

The Texts of the Convivium

THE TRIDENTINE MASS OF SAINT PIUS V AND THE NEW MASS OF PAUL VI

There is very few reading-matter that makes me feel so solidly behind, and even better, the Church of today, than those booklets of the magazine "La Tradizione Cattolica" (The Catholic Tradition) published by the followers of monsignor Marcel Lefebvre. It contains an entire contentestation of the Vatican Council II. And there is nothing like this criticism to persuade me to thank the Holy Spirit for having given us the grace of this Council, its valued documents and many well inspired initiatives related to it.

I would like to draw attention to a long article by don Davide Pagliarani, who, in n. 2 of the year XIV (2003) contests the new Mass of Paul VI. As far as the *Novus Ordo Missae* is concerned, which replaces the Tridentian Mass of saint Pius V, the author reproaches it for belittling the role of the *propitiatory sacrifice* from the Eucharistic celebration: sacrifice offered to God, renewing, in a symbolic and bloodless, although very real manner, the passion of Christ.

What is the reason for this kind of sacrifice? God the Creator is the supreme rule of good and evil, therefore He is also the judge. According to a more traditional concept of what is right, man's sin should be expiated in sufferance. Only this kind of *expiation* can re-balance the scales of justice. Now a sin that offends God, the infinite Being, is therefore in itself infinite, therefore only expiable through the sacrifice of a divine Person: of that second Person of the Trinity who becomes man and dies on the Cross. Only in this manner does God receive His *satisfaction*, and can therefore forgive men the sinners restoring them into His grace.

The idea of sacrifice of propitiation achieved through the offering of a victim appears in the phenomenology of the most varied religions. This victim replaces man, thus exonerating him from expiating his sin in first person.

If sin is not expiated in some way or other, justice is disappointed. On the basis of what phenomenologies of primitive-archaic religiousness refer, I would hasten to add an observation here: these populations think that the lack of punishment, or lack of revenge brings bad luck.

Don Pagliarani compares the severity of God in whom he believes to that of a father who punishes his son's failings: "...He forces a sacrifice upon him, he deprives him of a toy, a source of well-being, a bit of freedom". But what for? The Author explains: "To re-balance the damaged justice, since his son has misused something before. This misuse is compensated by the deprivation of the use of a determined object" (p. 15).

This is what happens, even more so, "in the relationship between man and God in Which the victim of the sacrifice expiates the abuse thus restoring justice" (ibidem).

If I may here start off some critical reflection, I would say that judging God is nevertheless temerarious, given the unfathomable mystery that surrounds Him, whereas judging a man who acts in that certain way appears much easier.

A respectable father takes immense care to see that his son grows up well and has all good things in life. Needless to say, the son needs to be corrected when he makes mistakes. Perhaps in many cases he may need some advice, perhaps even reprimanding, just enough to put him back on the straight and narrow. It may sometimes be necessary

to punish him: but always as a corrective means, definitely not to re-balance the scales of justice! A father – and, even worse, a mother – that worries above all about providing a counterweight to the famous scales would, more than anything else, need the services of a psychoanalyst, if not a psychiatrist.

However, let's go back to the exposition, although concise, of the thought under examination. The offer of sacrifice, to be pleasing to God and therefore efficacious in propitiating His forgiveness and favour, should be carried out according to all the good rules. They are rules that have been laid down from high above and formulated, in detail, by he who exerts a legitimate authority. With the aim of avoiding mistakes, it is necessary for the ritual action to be entrusted to competent persons, who are not only qualified but well worthy of such a high office, opportunely chosen.

And so here we have the figure of the *priest*, who has been exclusively delegated to carry out the sacrifice. The priest is precisely the sacrificer. Between the Divinity and the people he is the intermediary, the *medium*. Before God he represents the people, he is their ambassador. He offers the sacrifice during a prayer that is strictly priestly. He is the only one who, in the name of the people, speaks with God.

The priest, in a human language, expresses what escapes human comprehension. Here a *sacred language* is used, like Latin in the Western Church, or an antiquated and obsolete oriental language, or Koranic Arabic, or Hebrew of the Torah. (One may ask, incidentally: are the languages given here as examples *always* been antiquated or obsolete? Were they not, in the beginning, alive and in current use?).

In the central moments of the ritual the priest speaks in a low voice, so that the mysterious content of the speech should not be misunderstood by he who may listen in distractedly with a profane mind.

The Council of Trent says that the central part of the Mass, the Canon "established by the Church", is "so pure of any error that it knows nothing but that which has the utmost odour of saintliness and mercy and which raises the minds of those who offer it" (*Concilium Tridentinum*, sess. 22, chap. 4). The Council is decidedly against the idea that the Canon could be modified even only partially.

The sacrifice of the Mass is offered by the priest to God in an intimate conversation that takes place between the two. In my opinion this reminds one of the intimacy and secrecy of the conversation that took place between God and Moses on the top of Mount Sinai (Ex 19, 16-24; 24, 1-18; 25, 8-22; 34, 1-9 and 29-35). There the Prophet spoke with God in the name of the people, who did not, however, take any part in this meeting. It is in this spirit that the priest of the Tridentian Mass speaks to God in the name of a multitude, or of a small group of people, to whom his back is turned.

Don Pagliarani accuses the new Mass of having seriously penalized the sacrificial aspect. What was essentially seen in the Tridentian Mass was the renewing, in a nevertheless bloodless form, of the passion of Christ. In the more traditional concept the sacrifice of Mass renews that of Jesus on the Calvary. Today, on the contrary, in the Mass one sees the memorial, the recollection, therefore the symbolic (and although real) renewal of the entire life of the Divine Master: not only of His passion and death on the cross, but of His resurrection and ascension to heaven and, one may say, of His incarnation as a whole. (In other words, I would like to add, of the total giving to us of God incarnate). The new Mass does not stop at consecrating the body and blood of Christ, but it actively, communitarily, liturgically evokes the whole mystery together.

I fully agree with this idea. Frankly speaking, I am not very fond of this figure of God, which at all costs demands the *expiation* of sin – that suitable expiation that can only be given by His crucified Son – I find it borders on the limits of being repulsive.

This way of representing the Supreme Being clearly appears to be archaic. Leviticus and Deuteronomy prescribe a whole variety of expiatory sacrifices; however, this is a

decidedly obsolete edition of the long and complex biblical tradition, which the New Testament rightly turns its back on.

The idea of an *expiatory sacrifice*, and of a priesthood that has been accordingly conceived, nevertheless leaves some trace. Let us read, for example, the Epistles of the Hebrews, where the perfection and everlasting validity of the sole sacrifice and supreme priesthood of Jesus Christ are proclaimed, in contrast to what one might say about the ancient Jewish priesthood and its sacrifice of animals.

Needless to say, I have nothing against the idea of *sacrifice* in itself: of sacrifice as such, that does not necessarily have to be *expiatory*. *Expiation* is what sounds irksome, distasteful to me. *Sacrifice* is the act of offering something one possesses, or, even better, something of oneself. In his unconditioned willingness the saint nevertheless offers to sacrifice himself, whether in an act of martyrdom with the most atrocious death, or, on the contrary, being destined to a hard-working life through a long series of calm and peaceful days.

In this sense, *tout court* sacrifice means totally donating oneself, it means giving up every form of egotism, it means dying to every personal ambition in order to make oneself a pure instrument and vessel of the divine will, a pure angel of God.

As far as sufferance is concerned, it seems that each one of us inevitably has his own form of sufferance, in every condition, including even the less apparent one. Therefore, each one of us can offer to God not so much *one's own sufferance* – so as to speak, in my opinion, in an improper manner: is there not anything more pleasant we can donate? – as rather our *victory* over sufferance, achieved in serenely bearing our sufferance, which is the triumph of mind over matter.

The letters of the apostle Paul say that every true Christian dies with Christ to rise up again with Him (1 Cor 15, 20-22; Gal 5, 24; Rom 6, 1-11; Col 2, 12-13; 3, 1-3; 2 Tim 2, 11). However, here we are in the concept of that *ascesis* which all traditions deem to be essential so that man can rise to the perfection of the spirit. This has always been very much present in Christianity itself, right from the very beginning (Mt 11, 7-15; Lk 7, 24-28; 1 Cor 9, 24-27; Col 3, 5; Eph 6, 10-13; 1 Tim 4, 7-11).

He who wishes to be totally of God and receive all good from Him has to die to himself: this is *initiation death*. The idea of *propitiatory sacrifice* has by now been left far behind.

The Mass is the reunion of an assembly of Christians around Jesus Christ, who materializes in the midst of them making himself present in the truest and most tangible manner. Therefore, even after centuries have passed, they come to living with Him like the men of His times who met him in Palestine did.

Don Pagliarani complains that the *sacrificial* Mass has more essentially become a *meeting*. However, it is absolutely right. The Christians meet Christ and relive the entire earthly event, because He is once again amongst them.

Represented by the priest who heads the assembly, Christ becomes incarnate, through him, amongst his “disciples” and “friends”.

He makes Himself present in the bread and wine and the faithful feed on Him, in the same way as the vine-shoots absorb the lymph of the vines (Jn 6, 26-58; 15, 1-7). And it is by feeding on Him that they gradually grow to reach His stature (Col 2, 19; Eph 2, 21-22; 4, 13-15).

Not only the priest, but the whole community forms an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. The community becomes an *assembly*, of which the priest is the *chairman*. It is the ecclesiastical assembly that praises and honours God and welcomes His renewed incarnation. Renewed every time the Eucharist is celebrated: every rite is a *memorizing of the event* and, at the same time, a *replication of it*. In order to do this in

the most in keeping and efficacious manner, the rite has to be tuned in to the highest level of devotion possible in this circumstance.

The priest is no longer the only sacrificer, since the agent of the sacrifice – in other words, of the donation of the faithful to God the incarnate associated to the total donation of God Himself – it is the assembly as such, as a whole. Nevertheless, the priest presides over the celebration so that everyone may take part with the utmost fervour.

He who manages the act of worship makes sure it is carried out in the form that is most easily understood by the particular category of people that are involved.

Don Pagliarani says that the Mass always has the same value despite the different ways in which it is celebrated. From a certain point of view, this could very well be true, if one considers the pure divine action in the Mass. However, there is a human aspect, that clearly synthesizes with this divine action, contributing to the greater or lesser level and degree of sacrificial intensity and efficaciousness that the celebration can reach.

This is why, although to the disappointment of our Author, the priest-chairman “animates, stimulates, coordinates, assigns each one his part in order to make the assembly aware, alive and working” (p. 23).

It is for the same reason that the Mass opens with an initial hymn. This introduces the souls to the mystery of the liturgy and above all unites those present by making them sing together.

Don Pagliarani deplors that the real liturgist today is not he who thoroughly knows the rites, but rather one who knows how to animate, knows how to capture everyone’s attention by playing on what the group of participants is most sensitive to. Although our Author is extremely unwilling to follow this logic, it is clear that things change in different cases if the participants are aborigines, or civilised elderly people, or children. It would be better for the former if the rite also took place through dancing and drums. The elderly would prefer a more simple celebration. Whereas, something that had a greater influence on their feelings and imagination would help the children. Furthermore, it would be better if the rite were not repetitive any more than is strictly necessary, having, instead, that aspect of creativity making it more spontaneous and alive.

In making Himself man amongst us humans, God meets with each one of us, donating Himself according to the receptiveness of each one of us. It is what better suits the ever new incarnation of God in the celebration of the holy Eucharistic Liturgy.