, and empoweringly authorizes his ministers to 'do this', so that head and body may offer head and body in atonement.

Christ's three eucharistic acts at the last supper are three intentions of his one atoning will: he wills himself in atoning sacrifice for us; he wills himself in atoning communion with us; he wills that, in communion with him, our will should be at one with his in atoning sacrifice.

He offers himself to the Father in eucharistic sacrifice. As head of his Church, in act of family worship, he expresses socially and ritually the same will of atoning self-giving effectively expressed at the Incarnation. The atoning Priest ritually wills himself to the Father as our atoning Victim.

He gives himself, accepted atoning Victim, in atoning communion to his disciples. His own 'at-one-ness' perfected in accepted sacrifice, he mediates atonement, making man livingly at one with himself and in him with the Father. It is a communion effecting one living body. It is a communion of one covenanting blood, effecting a blood brotherhood of one life and spirit, sealing a living atonement of God and man in the living Atoner who is God and man.¹

¹ 1 Cor 10, 16 ff.; Lk 22, 20.

'The author of salvation to all who obey him',¹ he commands and enables his Church, through his empowered ministers and hers, to do this, to offer his sacrifice with him. He wills that his body the Church, livingly at one with him and in him, should be at one also in his sacrificial loving obedience and should will atoningly with him and in him in his atoning sacrifice. He wills not only that we accept the fruit of his sacrifice in living communion, but that we will to give ourselves in loving communion in his sacrifice. This is why he ordains the continuance of this eucharistic worship.

It should be evident that our 'at-one-ness' in accepting communion and engaging in sacrifice is grace derived from the unique atonement of the unique Atoner. It is equally plain that the derived and participated royal priesthood of the Church, the derived and participated sacrifice of the Church, cannot in any way add to or derogate from the unique priesthood and sacrifice of the incarnate Son; in somewhat the same way as derived and participated being cannot in any way add to or derogate from the fullness of subsistent being.²

THE CHRISTIAN EUCHARIST

The Christian Eucharist is the embodiment in the Church of Christ's atoning will, his will that we should be at one in the life given to us in the sacrament of the Eucharist (Holy Communion). Thus at one, we should also be at one, with him and in him, in willing, through his Holy Spirit, the sacrifice of the Eucharist (the Mass) to his God and our God, his Father and our Father.

The difference between the Eucharist Christ offers at the last supper and the Eucharist Christ offers in his Church is this. At the supper the head individually and without a subordinate minister offers the head individually. In the Church, the head with his body offers the head with his body through the service of the empowered minister of head and body. Christ's sacrificial will at the last supper is not simply that his individual humanity be given atoningly to his Father, but also that his brethren, become his body and Church through atoning communion, be given and will to be given atoningly to our Father. Thus the Atoner's one atoning will integrates each consequent eucharistic offering with and in the original and originating eucharistic offering, the unique sacrifice in which the derived participation is fulfilled. The one Priest-Victim actualizes

¹ Heb 5, 19.

² Cp. Mk 10, 18; Heb 2, 11.

the individual and corporate participation of priest-sacrifice-victim in the Church. Christ's will is everlastingly in act atoningly; the series of acts on the part of the Church are the actualized participation of Christ's one everlasting act. To put it in a humanly approximate fashion, Christ willed then and goes on willing that Father X, and through Fr X, John and Jane should will what he, Christ, willed and goes on willing.

Christ has no need to make a new act of will each time the Christian Eucharist is celebrated. Christ does not need to repeat or renew his act of will for himself or for his Church. The Church does; because the Church is growing in 'at-one-ment.' As new members receive the grace of being at one with Christ in his body the Church, their willing engagement in his atoning sacrifice is expressed through the Church's Eucharist. So, too, is the engagement of those who have fallen and repented restored; and that of those growing in assimilation to Christ is reinforced and deepened. We need to be renewed in holy communion and to renew the worshipful dedication of ourselves and the integration of our lives in our ever life-giving Atoner.

PERSONAL ENGAGEMENT

We are accustomed to the order of Mass first and then Holy Communion. And, of course, the sacrament of Holy Communion follows from and on the sacrifice of the Eucharist. Our Lord first offered himself to the Father in sacrifice for us; and then, in the grace of the accepted sacrifice, he gave himself to the disciples in the sacrament. But the disciples received Holy Communion first (at the last supper); later on, united to the glorified Atoner and endued with his Holy Spirit, they joined through the Mass in his offering of the sacrifice of head and body. Plainly we must first be united with our Lord by the grace of supernatural life before we can will to give ourselves, through his further grace, with and in him to our God and Father. We are made livingly at one with the incarnate Son through the supernatural life which we receive in Baptism-Confirmation-Eucharist.

When we received the grace of Baptism and Confirmation, we may have been incapable of a fully personal response. Our reception of the sacrament of the Eucharist should be our wide-awake acceptance of the Atoner and our entire personal engagement in the incarnate person's giving of himself to us. This is what makes a personal communion of Christ's giving and the Christian's respond-

ing, through and to and in Christ's giving. This means that with all our faith and hope and love we recognize the grace of the atonement as a personal grace in the person of the Atoner.

In the incarnate person whom we receive we are receiving the empowering and fulfilling vital centre of the whole act of the atonement and of the whole sacramental economy, of all that was achieved by the Atoner in his passible life span, of all the graces we have received and shall receive. We are entering into a communion which issues from the Father, who so loves us that he gives his Son to be the atonement of our sins and our atoning life, from the Son so loving that he gives his life for us and to us, from the Spirit lovingly engendering living love in us and making us one in loving life.¹ We are entering into this communion as a communion of personal love and personal union: 'he loved me and delivered himself for me';² he loves me and delivers himself to me. And, at the same time, without any lessening of the individual personalness, it is a communion of all of us, who in Christ form one bread, one body, growing up in closer 'at-one-ness' unto the head.³

Our eucharistic communion with the Atoner effects our living and loving assimilation to him. At one with him, we are able not only to love him but to love with him. Loving with him, we are able to will our loving self-giving with him. This is our sharing in his sacrificial self-giving; and this is what we do in the Mass. In the Mass Christ, the unique Priest, wills, with his once and for all everlasting will, that the human minister and the faithful should will atoningly with him. Our assistance at Mass is our joining with the atoning will of the Atoner, through the enabling charity of the Holy Spirit, to give ourselves, with him and in him, to God our Father, as the supreme expression of our adoration and gratitude, our satisfaction and loving obedience. This is the effective expression of our atoning will to be at one with God our Father and to make all God's scattered children at one with him in the atoning incarnate Son. And, as Christ's will in the Eucharist is the self-giving will that integrates the wholeness of his loving and the entirety of his living in the totality of his giving, so should our sacrificial will in the Eucharist be an effective expression of the giving of the whole of our loving of God in all and all in God, a real consecration of all that makes up our daily living of the life we have received in love,

¹ Jn 3, 16; 1 Jn 4, 9 ff.; Jn 10, 15 ff.; Rom 5, 5; 8, 14 ff.; Gal 4, 7.

² Gal 2, 20. ³ 1 Cor 10, 17; Eph 4, 15 ff.

which we give back in love and which our Father accepts and fulfils in love in the realization of eternal life.

The atoning will that we express in eucharistic sacrament and sacrifice grows 'at-one-ingly' as through each repeated and deeper participation we are more livingly and lovingly assimilated to the Atoner. Our closer assimilation must enable us to verify this will as we live our charity in all the real personal relationships that make up our lives: 'we have come to know love, in that he laid down his life for us; and ourselves ought to lay down our lives for our brethren . . . Let us not love with word . . . but in deed and truth'.¹ We do not need to await a moment of violent death to lay down our lives in love of our Father and our brethren. The life Christ laid down on the cross was laid down in a lifelong humility and love and obedience. It is this fulfilled life that is laid down on our altar to enable us to 'eucharistize' atoningly all our living and our dying.

We proclaim the death of the Lord until he come, when we celebrate the Eucharist.² We proclaim the finish and achievement of the atoning life of the beloved Son, who laid down his life to take it up again, who died and rose from the dead the first-fruits of them that sleep.³ The Eucharist is the life-giving mystery of the ever living Atoner and his whole atoning life. It is the atoning power of our personal communion in suffering and death and resurrection and of the whole communion of saints in fulfilled atonement.

Until he come. Then, they that are Christ's shall rise at his coming; mortal bodies brought to life by his Spirit who dwells within us; bodies of our lowliness transformed to be one with the body of his glory, by the force of that power whereby he is able to subject all things to himself. And when all things shall be subject to him, then shall the Son himself be subject to the Father who subjected all things to him, that God may be all in all.⁴

¹ 1 Jn 4, 16-18.

² 1 Cor 11, 26.

³ Jn 10, 18; 1 Cor 15, 20.

⁴ 1 Cor 15, 23-28; Rom 8, 11; Phil 3, 21.