

## **The Blood of Jesus and His Heavenly Priesthood in Hebrews**

### Part II: The High-Priestly Sacrifice of Christ

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#### HISTORICAL VIEWS OF THE HEAVENLY SACRIFICE OF CHRIST

The view that it is in heaven, rather than on earth, that our High Priest offers the sacrifice of Himself was propounded in the seventeenth century by the Socinians on the basis of their own characteristic interpretation of Hebrews 9:12-14, which speaks of Christ's entry into the heavenly sanctuary and of His offering of Himself to God. There is no mention here, they argue, of the offering of His blood or of the cross, and this is sufficient for them to conclude that this self-oblation of Christ takes place, not on earth, but in the heavenly sanctuary. John Owen objects, however, that it was precisely in the offering of His blood that Christ offered Himself, and to suggest that the sacrifice of Christ took place or takes place in heaven "utterly overthrows the whole nature of his sacrifice"; furthermore, our redemption is everywhere constantly in the Scripture assigned unto the blood of Christ and that alone — Eph. i. 7; Col. i. 14; 1 Pet. i. 18, 19; Rev. v. 9."<sup>1</sup> As Owens observes, nowhere is the appearance of Christ in heaven called His sacrifice or offering of Himself. The Socinian interpretation destroys the analogy of the tabernacle ceremonial, in accordance with which the sacrifice at the altar preceded the entry into the holy of holies; it overthrows the true notion and nature of the priesthood of Christ; indeed, it robs the incarnation of its primary purpose, the substitutionary atonement accomplished at Cal-

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<sup>1</sup> John Owen, *An Exposition to the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia, 1869), VI, 277.

vary.<sup>2</sup> And it does violence to the text, which declares that it was after he had secured (εὐράμενος, aorist) our eternal redemption, and through or by virtue of (διὰ) His own blood shed on the cross, that He entered into the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 9:12).

In Hebrews 9:24-26 one reads: "Christ has entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly ... ; for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." Does this passage teach a self-oblation of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary? Delitzsch, in company with a number of other German scholars (Tholuck, De Wette, Ebrard, Lunemann), holds that the offering spoken of here "cannot be the self-sacrifice of Christ upon earth, but a self-presentation subsequent to that."<sup>3</sup> It is plain that, unlike the Socinians, Delitzsch has no desire to bypass the cross and that he is postulating a distinction between the decisive act of His sacrifice of Himself at Calvary and a subsequent presentation of Himself on our behalf in the heavenly, sphere.

Another view, which is similar only in incidental respects and which is advocated in the main by Anglo-Catholic and Roman Catholic scholars, is that in the heavenly sanctuary a perpetual sacrificial offering by Christ of Himself takes place. This interpretation is commonly linked with a particular doctrine of eucharistic sacrifice taking place simultaneously here on earth. It is argued, further, on the basis of Hebrews 8:3, according to which "every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices," so that "it is necessary for this priest (the ascended Lord ministering in the true tabernacle, 8:1-2) also to have something to offer," that if Christ is not offering sacrifice He cannot fulfill the priestly function, and that therefore His role in heaven must be that of a constantly sacrificing priest. Because of the emphatic teaching of the New Testament, and not least the Epistle to the Hebrews, regarding the final once-for-all character of Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross, it is hardly open to anyone to suggest that in heaven He offers an atoning sacrifice other than that which He offered on the cross; consequently the explanation is proposed that it is a perpetual offering of this same sacrifice that takes place in the heavenly sanctuary.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., VI, 301.

<sup>3</sup> Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, trans. by Thomas L. Kingsbury (3rd ed.; Edinburgh, 1887), II, 264.

The concept, however, is much confused. Not only are the suffering and death of the cross unrepeatable, but they are also unprolongable. Christ lives to suffer and die no more. Therefore what is conceived of as a self-offering in heaven cannot be the same thing as the self-offering on earth. At most it is the presentation of a *fait accompli*. It is the efficacy of the one offering made at Calvary, not the offering itself, which is perpetual. But the concept of the offering of an atoning sacrifice in the heavenly sanctuary would seem to a considerable degree to be dictated by an *a priori* notion of the eucharist as, so to speak, an extension of Calvary in one's earthly sanctuary. The so-called "sacrifice of the altar," though bloodless, is seen as one, sacramentally, with the sacrifice of the cross. The immolation of the sacred victim takes place not so much again and again (though phenomenally this would seem to be so) as perpetually, and corresponds to and is simultaneous with the sacrifice continuously being offered in heaven. Christ, apparently, has been cast in the part of a eucharistic priest sacrificing in the sanctuary above. And the scene has become further confused by the revival of the notion of the eucharistic "offertory," in which the offerings of human life and labor, symbolized by the presentation of the everyday elements of bread and wine, are supposedly united with Christ's unique offering and thereby made acceptable to God.

Although the doctrine of eucharistic sacrifice is not recent, the concept of Christ's continuous sacerdotal self-sacrifice in the heavenly sanctuary seems to have been developed only in modern times. Thomas Aquinas, for example, makes a precise distinction between the actual offering of the sacrifice of Christ and its consummation, between the event of the sacrifice and the purpose and effect of the sacrifice. Of the ceremonial of the Day of Atonement under the levitical system he says:

It is noteworthy that the goat and the calf were slain, not in the holy of holies, but outside. Likewise Christ has entered into the holy of holies, that is, into heaven, furnishing a way of entry for us by the power of his own blood which he shed for us here on earth.

"The passion and death of Christ are never to be repeated," but "the efficacy of his sacrifice remains for ever."<sup>4</sup> Aquinas defends the description of the eucharist as a sacrifice by invoking the Augustinian

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* iii. 22. 5.

principle that the images of things are called by the names of the things of which they are the images: "the celebration of this sacrament is an image representing Christ's suffering, which is his true sacrifice; accordingly the celebration of this sacrament is called Christ's sacrifice." And on this same basis it is equally true to say "that Christ was sacrificed even in the figures of the Old Testament"; hence the declaration of the New, that He is "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8).<sup>5</sup> The notion of a perpetual sacerdotal self-offering by Christ in heaven is unknown to Aquinas. This is evident from the quotation just given: it would be impossible, with reference to the Old Testament figures, to imagine a self-sacrifice in the heavenly sanctuary when Christ had not only not yet entered the heavenly sanctuary as high priest but also had not yet offered up Himself on earth; and it is also evident from the commentary of Aquinas on Hebrews 9:24 ("Christ has entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf"), where, so far from indicating any such opinion, he says:

The Apostle is alluding to the ritual of the old law, according to which the high priest, when he entered the holy of holies, stood before the mercy-seat in order that he might pray for the people; so also Christ entered into heaven, insofar as he is man, in order that he might be the advocate before God (*ut astartet Deo*) for our salvation.<sup>6</sup>

Early in the sixteenth century we find Jacques Lefevre d'Etaples (Faber Stapulensis) speaking, in his commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, of a perpetual self-offering of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary (on 9:2 4 ff.): "After once entering into the holy of holies above, he continues in the presence of God offering himself without intermission for all who are to be saved even to the end of the world."<sup>7</sup> At first sight this seems like a departure from the doctrine of Aquinas, but in fact in commenting on 7:26 ff., Lefevre propounds a view which is entirely in harmony with that of Aquinas. Stressing that it was by one offering that Christ made satisfaction for the sins of the whole world, an offering "more powerful than the innumerable victims offered with endless repetition" (*potentior innumeris infinitis iteratis*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, iiii. 83. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Aquinas *Epistola ad Hebraeos* ix. 5 (Opera Omnia [Parmae, Italy, 1862], XIII, 743).

<sup>7</sup> Jacques Lefevre d'Etaples, *Commentariorum in Epistolas Beatissimi Pauli Liber* (2nd ed.; Paris, 1515), p. 245a.

*hostiis*) under the former dispensation, he affirms that "those things which are performed daily in the ministry of his priesthood [that is, in the eucharist] are not repetitions of his offering but rather the remembrance and recollection (*memoria ac recordatio*) of that one same victim who was offered once only," in conformity with the command, "do this in remembrance of me."<sup>8</sup> This indicates an agreement between Lefevre and Aquinas regarding the perpetual virtue and efficacy of Christ's one sacrifice offered not in heaven but on earth, and consequently the self-offering in heaven spoken of in the former quotation must be taken to mean Christ's presentation of Himself in the presence-chamber of the sanctuary above as our advocate and intercessor.

It is worthy of note that in the Roman Catholic position officially formulated at the Council of Trent in the mid-sixteenth century no doctrine of a continuous high-priestly offering in the heavenly sanctuary is propounded. The Tridentine fathers do no more than mention the heavenly session of Christ. Thus the Decree on the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist states:

In the first place the holy synod teaches and openly and simply professes that, in the august sacrament of the holy eucharist, after the consecration of the bread and wine, our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and man, is truly, really, and substantially contained under the species of those sensible things. For neither are these things mutually repugnant — that our Saviour himself always sits at the right hand of the Father in heaven, according to the natural mode of existing, and that, nevertheless, he is sacramentally present to us in his own substance in many other places ...<sup>9</sup>

Again, in the Doctrine on the Sacrifice of the Mass, it is declared:

He, therefore, our God and Lord, though he was about to offer himself once on the altar of the cross to God the Father, there by means of his death to effect an eternal redemption; nevertheless, because his priesthood was not to be extinguished by his death, in the Last Supper, on the night in which he was betrayed, that he might leave to his own beloved spouse the Church a visible sacrifice, such as the nature of man requires, whereby that bloody sacrifice, once to be accomplished on the cross, might be represented and its memory remain even to the end of the world and its salutary virtue be applied for the remission of those sins which we daily commit — declaring himself constituted a priest for ever, according to the

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239a.

<sup>9</sup> Council of Trent: Session xiii. 1.

order of Melchizedek, he offered up to God the Father his own body and blood under the species of bread and wine ...<sup>10</sup>

The Catcheism of the Council of Trent adds nothing to this teaching. Consequently it is clear that officially Roman Catholicism envisages the continuing priesthood of the glorified Christ as finding its fulfilment in the daily offering on earth of the sacrifice of the mass, which is regarded as one with that of Calvary.

The controversy between John Jewel, Bishop of Salisbury, and the Roman Catholic apologist Thomas Harding took place at a time immediately following on the conclusion of the Council of Trent. Harding wished to maintain the precarious position that "Christ offered and sacrificed his body and blood twice: first, in that holy supper unbloodily, . . . and afterward on the cross, with shedding of his blood";<sup>11</sup> and he postulated, further, a third offering in heaven, simultaneously with that on earth, thereby teaching the offering of the sacrifice in heaven even before the entry of Christ into the heavenly sanctuary, though thereafter it is explained as continuing for ever. He writes as follows:

And at the very same instant of time (which is here further to be added as a necessary point of Christian doctrine) we must understand that Christ offered himself in heaven invisibly (as concerning man) in the sight of his heavenly Father; and that from that time forward that oblation of Christ in heaven was never intermitted, but continueth always for our atonement with God, and shall without ceasing endure unto the end of the world.<sup>12</sup>

As, however, Harding goes on to explain that by the continually enduring oblation of Christ in heaven "we understand the virtue of his oblation on the cross ever enduring [and] not the oblation itself with renewing of pain and sufferance continued," and as, moreover, he points out that on earth "we do perpetually celebrate this oblation and sacrifice of Christ's very body and blood in the mass, in remembrance of him, commanded so to do until his coming,"<sup>13</sup> it would appear that after all his position is not radically different from that of Aquinas, who, as we have seen, also emphasizes the ever enduring virtue of the sacrifice offered at Calvary and the eucharist as a remembrance of this unique oblation.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, Session xxii. 1.

<sup>11</sup> *The Works of John Jewel*, ed. John Ayre (Cambridge, 1847), II, 717.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 718.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 719.

Some years later another and more famous Roman Catholic scholar, Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621), insisted that the concept of Christ's everlasting priesthood demanded that He should always be offering sacrifice. He writes, with reference to Heb. 7:27 (cf. 9:25-26):

When Paul says that there was no necessity for Christ to offer himself frequently he is obviously speaking of the bloody oblation, which was fully sufficient (*sufficientissima*), indeed of infinite cost and worth. Other oblations were and are repeated because they are of finite worth. With respect, however, to the eternal priesthood of Christ, it is necessary that he should frequently offer, by himself or by his ministers, not indeed in a bloody manner, but in some other manner.<sup>14</sup>

For this opinion he cites the authority of Hebrews 8:3 ("For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; hence it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer"), from which, he holds, it necessarily follows that "Christ is not a high priest for ever unless he offers something assiduously" and that "it is not enough that he once offered himself in a bloody manner." How, then, does He continuously offer Himself? "Without doubt," Bellarmine answers, "in the most sacred eucharist," the sacrament which He instituted and now celebrates daily by His ministers.<sup>15</sup> His heavenly intercession, further, is explained as taking place through the offering of sacrifice, the sacrifice, namely, of the eucharist, "which is continually (*jugiter*) offered by Christ to God through human ministry."<sup>16</sup> It is apparent, therefore, that for Bellarmine as for Aquinas the notion of a perpetual offering of sacrifice by Christ means the specific concept of eucharistic offering here on earth, not a continuous self-oblation in heaven.

As has been remarked, the Socinians taught that Christ's high-priestly function, including His offering of Himself, had its commencement not on earth but on His entry into the heavenly sanctuary. Teaching very much to the same effect has become current again in the present day, though its advocates otherwise have little if any sympathy for the distinctive opinions of Socinianism. At the beginning of this century, for example, Charles Gore wrote, with ref-

<sup>14</sup> Roberto Francesco Romolo Bellarmino *De Missa* i. 6 (pp. 733-34).

<sup>15</sup> Roberto Francesco Romolo Bellarmino *De Sacramento Eucharistiae* vi. 15 (p. 643).

<sup>16</sup> Bellarmino *De Missa* i. 6 (p. 735).

erence to the doctrine of the Epistle to the Hebrews, that in the sacrificial ritual of the Day of Atonement,

the moment of offering and of atonement was not the moment of the slaying of the victim, but that of the entrance of the high priest with the blood of the victims into the most holy place to sprinkle it upon the mercy seat.<sup>17</sup>

In accordance with this interpretation, he concluded that in the Epistle to the Hebrews all that goes before the ascension is the preparation of Christ for His priestly work. . . . It is at His entrance into heaven, and not upon the cross, that He accomplishes His atonement for us, according to the Epistle to the Hebrews; and His work as high priest, which begins with His entrance into heaven, is perpetual.<sup>18</sup>

The Englishman, Gore, was, apparently, to some degree indebted to the Scottish scholar, A. B. Davidson, for these views, though it is hardly likely that Davidson would have found himself in agreement with the manner in which they were developed, in particular eucharistically, by Gore. In his commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews (published in 1882) Davidson had declared that it was certain "that all the Son's priestly acts in heaven belong to the sphere of His Melchizedec priesthood,"<sup>19</sup> and that it was doubtful "if the Epistle anywhere regards the Son's death considered merely in itself as a priestly act."<sup>20</sup> It is the Son's entry into heaven, he says, which "is the culminating point of His atoning sacrifice, — is strictly the atoning point itself." At the same time he insists that "the idea that in any sense He repeats the offering of Himself, or that He continues it, is wholly absent from the Epistle."<sup>21</sup>

This line of interpretation which, in combination with the doctrine of eucharistic sacrifice, has become characteristic of much contemporary Anglo-Catholic theology, was elaborated and systematized by F. C. N. Hicks in his book *The Fullness of Sacrifice* (1930). Hicks is severely critical of "the habit of interpreting the Cross as the ultimate Christian altar."<sup>22</sup> Indeed, he maintains that the world which the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the other writers of the New Testament had in mind was one "in which such an error as

<sup>17</sup> Charles Gore, *The Body of Christ* (London, 1901), p. 252.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 252-53.

<sup>19</sup> A. B. Davidson, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Edinburgh, n.d.), p. 150.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153; cf. also pp. 196-203.

<sup>22</sup> F. C. N. Hicks, *The Fullness of Sacrifice* (3rd ed.; London, 1946), p. 235.



the equating of sacrifice with death would have been inconceivable."<sup>23</sup> "The rule is," he contends, "that the work of the priest, as priest, does not begin until after the death" of the victim that is slain. In his view, then, "the Cross is not itself the Sacrifice," though it has its place in the sacrificial action and sequence; and it is not until the entry into the heavenly sanctuary that the effective work of sacrifice is performed.<sup>24</sup> Following the lead given by Milligan and Westcott, Hicks postulates the identification of the blood that is shed with the life of the victim (released and made available in the act of blood-shedding) and affirms that "the blood, in fact, needs to be dissociated from the idea of death," indeed deplors "the fatal identification between sacrifice and death."<sup>25</sup> This disjunction of blood-shedding from the notion of death is fundamental to his argument, though, as it has been seen, it is consonant with the usage neither of the Epistle to the Hebrews nor of the rest of Scripture. In Hicks' perspective, however, when the New Testament speaks of the redeeming property of the blood of Christ the reference is entirely to the high-priestly work that is being carried on in heaven and not to what took place on earth at Calvary.

It is indeed by the precious blood of Christ that we have been redeemed, but the blood is "like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Peter 1:18-19); that is to say, the focus is in reality on the act of blood-shedding which took place when Christ as the pure and innocent victim died for one's sins on the cross. The argument that the New Testament writers, who, says Hicks, "know their subject," stress the virtue of the blood rather than of the death of Christ, on the supposition that blood and death mean two different things, cannot possibly be sustained. Thus, while Romans 5:9 asserts that "we are now justified by his blood," this can hardly imply, as Hicks wishes,<sup>26</sup> a distinction between the death of Christ as backward looking and the blood of Christ (equated with life) as forward looking, for, as Paul says immediately after, we who are now reconciled to God were so reconciled by the death of Christ; and, as justification and reconciliation belong together as consequences of the redeeming work of our High Priest, to be justified by Christ's blood and to be reconciled to God by His death both speak, harmoniously, of the one

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 242-43.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 243.

saving event of the cross. So also, to take an example from the Epistle to the Hebrews, in Hebrews 9:16-18 there is a clear identification between death and blood ("where a will *διαθήκη* is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. . . . Hence even the first covenant [*διαθήκη*] was not ratified with blood").<sup>27</sup>

Like Bengel, Hicks postulates a theologically significant distinction between the flesh of Christ and the blood of Christ — a distinction that is brought out by emphasizing the "copula and in places such as John 6:53, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ..." and 1 Corinthians 11:26, "as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup. . . ." But, as we have shown above, in connection with the former of these passages, eating Christ's flesh and drinking His blood belong together to the lone response of the sinner who comes in faith to Christ. So also in the words of the institution of the eucharist (to which also the words of John 6:53 apply) the eating of the bread and the drinking of the wine testify unitedly, as a single act to the redeeming death of Christ. Hence, Paul completes his account by admonishing the Corinthian believers that every time they eat the sacramental bread and drink the sacramental cup they "proclaim the Lord's *death* until he comes." The wine (blood), equally and in union with the bread (flesh), proclaims the death of Christ in the act of communion. The redemptive efficacy of the death of Christ is identical with the redemptive efficacy of His blood. Both belong to and take their significance from the single event of the cross. The purpose of Christ's incarnation, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews affirms, was that "by the grace of God he might taste *death* for every one" (2:9).

If it is only with His entry into heaven that Christ's priestly activity begins, it undoubtedly follows that there is a necessity for priestly sacrifice to be offered there. The doctrine of the perpetual offering of sacrifice in the heavenly sanctuary seems to have been advocated by some of the delegates at the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century. To what degree the doctrine was elaborated in the thinking of those who favored it at that time it is difficult to say. In the next century, however, it received clear expression. The French Roman Catholic scholar Louis Thomassin (1619-1696), for example, in his *Theological Dogmas* affirmed that the sacrifice of the cross was

<sup>27</sup> See also the comparison between Heb. 10:10 and 10:29 given earlier.

not only once offered but is also continuously offered<sup>28</sup> and that it was only after His resurrection that Christ, on entering into the heavenly sanctuary, most specifically assumed the dignity and office of high priest.<sup>29</sup> He propounded an identity between the cross below and the sacrifice above. Thus he writes:

His own abode and dwelling place is heaven and the sacrifice itself is also heavenly, because although the victim is slain on earth, it is slain here in order that it may be placed there on its proper altar, and may be offered there for an eternal burnt offering.<sup>30</sup>

Again, the One who in glorified manhood stands before the Father in heaven

does not cease to offer a solemn sacrifice and to plead and to offer Himself, and without intermission to sacrifice a burnt offering and a perpetual sacrifice.<sup>31</sup>

Language of this kind seems, unfortunately, to be governed by preconceptions which do not correspond with the biblical reality. Nowhere does the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, or any other New Testament writer, teach that the incarnate victim "is slain here in order that it may be placed there on its proper altar" and "offered there for an eternal burnt offering." Christ entered heaven not as victim but as victor. His entry is His exaltation: His humiliation, of which the cross was the deepest expression, is now behind Him (Phil. 2:8-9). "We know," says Paul, "that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him" (Rom. 6:9). In any case, there was no altar in the holy of holies and consequently never any suggestion that the victim slain outside at the altar of sacrifice was then carried in and sacrificed as a burnt offering in that inner sanctuary. The earthly sanctuary, which is the shadow of the heavenly reality, is defined in Hebrews 9:1 if. in terms of the tent, with its two chambers, the holy place and the holy of holies: the outer courtyard with its altar of sacrifice is not included within this purview. The notion, then, of the repetition or extension of the atoning sacrifice is inadmissible. Extravagant language of this sort probably intends less than it says, but even so it is misleading

<sup>28</sup> Louis Thomassin *Theological Dogmas* x. 10. 9 (This quotation is from Darwell Stone, *A History of the Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* [London, 1909], II, 382).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, x. 11. 1 (Stone, II, 382).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, x. 11. 13 (Stone, II, 385).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, x. 13. 3 (Stone, II, 385).

insofar as it shifts the focus of sacrifice from the earthly to the heavenly scene.

Much to the same effect, but more moderately expressed, is the view of Henry Edward Manning, published in 1850, the year before he abandoned the Church of England for the Church of Rome, that Christ "truly offers Himself for us perpetually both in heaven and earth,"<sup>32</sup> that "His intercession is the perpetual presenting of His own sacrifice, that is, of Himself, bearing the wounds of His passion,"<sup>33</sup> and that, whether in heaven or on earth, "it is but one act still, one priesthood, and one sacrifice," since in heaven Christ offers himself "in visible presence" and on earth "by His ministering priesthood . . . in the Sacrament of His Body and Blood."<sup>34</sup> Such teaching, with which the Tractarian Movement became associated, stirred up the strongest controversy in the Church of England during the latter half of last century; but now it is familiar as the characteristic position of Anglo-Catholicism. Thus, for example, the opinion of E. G. Selwyn that the Epistle to the Hebrews "represents our ascended Lord as our great High Priest for ever offering, pleading, presenting in heaven his own sacrifice of himself for man's sin" can be taken as an accurate representation of that position.<sup>35</sup>

The views of Westcott, that the sacrificial blood speaks not of the death of the victim but of the release of His life for the world, and of Hicks, that the priestly work of Christ commences not on earth but only with His entry into the heavenly sanctuary, have become widely approved. By way of example, again, we may quote A. G. Hebert: "The idea that the death of the victim was the centre of sacrifice is simply false. The animal was killed not in order that its life might be destroyed (for 'the blood is the life'), but that the life offered in death might become available for the holy purposes of sacrifice."<sup>36</sup> Later he adds: "The Sacrifice which was enacted in time on Calvary . . . now is offered by Him at the heavenly altar."<sup>37</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Henry Edward Manning, *Sermons* (London, 1850), IV, 223.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 215.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 224.

<sup>35</sup> E. G. Selwyn, "The Christian Sacrifice in the Eucharist," *Report of the Anglo-Catholic Congress: London, 1927*, ed. by Charles Scott Gillett and Kenneth Ingram (London, n.d.), p. 92.

<sup>36</sup> A. G. Hebert, "A Root of Difference and of Unity," *Inter-communion: A Report of the Theological Commission Appointed by the Continuation Committee of the World Conference on Faith and Order Together with a Selection from the Material Presented to the Commission*, ed. by Donald Baillie and John Marsh (London, 1952), p. 239.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 242.

A rather extreme formulation of the doctrine that Christ began to fulfill His priestly function only on His entry into the heavenly sanctuary has recently come from the pen of a Roman Catholic writer, Walter Edward Brooks. Arguing from the assertion of Heb. 7:16 that Christ "has become a priest by the power of an indestructible life" (κατὰ δύναμιν ζωῆς ἀκατάλυτου), Brooks maintains that Jesus "is eternal priest from the moment of his resurrection-exaltation because he possesses from that moment a life that does not end."<sup>38</sup> The following quotations indicate the main lines of his position:

Since Jesus' priestly office is based on a life that cannot end and is exercised in the heavenly tent, it is inconceivable that his sacrifice would have been offered before the resurrection experience. For then he was not a priest, but now he is a priest forever and his sacrifice must correspond to his priesthood. . . . The death of the victim was essential but preparatory. At-one-ment through expiation was achieved by the manipulation of the blood. This was the saving event and on the Day of Atonement it took place within the holy of holies.<sup>39</sup>

He continues:

He enters with his blood and presents himself to the Father. Drawing on the analogy of the Day of Atonement coupled with an accurate conception of Jewish sacrifice and the understanding that Christ's priesthood is not of this earth but only begins with the reception of the life that does not end, we are justified in seeing his sacrifice reach its climax in the holy of holies of the eternal tent. ... Now to say this is not to say that the cross is unessential. However, it is to stress the fact that the priestly work of Christ begins only after the death and reaches its terminus in the heavenly sphere and that the act of offering there is perpetual. The cross is not the sacrifice. It is rather part of the preparation for the heavenly sacrificial ministry of our high priest and is thereby essential but not all-sufficient. It is not the altar on which the sacrifice of Jesus begins and ends.<sup>40</sup>

#### THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE CROSS ACCORDING TO THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

A more careful examination of the teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews will show, however, that these conclusions are not

<sup>38</sup> Walter Edward Brooks, "The Perpetuity of Christ's Sacrifice in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXXXIX (June, 1970), 207.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, LXXXIX, 208-9.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, LXXXIX, 211, 212.

justified. In the first place, the KJV rendering of δύναμις ζωῆς ἀκατάλυτου as "the power of an endless life," which Brooks embraces, is not entirely satisfactory: it is more accurately translated by RSV and Jer. as "the power of an indestructible life" or, similarly, by NEB as "the power of a life that cannot be destroyed." The reference is to a life not merely which, from a certain point onwards, has no end but also and at the same time which has no beginning. This is clearly brought out earlier in the same chapter where the author, in comparing Christ with Melchizedek, says that he "has neither beginning of days nor end of life" (7:3). His life is indestructible because it is the ever continuing life of the Son of God (7:24-25); and while it is true that the priestly office of Christ is specifically associated with the Incarnate Son, who by the incarnation is capacitated to die, and to die as Man for man, yet, as Chalcedon insisted long since, He does not and cannot cease to be the Son of God.

Secondly, to "make intercession," as our High Priest does in the heavenly sanctuary for "those who draw near to God through him" (7:25), is not the same thing as to offer up a victim in sacrifice. The latter sacrifice took place outside the tent at the altar of sacrifice, to which, in the Epistle to the Hebrews and throughout the New Testament, the cross of Calvary corresponds. Moreover, as has already been remarked, there was no altar of sacrifice within the earthly sanctuary and it is wrong and inconsistent to postulate or suggest the existence of such an altar in the sanctuary above. Nor is this conclusion shaken by the declaration of 8:3 that since every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices "it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer." For one thing, the verse does not say that He must have something which He can perpetually offer. For another, the verb "to be" is not included in the Greek text, though it is implied, and it has to be supplied in an English translation. It has to be decided, therefore, whether ὅθεν ἀναγκάϊον would better be rendered "therefore it is necessary" or "therefore it was necessary." Thus Westcott comments: "It has been debated whether ἦν or ἐστίν should be supplied with ἀναγκάϊον. If the reference is to the offering of the Cross, as seems to be required by the type and the context, then ἦν must be supplied."<sup>41</sup> The tense of the verb προσφέρη would also seem to be significant. If

<sup>41</sup> Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London, 1889), p. 215.

the author had intended to say that it is necessary for Christ to have something to offer continuously, the present rather than the aorist would have been more appropriate to his purpose *προσφέρη* rather than *προσενέγκη*. The aorist *προσενέγκη* weighs against the notion of a perpetual offering, and all the more so when it is considered in association with the present infinitive *προσφέρειν* used in the earlier part of the verse of the constantly repeated offering of the old-style high priests. (Cf. the alternative rendering in NEB: "hence, this one too must have had something to offer.") Indeed, Wilfrid Stott has pointed out, when referring to the work of the Aaronic high priest the author of Hebrews "invariably uses the present tense, showing its continuous character" (5:1,3; 8:3a, 4; 9:7; 10:1, 2, 8), whereas, "in contrast with this, when he speaks of Christ's offering he invariably uses the aorist" (8:3b; 9:14, 28; 10:12).<sup>42</sup>

Thirdly, that the offering of Himself on the cross was the focal and consummating moment of the high-priestly work of Christ. in its sacrificial aspect is plainly the teaching of 2:14 ff., where the purpose of the Incarnation is defined as follows: "so that through death he might break the power of him who had death at his command, that is, the devil; and might liberate those who, through fear of death, had all their lifetime been in servitude" (NEB); or again, as reflected by another facet of the prism of redemption, "so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people" (RSV). His mercy or compassion is explained in terms of His suffering: "because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted" (cf. 4:15-16); and His faithfulness is explained in terms of His obedience, which of course is closely associated with His suffering (cf. 3:1 ff.; 5:8 ff.; 10:7 ff.). The summit of both of His obedience and of His suffering was the cross (12:2; Phil. 2:8). The cross, far from being isolated from or merely preparatory to Christ's priestly work, is the very center and heart of that work. Accordingly, 6:20 declares that Jesus has entered the heavenly holy of holies "as a forerunner on our behalf having become (*γενόμενος*) a high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek;" the aorist participle indicating that it was prior to His entry into heaven that He

<sup>42</sup> Wilfrid Stott, "The Conception of 'Offering' in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *New Testament Studies*, IX (October, 1962), 65. Notice the negative plus the present in 9:25: "not that he should go on offering Himself frequently" (*οὐδ' ἵνα πολλάκις προσφέρη εἰαυτόν*).

became our high priest. This high priesthood belongs to the incarnate Christ in humiliation as well as in glorification, but always the central focus is on Calvary as the culmination of His obedience and suffering and as the place of His perfect and eternally availing sacrifice. To the same effect 9:12 states that He entered once for all into the sanctuary above after He had secured (εὐράμενος) our eternal redemption. This is the proper connotation of the aorist participle, and it is regrettable that it is not brought out in RSV ("thus securing ...") or NEB ("and secured ..."). KJV ("having obtained ...") and Phillips and Jer. ("having won . . .") render it accurately. Again, 9:28 assures us that Christ, "having been offered once (ἅπαξ προσευχθείς) to bear the sins of many" at His first advent, "will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him." And yet another aorist participle, in 10:12 — "when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins (μίαν ὑπὲρ ἁμαρτιῶν προσενέγκας θυσίαν εἰς τὸ διηνεκές) He sat down at the right hand of God" — conveys the same emphasis on the finality and the pastness of the unique sacrifice of Calvary. Nowhere is there any mention of a sacrifice that is prolonged in some manner or continuous in the heavenly sanctuary.

The teaching of the Epistle, to the Hebrews has been well explained by F. F. Bruce, who writes as follows (on 9:12):

Aaron certainly carried the sacrificial blood into the holy of holies, but our author deliberately, avoids saying that Christ carried His own blood into the heavenly sanctuary. Even as a symbolic expression this is open to objection. There have been expositors who, pressing the analogy of the Day of Atonement beyond the limits observed by our author, have agreed that the expiatory work of Christ was not completed on the cross — not completed, indeed, until He ascended from earth and "made atonement 'for us' in the heavenly holy of holies by the presentation of His efficacious blood." But while it was necessary under the old covenant for the sacrificial blood first to be shed in the court and then to be brought into the holy of holies, no such division of our Lord's sacrifice into two phases is envisaged under the new covenant. When upon the cross He offered up His life to God as a sacrifice for His people's sin, He accomplished in reality what Aaron and his successors performed in type by the twofold act of slaying the victim and presenting its blood in the holy of holies. The title of the Anglican Article XXXI speaks rightly "of the one oblation of Christ finished upon the cross."<sup>43</sup>

<sup>43</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, 1964), pp. 200-201.



And Oscar Cullmann appropriately warns that:

The danger of falling back to the level of Old Testament priesthood arises when the high priest must always present the sacrifice anew. Christian worship in the light of that 'one time' which means 'once for all time' is possible only when even the slightest temptation to 'reproduce' that central event itself is avoided. Instead, the event must be allowed to remain the divine act of the past time where God the Lord of time placed it — at that exact historical moment in the third decade of our chronology. It is the saving consequences of that atoning act, not the act itself, which become a present event in our worship. The Lord present in worship is the exalted *Kyrios* of the Church and the world, raised to the right hand of God. He is the risen Lord who continues his mediating work on the basis of his unique, completed work of atonement.<sup>44</sup>

Finally, the Epistle to the Hebrews describes the glorified Christ who has entered the true tabernacle above in two ways: (1) as seated and (2) as interceding. The former theme is introduced at the very beginning of the Epistle (1:3) — "when he had made (ποιη-σάμενος, another aorist participle!) purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" — and it recurs at 8:1, 10:12, and 12:2. The sitting down, or session, of Christ symbolizes not only His sovereign enthronement but also the completion of the redemptive work He had come to earth to do (cf. Mark 10:45, "The Son of man also came . . . to give his life as a ransom for many"), and is incompatible with the notion of Christ as perpetually offering priestly sacrifice in heaven — otherwise there would be no point in the contrast between the priests of the old dispensation daily standing as they repeatedly offer the same sacrifices and Christ, our unique High Priest, seated in glory, this one all-sufficient sacrifice for sins a thing of the past (10:11-12). It is not surprising, therefore, that advocates of this notion customarily link it with Christ's heavenly intercession, as though this intercession is the same thing as His constant pleading by means of the continuous offering of His sacrifice in the tabernacle above. It is a notion, however, which is read into rather than out of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Christ's intercession, mentioned only as such in 7:25, is undoubtedly what 9:24 speaks of as His appearing in the presence of God on our behalf. The complete acceptance of His sacrifice for human sins is signified by the fact of His exaltation; and His acceptance means also the acceptance of all who by faith are one with Him. Hence the confidence with

<sup>44</sup> Oscar Cullmann *The Christology of the New Testament*, trans. by Shirley C. Guthrie and Charles A. M. Hall (2nd ed.; London, 1963), p. 99.

which we are invited to draw near, on the basis of His atonement, to the throne of grace (4:16; 10:19 ff.).

Stott draws attention to 2 Samuel 7, a passage quoted in 1:5 and probably echoed in 3:6, as an example of the combination of session with intercession — in fact "the only passage in the Scriptures where prayer is spoken of with the posture of sitting," the picture being that "of David as king seated before Jehovah and claiming that the Covenant which has been promised shall be fulfilled." Relating this to the imagery of the Epistle to the Hebrews, he concludes:

Thus it would seem that the picture in the writer's mind is of a royal priest who is seated, as David was, before God, not pleading a sacrifice, but 'having accomplished' already the 'cleansing', mediated the New Covenant and now seated in royal state and claiming the fulfilment of the Covenant promises for his seed.<sup>46</sup>

Christ's intercessory activity, as Cullmann says, "is always effective because of this one-for-all work," and "is a genuinely priestly act."<sup>47</sup>

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews may fittingly be allowed to conclude this part of the discussion with these decisive statements:

He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily ... ; he did this once for all when he offered up himself (7:27).

By that will [of the Father] we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. . . . For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified...

"I will remember their sins and their misdeeds no more." Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin (10:10, 14, 17, 18).

How is it possible in the face of such affirmations to hold that the Epistle to the Hebrews does not teach the all-sufficient finality of the cross of Christ?

<sup>45</sup> Stott, IX, 67.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Cullmann, p. 102.

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