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## SACRIFICE: ITS ORIGIN AND PURPOSE

THE two questions suggested by the title of this paper converge into one; they are really two aspects of one and the same main problem. For purposes of method, however, it may be better to treat them separately.

### I

By reason of the apparent silence of Scripture, a great difficulty seems to stand in the way of the school which maintains that sacrifice was instituted by Divine authority. In the account of the first sacrifice offered by man (Genesis IV), no mention whatever is made of a Divine commandment towards this end—and though it does not preclude the possibility of such a commandment having been given, it might seem to yield itself equally well to the theory of a human origin of sacrifice.

The attempts to discover a clue to the Divine origin of sacrifice have been concentrated more or less upon the account of God's provision of coats for Adam and Eve after their fall. The material out of which these were made was skins of animals, which were slaughtered for this special purpose. Writers as distant from each other, chronologically, as S. M. Zwemer and George Stanley Faber, hold that in the slaughtering of these animals we can find the Divine prototype of the institution of sacrifice. By the shedding of the blood of those animals, God showed to the fallen man the only possible way in which he might hope to propitiate God's wrath against his sin. Zwemer, in his *Origin of Religion*, writes: ". . . the clothing which God found for Adam could only have been obtained at the cost of a life, and that the life of one unguilty. . . . Surely the mention of an occurrence so apparently trivial in the midst of a solemn history must have arisen from its association with some other transaction of higher importance, and that was none else than the institution of animal sacrifices. . . . The skin of a lamb

or a kid could not be procured without the death of the animal; and . . . the blood-stained hide of the slain beast, as it was worn on the persons of the fallen pair, would be a constant painful reminder of the death which their guilt deserved." This reference to God's furnishing coats of skins for Adam and Eve may seem to be somewhat overstrained; and, though I believe that it is very probable that the institution of sacrifice was actually connected with this act of clothing the fallen man, I admit that I find no Scriptural warrant for holding this view.

A safer way of approach is pointed out by W. P. Paterson, in his article on "Sacrifice" in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*. While himself maintaining the human origin of sacrifice, he adds in conclusion something which, to my mind, furnishes the key to the whole problem. "The theory of a divine institution", he says, "stands or falls with the theory of a primitive revelation, and this theory has even in theological schools been generally abandoned." I have no difficulty in accepting the first half of the statement, and I think that in this we have the ground on which we may hope to solve our problem. If we reject the theory of a primitive revelation to man, it is evident that by the very nature of things little or no room can be found for a Divinely ordained institution of sacrifice. The place of the original revelation is taken by the faltering struggles of man to ascend to God, and somehow, and at some time, sacrifice found its place in that effort. If, however, we accept the fact of a primitive revelation, as the Bible records it, we cannot but see that sacrifice is an indispensable factor of that revelation.

That sacrifice was included among the items of such a primitive revelation is not clearly shown in the Old Testament account of the first sacrifice: it is, however, hinted at in the New Testament account of the same event. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, Abel is numbered among the faithful of the old economy: it is said of him that "by faith he offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous". Such faith, however, necessarily pre-supposes a previous revelation regarding that ordinance, or, to put it in the words of Faber (*Horae Mosaicæ* [1818], Vol. II, pp. 244, 245), "If, by the term faith . . . be meant only a general belief or persuasion that God would accept their several oblations, it does not appear that Abel had any

more faith of this kind than Cain; for the very act of offering a sacrifice involves the persuasion of the sacrificer, that it would be acceptable". "The context shows us that the faith of the patriarchs . . . is a prospective faith in Christ." In the same work Faber says, "Since it is the standing doctrine of the Gospel, that every bloody sacrifice shadowed out the alone efficacious sacrifice of Christ, we seem from this circumstance to be inevitably brought to the conclusion, that the ordinance of piacularly devoting a victim was not the unauthorised institution of man, but that it was specially appointed by God Himself: for, had such an ordinance sprung from mere superstitious will-worship, it is difficult to conceive, either how it could be pleasing to the Supreme Being, or with what propriety it could have been so adopted into the heaven-appointed ritual of the Hebrews as to be deemed typical of the great oblation of the Messiah. . . . If, however, the ordinance of sacrifice was instituted by God . . . we are compelled to suppose that it was first instituted when expiation first became necessary . . ." and "expiation first became necessary when man first required an atonement" (Vol. II, pp. 238-240).

My conclusion on this point is—that though we do not have a specific Scriptural assertion of the Divine origin of sacrifice, it is difficult to see how the theory of its human origin can be made out to be compatible with the belief in an original revelation of God to man. On the acceptance of this original revelation, it is extremely difficult to see how, in a matter of such vital importance, God would have left man unaided to form his own religious conceptions, and to practise the *ἑθελοθησκεία*, i.e., the worship which has its source not in the revealed Will of God, but in the will of man, and which is so severely condemned by Paul in his Epistle to the Colossians. "Certainly at no other era of the Church's history", says P. Fairbairn, "did God leave His people to their own inventions, for the discovery of a suitable way of approaching Him, and giving expression to their religious feelings." And, we may add, if He has not done this at any other era of the Church's history, it is more than improbable that He would do it at a moment when more than ever man was in need of Divine guidance.

I have given at some length the arguments for the Divine origin of sacrifice. I do not intend to pass unnoticed the theories

which contend for a human origin. They are all connected, however, with the purpose which has been assigned to the institution of sacrifice. Therefore their examination figures more naturally in the second part of this Paper.

## II

A. B. Davidson distinguishes the attempts to define the purpose aimed at by sacrifice, as running on two lines, the "ethical" and what might be called the "physical" line. The two most prominent theories belonging to this latter class are the Table-Bond theory, and the Sacramental Communion theory. The latter is really a modification of the former. Chief exponent of the Table-Bond theory is A. A. Sykes in his book *Nature of Sacrifices* (1748). He contends that the efficacy of sacrifices is "the fact that eating and drinking were the known and ordinary symbols of friendship and were the usual rites in engaging in covenants and leagues". Thus, the meal which worshippers and gods shared established a firmer bond of fellowship between them. The Sacramental Communion theory is a more elaborate presentation of the former. It was upheld by J. Wellhausen and W. Robertson Smith, and it is totemistic in its basis. It is founded on the belief that certain families and clans stand in a definite blood-relationship to particular species of animals. Before I proceed to the examination of this theory, let it be said that, though its basis is thoroughly unscriptural, and further, it has been proved to be devoid of any historical truth, yet one cannot but be struck by the great importance which some of its details have for the significance of the institution of sacrifice, as seen in the light of the atoning death of Christ. This leads me to a further remark. Though I believe that the chief character of sacrifice, as ordained by God, is the propitiatory character, yet I think it would be a blunder for us to overlook the greater or lesser part of truth which is to be found in almost every one of the other theories.

The Sacramental Communion theory is a totemistic theory, and as such it is an evolutionary theory. Robertson Smith believes that he can demonstrate totemism at the root of Semitic, and in particular Hebrew, religion. By way of proof he alludes to the names of tribes, which were at the same time names of

beasts; to the distinction between clean and unclean beasts; to the taboos on foods connected therewith, etc. His interpretation of sacrifice is that the victim was the totem animal, of the same blood and the same stock as the god to whom the sacrifice was made, and as the man who made it. "If", he writes in his *Religion of the Semites*, "kinship between the gods and their worshippers, on the one hand, and kinship between the gods and certain kinds of animals, on the other, are deep-seated principles of Semitic religion, manifesting themselves in all parts of the sacred institutions of the race, we must necessarily conclude that kinship between families of men and animal kinds was an idea equally deep-seated, and we shall expect to find that sacred animals, wherever they occur, will be treated with the regard which men pay to their kinsfolk" (p. 289). "The principle of sanctity, therefore," he says further on, "and that of kinship are identical. . . . Thus the conjecture that sacrificial animals were originally treated as kinsmen, is simply equivalent to the conjecture that sacrifices were drawn from animals of a holy kind, whose lives were ordinarily protected by religious scruples and sanctions."

Generally, this animal might not be killed or eaten. But on the occasion of certain festivals the tribe gathered together, and then the totem animal, which was identical with the god, was killed, and a communal meal was made of its flesh and blood. To revert once again to the words of Robertson Smith, "The sacred function is the act of the whole community, which is conceived as a circle of brethren, united with one another and with their god by participation in one life or life-blood. The same blood is supposed to flow also in the veins of the victim, so that its death is at once a shedding of the tribal blood and a violation of the sanctity of the divine life that is transfused through every member, human or irrational, of the sacred circle". "Thus," he says, "by their participation in one communal meal, the tribesmen cement and seal their mystic unity with one another and with their god." "This cement is nothing else than the actual life of the sacred and kindred animal, which is conceived as residing in its flesh, but especially in its blood, and so, in the sacred meal . . . each of them incorporates a particle of it with his own individual life" (pp. 312, 313).

Criticism of this theory has followed a double line:

(a) It is not adequate to explain all the phenomena of sacrifice. A. B. Davidson in his *Theology of the Old Testament* rejects this theory on the ground that if sacrifice was a common sacramental meal between men and the god, we are at a loss to explain the rise of such sacrifices as the כָּלִיל (*kaliḥ*) and the עֹלָה (*'olah*)—the “Whole Burnt Offering”, which was wholly given to the deity, and of which men did not partake at all.

(b) The theory has not been able to base itself on facts. Robertson Smith did not succeed in bringing in evidence of a positive character for his theory—with the possible exception of one incident related by him from the life of St. Nilus the Hermit. According to this, the Bedawin of the Desert of Sinai, who usually lived by brigandage, hunting, and on the milk of their herds, would also kill, in case of need, some of their most precious possessions—their camels—and eat them. Only one was slaughtered for each horde, and its flesh, slightly roasted, was then eaten with dog-like greed. This, according to Robertson Smith, was a classical instance of totemic sacrifice. This kind of evidence, of course, leaves one with grave doubts. The French G. Foucart opposed the whole theory from the point of view of historical method. “And as regards St. Nilus’ camel,” he says, “I am still of the opinion that it does not deserve to have so heavy a weight as the genesis of a part of the history of religion laid on its hump.”

A thorough refutation of the application of the totemic theory to the Old Testament has been made by F. V. Zapletal, J. Nöldeke, and W. Schmidt. Even J. G. Frazer, the pioneer, so to say, of Totemism in this country, finds that the application of Totemism to the Old Testament sacrifices has not yet been proved. Of the few cases (four in all), of solemnly killing an animal, which, following Robertson Smith, Frazer has noted in his *Totemism* as probably being a totem, none included the eating of the sacred animal by the worshippers, which was an essential part of the theory. Hence, Frazer admits that he became more and more doubtful of the existence of such a practice at all. The same line is followed by E. O. James, President of the Folk-Lore Society, in his *Origins of Sacrifice*, where he says “it has yet to be proved that the Hebrews passed through a totemic stage in the evolution of their highly complex sacrificial system” (p. 47).

I have treated this theory at some length, first because, to my mind, the basis of this theory is the most hostile to the Scriptural conception of sacrifice. To say that in certain animals man recognises a kinsman of his god, and by partaking of those animals he partakes of his god himself, ~~may~~, or may not, be proved to be the case with this or that savage people, but clearly that was not the case with the origin of sacrifice, as it is represented in the Old Testament. But also, I have examined this theory at greater length because, curiously enough, it is this theory which, in some of its details, presents very close affinities with the Scriptural view of sacrifice. Let us take two instances:

(1) The first is the strong emphasis it lays on the fact that the sacrificial victim was supposed to be a blood-relation of the sacrificer. It was something of his own self that the sacrificer presented to God on the altar. He was not simply represented by, but actually identified with, the victim. And only in so far as this identification was real had his sacrifice any value. . . . Now, this is the true conception of the sacrifice of Christ. Only in so far as we are identified with Him can His sacrifice have any value for us. The so-called objective theories of the Atonement are sometimes so represented as to leave this factor rather vague. The result is to make of the Atonement a mechanical device, lying outside man, which is brought in to meet the problem of man's sin. Take Anselm's theory of the Atonement. Anselm has undoubtedly the glory of being the first to formulate in a systematic theory the Godward aspect of the Atonement. But one of the more thorough criticisms that have been brought against his theory is that he makes of the Son of God a *Deus ex machina*, who suddenly steps in to offer His services. Anselm, quite satisfactorily, proves that sinners can offer no satisfaction to God. Equally satisfactory is the demonstration that none other save God incarnate can fulfil the requirements of such a satisfaction as is demanded. For this great service the Son of God is available. Yet Anselm is not at all clear as to the relation of the Son of God to humanity. He does not represent the Son of God to be related to humanity with such eternal bonds of relationship as make, for example, the *Logos* of Athanasius the natural representative of mankind. He misses the fact that, by means of the Incarnation, it was a Man who died on the Cross, and that

the Atonement is accepted on the ground that all have died in Him. In so far, therefore, as this theory holds that, in the sacrificial victim, the sacrificer recognises part of his own "ego", it helps one to understand the real ground on which the atoning Sacrifice of Christ can be effective.

(2) A second point of interest in this theory is the double view it takes of the blood of the victim. The sacrifice, it maintains, is a meal, in which not only God, but man also partakes. Interpret as you may God's participation in the meal, there remains the other party to be considered—man. Man, by participating in the meal, partakes, as we saw, of the very life of God. There can be no doubt that there is a double view of the Blood of Jesus Christ as being shed for us. The first, the propitiatory view, has an exclusively God-ward meaning. It is, so to say, the Blood of His Death, the expiatory Blood. But there is the other view of the Blood, the one to which our Lord pointed, when He said, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you". This is the Blood of His Life. And unless we participate in this too, the work of redemption is not fully operative in us.

### III

I shall now examine, as shortly as possible, some of the so-called "ethical" theories of Sacrifice. Very prominent among these is the Gift theory. The sacrifice is conceived as a gift which is presented to God with the anticipation that it will be received with pleasure and gratitude. A chief or a king is approached with gifts, and a god expects the same treatment. Chief exponent of this view is G. B. Gray, who holds that the idea of a gift was consciously associated to a great extent with sacrifice, in the history of Hebrew religion. Some sacrifices, he says, are gifts pure and simple, such as were the offerings of Cain and Abel. The very word used of their offering מְנִחָה (*minḥah*) from the root מָנַח (*manah*), "to lend", "to give as a gift", suggests this idea. Gray, however, is careful not to press his theory too far. He admits that there are cases in the sacrifices of Israel which cannot be interpreted by means of the Gift theory. When a man slays an animal, and gives small portions to God, while he and his friends eat

the larger part, the whole proceeding is obviously something more than, or rather other than, the simple presentation of a gift to God. Another objection to the adequacy of the Gift theory to explain all sacrifices is furnished by Professor Paterson, who rightly says that the blood, which figures so prominently in sacrificial ritual, can scarcely have been selected as a desirable gift.

Of course there is a noble, as well as a base, conception of sacrifice as being a gift offered to God: and we find both conceptions in the Old Testament. They depend on a high and low conception of the Deity respectively. There is the conception of the Deity as being a nature-spirit, or an ancestral God, or a fetish, which needs what is given to it. Here the gift offered to God takes the form of a bribe given to ensure one's safety, or to secure certain favours. And this is the target against which the prophets addressed their criticism in connection with the system of sacrifices. It was the abuse of the cult which they condemned, not its use. What they condemned was the heathenish idea that "all God needed was gifts, lavish gifts, and would condone any sin if only they bestowed abundance of gifts". The other conception of sacrifice as a gift is to be found in what is called the "honorific offerings". Those are the free-will offerings in grateful recognition of the goodness and beneficence of the Deity. Some of the sacrifices of the Old Testament, especially the offerings of the first fruits, etc., cannot be adequately explained except by means of this theory. This thought is behind that beautiful prayer which was offered when the basket of new fruit was brought to the Temple: "I profess unto Thee this day, that I am come into the land which the Lord sware unto our fathers to give us." .

Closely connected with this "honorific offering" theory is the so-called "homage theory" of sacrifice, in which an important element for the right conception of the sacrifice of Christ is to be found. On this view, man was impelled to seek closer communion with God, not out of a sense of guilt, but rather out of a desire to acknowledge his dependence and profess his obedience. To give expression to these devout feelings, he made use of the language of action, which, as Professor Paterson says, is more powerful than the language of speech. This theory has been maintained chiefly by W. Warburton and F. D. Maurice. Both A. B. Davidson and Paterson

bring against this theory the objection which in a greater degree has been brought against the expiatory theory of sacrifice, that it assumes ideas in the mind of primitive man which belong to an advanced period of ethical reflection. I think we can dismiss this criticism as untenable. The feeling of dependence on the Supreme Being, whatever conception one may have had of Its substance and form, coupled with the feeling of gratitude for Its benevolence, is, to my mind, just the feeling that would be expected to creep into the heart of man in his child-age. This "homage" theory sheds, I think, some light on one particular aspect of the sacrifice of Christ—the aspect of His obedience. It is neither easy nor desirable to disconnect Christ's death from His life. There can be no doubt that His atoning sacrifice consisted in His death; but that death cannot be fully appreciated unless it is viewed from the angle of His life, which was a life of full dependence on the Father, and which therefore was a sacrifice of homage and obedience to God offered on the part of man. This aspect is emphasised in the Epistle to the Hebrews—that sacrificial book of the New Testament—and it is stressed, or rather overstressed, by B. F. Westcott in his exposition of that Epistle.

#### IV

And now I come to the last, and what, I have no doubt, the Scriptures hold to be the most important aspect of sacrifice, that is, its propitiatory character. To enter into a full discussion of that propitiatory character would necessitate a full examination of the problem of the Atonement. I shall confine myself, therefore, to the examination of the question whether the sacrifices of the Old Testament bear this character of propitiation, and what, in general lines, this character implies.

As has already been said, the *a priori* objection has been brought against this theory that it attributes to man a knowledge of God far in advance of his childhood. "The expiatory theory", says Paterson, "credits man with a sense of sin, and with a valuation of death as the wages of sin, which belong to a later period of spiritual development." What is radically wrong with that type of objection is that we assume to dictate to the childhood of man what conceptions it is capable of

forming about God, about itself, and the world, and what it is not. This, however, is arbitrary, and on more than one occasion it has led to erroneous conclusions. If the first chapters of Genesis are trustworthy records of events which actually took place, there can remain no doubt that man from the very first was in a most solemn way put face to face with the problem of evil and its far-reaching consequences. If sin is to be traced to an original fall of man from his state of innocence, and not to be conceived of as the unfortunate remnants of his semi-animal existence, then there can remain no doubt that He Who directed the hand of man to slaughter his first sacrifice, put in his heart also, in however elementary a way, the germs of the ultimate meaning of that sacrifice.

When we pass, however, into the Mosaic period, we see clearly that there this expiatory character of sacrifice is prominent. The very names of the two most important sacrifices of this period serve as clues to the meaning which was put on sacrifice, at least at the Mosaic period. Terminology is not always a safe guide, but when it is used with discretion and with due reference to the other factors of the problem, it can be made to yield some useful results. The names of these two sacrifices are *חַטָּאת* (*hattath*) and *אֲשָׁם* (*asham*). The first is rendered in the English Bible by "sin offering", the second by "trespass offering". There can be no doubt about the character and aim of these two great sacrifices. In the death of the beast there was sought a vicarious expiation of the sins of the offerer. This is made very clear by the original meaning of these two Hebrew terms. To render them as "sin offering" and "trespass offering" is an accommodation to the needs of the language, but it does not do full justice to the meaning of the words. In fact, the first word originally means not "sin offering" but "sin", and the second not "trespass offering", but "offence" or "guilt". The Septuagint is more accurate, as it has tried to retain the original meaning of the terms, and renders them *ἁμαρτία* and *πλημμέλεια*. Now this brings us to the heart of the meaning of that kind of sacrifice. The victim on the altar was not, in the literal meaning of the words, a sin offering, or a trespass offering; it was the personification itself of the sin of the offerer. This reminds us, on the one hand, of the Sacramental Communion theory, which stresses the fact that by means of the common blood which was flowing

in the veins of both the offering and the offerer, the offerer was conceived as shedding his own blood on the altar; and, on the other hand, of expressions used in the New Testament by which Christ is represented as having been made not merely a sin offering for us, but our sin itself. That complete identification of ourselves with Christ on the Cross is the only possible clue to a clear conception of the meaning of His atoning sacrifice, and the mystery of its effectiveness. This double identification of ourselves with Christ is set forth very vividly in the fifth chapter of the second Epistle to the Corinthians, where in verse 21 the Apostle says that God "made Him to be sin for us, Who knew no sin", after he had said in verse 14 that "if One died for all, then were all dead".

*Edinburgh.*

G. A. HADJANTONIOU.