



Christ's Victimhood: A Biblical Framework

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Abstract: There is a long-standing tradition in the Church portraying Christ Jesus as “Priest and Victim”, or *Sacerdos et Victima*. Unfortunately, in modern times the word “victim” has all but vanished from Christian vocabulary, and its deeper signification is in need of recovery. It remains an essential and even vital reality not only for priestly identity but also for the laity. Curiously, however, Christ is nowhere in the Old or New Testaments expressly identified with a Priest who is at the same time a Victim. So, what are at least the biblical allusions to the God-Man’s priestly Victimhood? This study intends to recapture some of the theology, morality, and spirituality of Jesus being at the same time Priest and Victim, and its consequences for Christian victimhood. As victims we make self-oblation of ourselves with Christ especially during the Holy Eucharist; in fact, the ministerial and baptismal priesthood is best illumined in the fires of victimhood, redounding also to more priestly and religious vocations in the Church. This recognition allows the Christian to be deeply implanted in and enveloped by the crucial paradox of Christ, *Sacerdos et Victima*.

Keywords: slain victim, self-oblation, vicarious ransom, perfect redemption, sacerdotal self-offering.

Resumen: En la Iglesia hay un muy antigua tradición establecida que representa a Cristo Jesús como sacerdote y víctima, *sacerdos et victima*. Por desgracia en los tiempos modernos la palabra «víctima» se ha desvanecido totalmente del vocabulario cristiano, y su más profundo significado tiene necesidad de ser redescubierto. Este

sigue siendo una realidad esencial e incluso vital no solo para la identidad sacerdotal sino también para la laical. Sin embargo, curiosamente, Cristo no es identificado expresamente en ningún lugar del Antiguo o Nuevo Testamento como sacerdote que al mismo tiempo sea víctima. Por ello, ¿cuáles son, al menos, las alusiones bíblicas del sacerdocio del Dios-hombre a la vez víctima? Este estudio pretende recuperar algo de la teología, moralidad y espiritualidad de Jesús que a la vez es sacerdote y víctima, y sus consecuencias para la oblación del cristiano. Como víctimas nos ofrecemos a nosotros mismos a Cristo, especialmente durante la Santa Misa; de hecho, el sacerdocio ministerial y bautismal queda mejor iluminado en la ofrenda de victimización, lo que redundará también en más vocaciones sacerdotales y religiosas en la Iglesia. Este reconocimiento permite al cristiano permanecer más profundamente arraigado y envuelto en la crucial paradoja de Cristo, *Sacerdos et Victima*.

Palabras clave: víctima inmolada, oblación de sí, rescate vicario, redención perfecta, ofrecimiento sacerdotal.

INTRODUCTION

There is a time-honored way of describing Christ Jesus as “Priest and Victim”, in Latin, *Sacerdos et Victima*. Yet in this day and age, the word “victim” has all but lost its spiritual meaning among Christians, including arguably among Catholic clergy. Notwithstanding this contemporary lack of understanding or even interest in it, it remains fundamental, especially for the priestly identity of the hierarchical ministry. As a matter of fact, the estrangement between priest and victim inevitably results in a marred concept of the priesthood itself, as well as in unfortunate forms of narcissism and clericalism. To compound the challenge is the circumstance that the very notion of victimhood is either misunderstood or outright demonized by contemporary culture. One is not supposed to “play the victim”, or to allow oneself to be “victimized”, they say. But this is an unproductive misunderstanding that undermines a central aspect of the Christian religion. Archbishop Fulton Sheen once wrote that he had yet to hear a candidate for the ordained priesthood say that he was studying to become a willing victim, and that its notion was almost alien to priestly formation.¹

Intriguingly, nowhere in the Old or New Testaments is the divine Messiah explicitly identified with a Priest who is at the same time a Victim. That begs the question: what are at least the scriptural intimations to the God-Man Jesus’ priestly Victimhood? No recent study appears to have pursued this subject matter, and so, this present essay purports to fill that gap, and offer at least

1 Cf. SHEEN, *The Priest is not his own*, 10.

a succinct investigation in this regard. The intention is to recapture some of the theology, morality, and spirituality of Christ being at the same time Priest and Victim, and its reflection in Christian victimhood. In the first chapter, we will explore where the expression “Priest and Victim” originated. The second chapter will offer an investigation into the reality of *victima* in the New Testament, drawing on the foreshadowings in Old Testament sacrifice. In the third chapter, the God-Man Jesus will be presented as the fulfillment of the concept of biblical victimhood. And in the last chapter, one will return to the opening question concerning the relevance of victimhood for Christians today, how to live it as a central part of priestly and laical spirituality.

1. NOTIONAL LINEAGE OF *SACERDOS ET VICTIMA*

What a household name or a celebrity is in secular cultures, that is from time immemorial to Christianity the expression “Priest and Victim” when speaking of Christ Jesus. While this phrase is very much present in the Church’s apostolic tradition, and therefore quite familiar to most members of the people of God, it is intriguingly absent from Sacred Scripture.² As is well known, the sea of Catholic doctrine is fed by the twin tributaries of apostolic tradition and biblical sources³, and all truth is at least implicitly contained in the written word of God. So, it seems more than warrantable to inquire about the notion’s indirect roots in the Bible. Yet before delving into this matter, it will be helpful to first sketch a digest of sources found in Christian tradition down the centuries that have spotlighted the person and work of the Savior through the lens of priesthood and victimhood.

Commencing with one of the earliest testimonies, namely, a prayer ascribed to the 4th century AD bishop of Milan and doctor of the Church, Saint Ambrose, meant to be recited on Sundays before the celebration of the Holy Eucharist; it begins with this invocation: “O Supreme High Priest and true Pontiff, Jesus Christ, who didst offer thyself to God the Father as a pure and spotless Victim upon the Altar of the Cross for us miserable sinners.”⁴ A distinct theological connection is shown between the Lord’s sacerdotal action and his simultaneous victimization. Incidentally, the term pontiff derives from

2 See DALY, *The Origins of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice*.

3 Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Dei Verbum*, no. 9; see also CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, no. 82.

4 From the Latin original *Orationes sancti Ambrosii* (Ante Missam singulis hebdomadae diebus, Die Dominica): *Summe Sacerdos et vere Pontifex, Iesu Christe, qui te obtulisti Deo Patri hostiam puram et immaculatam in ara Crucis pro nobis miseris et peccatoribus*.

the Latin noun *pontifex*, which in turn is a compound of *pons*, “bridge”, and *facere*, “to make”, that is, a bridge-builder, denoting the priest’s mediation between humanity and divinity.⁵ And that very interposition between God and man also contains the seed of tension that will manifest itself in Jesus’ victimization. Besides its citation in the New Vulgate’s rendition of the New Testament with reference to both, the Jewish High Priests, as well as to Jesus himself⁶, it also evokes the role of mythological bridges in ancient non-Christian religions, often associated with bodily resurrection, individual judgment, and eternal redemption.

Among Ambrose’s catechumens was Saint Augustine, who later became the bishop of Hippo, as well as one of the Four Great Western Church Fathers himself. In his autobiographical *Confessions* he declares: “How you have loved us, O Good Father, who did not spare your only Son, but handed him over for us evil men (Rom 8:32)! How you have loved us, for whom, not deeming equality with you something to be clung to, he made himself subject even to the death of the cross (Phil 2:6.8), he, the one man free among the dead (Psa 87:5), possessing the power to lay down his life and possessing the power to take it up again (Jn 10:18), for our sake your victor and victim, and a victor because a victim, for our sake your priest and sacrifice, and a priest because a sacrifice [*pro nobis tibi victor et victima, et ideo victor, quia victima, pro nobis tibi sacerdos et sacrificium, et ideo sacerdos, quia sacrificium*], making sons for you out of us slaves, by being born from you and serving us.”⁷ In *On the Trinity*, written not long after his *Confessions*, he goes on to explain that “the same one true Mediator, reconciling us to God by the sacrifice of peace, was one with him to whom it was offered, united in himself those for whom he offered it, at the same time offered it himself, and was himself that which he offered.”⁸ In that same vein, in his timeless *City of God*, finalized shortly before his death in AD 430, he professes, “Christ himself both is the priest who offers it and the victim: the sacred token of which he wished to be the daily Sacrifice of the Church.”⁹ Thus, Augustine, too, links the Son of God to the offices of Priest and Victim.

5 CLEMENT OF ROME calls Christ the “Pontiff of our offerings” (*Letter to the Corinthians*, no. 36) and the “Pontiff and Guardian of our souls” (*ibid.*, no. 61); POLYCARP also calls him “the eternal Pontiff” (*Epistle to the Philippians*, ch. XII).

6 E.g., Mk 15:11; Heb 2:17.

7 *Confessiones*, X, 69-70.

8 *De Trinitate*, IV, 14.

9 *De Civitate Dei*, X, 20.

And yet another contemporary, the Roman poet, senator, and bishop of Nola, St. Paulinus, in a letter to his friend Sulpicius Severus, affirms: “Then in his turn, Christ will make himself a sheep for you, the Lamb that was led to the slaughter for us, and was dumb before his shearer, allowing his fleece, which are the spoils of his flesh, to be torn from him. For he laid down his soul and body for us, and for us he regained them (Jn 10:17-18). He is Priest, Victim, Lamb, and Shepherd. As Shepherd, he died for his sheep; as Lamb, he was killed for his shepherds, for the Lord himself is the sacrificial Victim of all priests (Heb 10:10-12). Offering himself to the Father to win back all mankind, he was the Victim which his Priesthood offered, and the Priest who offered himself as Victim [*victima sacerdotii sui, et sacerdos suae victimae fuit*]. To him now, as the one Lord of all, each new creature is a sacrifice, and the priests themselves are victims.”¹⁰ Here again one notices the astounding, because paradoxical, juxtaposition of a priest who offers himself as the victim.

Skipping then ahead on an imaginary timeline into the era of medieval scholasticism where one encounters St. Thomas Aquinas. In the Third Part of his *Summa Theologica* he opines that Christ was indeed both priest and victim, taking the delineation of his self-sacrifice at Eph 5:2 as a point of departure. The *Doctor Angelicus* proceeds to describe the logic of an invisible sacrifice by which someone offers his spirit to God (Psa 50:19), hoping to obtain the remission of sin, salvation, and perfect union with the Almighty. These effects were conferred on us by the humanity of Christ, the great Dominican argues, and, therefore, the Lord himself, as Man, was not only Priest, but also a perfect Victim, being at the same time Victim for sin, Victim for a peace-offering, and a holocaust. Although he did not physically slay himself, but of his own volition allowed himself to become vulnerable to the point of death (Isa 53:7), and in this manner he is said to have offered himself. If the slaying of Jesus is contemplated in reference to the will of the Sufferer, who freely surrenders himself to torment, then he is a Victim. Aquinas subjoins the thought that the holy humanity of Christ Incarnate was sanctified in a new way when it was offered to his heavenly Father in his Paschal Mystery, adding sanctity of his victimhood acquired at that very moment. That victimized holiness sprang from the charity which his Manhood possessed from the beginning, and from the unitive grace sanctifying it completely.¹¹ Hence, St. Thomas seamlessly inserts himself into Tradition, teaching what other had taught before him, i.e., the oneness of Priest and Victim in the divine person of the Redeemer.

10 *Letter 11, To Severus*, no. 8: quoted from WALSH, *Letters of St. Paulinus of Nola*, p. 98.

11 Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, Tertia Pars, quaestio 22, 2.

Outside the Catholic tradition of Christianity, thinkers and theologians have attested to the concept of Christ as Priest and Victim, too. There is the French Calvinist scholar Theodore Beza, for instance, who played an important role in the Protestant Reformation especially in the late 16th century Switzerland. When pondering the Lord's personal sanctification, he expostulates that he had to set himself apart as a voluntary oblation, that is, as Priest and Victim (*nempe ut sacerdos et victima*).¹² Also worth mentioning is the early 17th century German Reformed theologian Johannes Piscator, known as a Bible translator and textbook writer, who propounded that the Son of God had to be saintly also in his humanity in order "that he might be a holy priest and the holy victim" (*ut esset Sacerdos sanctus et victima sancta*).¹³ Furthermore, there is the 17th century Dutch Protestant humanist and diplomat Hugo Grotius, who, when speculating about Christ, maintained that no sacrifice can possibly be more pleasing to God than the one where priest and victim are the same (*nullum sacrificium Deo potest esse gratius quam ubi idem est et sacerdos et victima*). Such sacrifice is necessarily imbued with the most perfect obedience, and its fruitfulness redounds to the salvation of humankind. Grotius argues that Jesus is a true Priest and a true Victim, and not just metaphorically, far excelling the Levitical priesthood and its sacrificial victims.¹⁴

Turning then to the present times, among the copious sources one could mention is Pope Pius XII's 1947 Encyclical Letter *Mediator Dei*, where he teaches the following: "It is quite true that Christ is a Priest; but he is a Priest not for himself but for us, when in the name of the whole human race he offers our prayers and religious homage to the eternal Father; he is also a Victim, but a Victim for us, since he substitutes himself for sinners."¹⁵ Then there is the American archbishop and early televangelist, the Venerable Servant of God Fulton Sheen, who, especially in his book *The Priest is not his own*, delves into the mystery of Christ's Priesthood. He insists that the Savior came into this world not to live, but to die, and to never offer anything except himself, as Priest and Victim.¹⁶ This his priestly Victimhood finds its prolongation in the Catholic priesthood, where the ordained man acts in the person of Christ the Head (*in persona Christi capitis*) as *sacerdos et victima*.

12 Quoted from FLAVEL, *The Fountain of Life Opened*, Sermon 7, 1.

13 *Theses Theologicae De Christo*, xxix.

14 Cf. GROTIUS, *Defensio Fidei Catholicae de satisfactione Christi adversus Faustum Socinum* (AD 1617), 338.

15 *Mediator Dei*, no. 81.

16 Cf. *The Priest Is Not His Own*, 10.

Yet even more importantly, this same notion is deeply rooted in the sacramental and liturgical life of the universal Church, much in accord with the ancient axiom *lex orandi, lex credendi*, highlighting the interwovenness of prayer and belief. To offer just a few examples: the Roman Missal's first preface of the Most Holy Eucharist reads: "For he is the true and eternal Priest, who instituted the pattern of an everlasting sacrifice and was the first to offer himself as the saving Victim, commanding us to make this offering as his memorial. As we eat his flesh that was sacrificed for us, we are made strong, and, as we drink his Blood that was poured out for us, we are washed clean."¹⁷ And how can one not mention the Sequence *Victimae paschali laudes* chanted during the Eucharistic celebrations of the Easter Octave, alluding to the Victimhood of the Risen Lord: "Let Christians offer sacrificial praises to the Passover Victim. The Lamb has redeemed the sheep, the innocent Christ has reconciled the sinners to the Father." It culminates in the imploration "O Victorious King, have mercy on us!", a play on the assonance between the Latin *victima* ("victim") and *victor* ("victor"). Moreover, an Ambrosian Easter hymn, part of the Liturgy of the Hours by the title *Ad regias Agni dapes*, sings this verse: "Praise we him whose love divine, gives the guests his Blood for wine, gives his Body for the feast, love the Victim, love the Priest."

Lastly, Catholic devotion has cherished the Litany of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, Priest and Victim, inclusive of these heartfelt invocations: "Jesus, High Priest, who gave yourself up to God as offering and Victim, sacrificial Victim of God and Man, holy and spotless sacrificial Victim, mild and gentle sacrificial Victim, peace-making sacrificial Victim, sacrificial Victim of propitiation and praise, sacrificial Victim of reconciliation and peace, sacrificial Victim in whom we have confidence and access to God, sacrificial Victim living for ever and ever: Have mercy on us." Yet now that the presence of the expression *Sacerdos et Victima* with regard to the Lord Jesus within the Christian tradition has been validated, it is time to inquire into its scriptural backdrop.

2. VICTIMA IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Since the revelation of Christ Jesus as the eternal High Priest is well established in the New Testament, let us now focus on his relationship with the concept of *victima*. It may come as a surprise that the feminine Latin noun *victima*, "victim", occurs only once in the Neo-Vulgate's rendition of the New

17 This preface is also employed in the votive Mass of "Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Eternal High Priest".

Testament, i.e., at Acts 7:42, and not even in reference to Christ. It is contextually part of Deacon Stephen's discourse in Jerusalem, where he upbraids his Jewish audience with the idolatry of their fathers, to which God gave them up as a punishment for their disloyalty to him. He is freely quoting from Amos 5:25, including the Septuagint noun *sphágion* (σφάγιον), "a slaughtered victim"; however, unlike in Acts 7:42, the Latin renders it as *hostia*, which equally refers to a sacrificial offering or animal of sacrifice. Yet before scrutinizing this type of offering, and for the sake of terminological precision, let us start by pointing out the etymological and lexical significance of this venerable term *victima*.

Alongside its alternative form *victuma*, this feminine-gendered noun springs from the Proto-Indo-European root *wēyk*, meaning "to choose, separate out, bend, wind, set aside as holy, consecrate, sacrifice."¹⁸ It seems to be cognate to the Proto-Germanic *wīhaz* and the Gothic *weihs*, conveying the idea of a "sacred place or thing, sanctuary." From it also descends the German verb "weihen", that is, "to consecrate." Through the Proto-Italic *wiktōr* it is related also to *victor*, meaning "the one who overcomes, conqueror, vanquisher, winner, champion." What is more, the akin Proto-Germanic stem *wicca* or *wikkōna* signifies someone who practices "sorcery", having given rise to English words like wizard, wicked, and witch. *Victima* is perhaps affiliated, too, with the adjective *vicis*, "turn, occasion", which would correlate it with the notion of "vicar, vicarious", underlining the reality of a ritual exchange with the gods.¹⁹ Lexically, it transmits the general idea of a living being, animal or even human, sacrificially annihilated in honor of some deity, for the purpose of appeasing its wrath or conciliating its favor and blessing. Put differently, a creature is immolated as an offering to the Creator, as a substitutional gesture of worship, gratitude, and reparation. Hence, the conclusion can be drawn that "victim" has the same denotation as "sacrifice", and in that sense, before examining the various types of Old Testament sacrifices assumed into the New Testament, a succinct rundown of its religious symbolism should be provided.

"Sacrifice", properly so called as a ubiquitous religious concept, solemnly inflicts death by slaughter for the effusion of blood, as a supplication for the pardon of human sin, and as a supposed means of compensation for the insult and injury thereby offered to God's majesty and sovereignty. Whether it arose from a natural instinct, sanctioned and guided by God, or whether it

18 Cf. LEWIS-SHORT, *Latin Dictionary*, "Victima".

19 This signification is shared with the etymology of the related feminine-gendered Latin noun *hostia* ("victim, sacrificial offering, animal of sacrifice"), a derivative of the Proto-Indo-European stem *ghēs*, "hand", implying the action of "taking, receiving" or "offering, giving in exchange."

was the subject of some distinct primeval revelation and institution, remains shrouded in insoluble mystery. It is inarguable that the Most High God over the millennia of human history received it as the universal mode in which acceptable worship was to be offered to him by sinful man in satisfaction. Sincere sacrifice is always and everywhere the free expression of the conscience and determination of the a person or community in their inalienable divine likeness (Gen 1:27), according to which one cannot cease to search for that communion with the Almighty for which one was created, even to the point of self-sacrifice. In all of this, the offeror is not portrayed as a mere creature, but specifically as a sinner in need of forgiveness, and the sacrificial victim itself is an intermediary, a substitute providing that hoped-for expiation. Its violent destruction is designed to mirror a person's inner obsequium, submission, and contrition, to influence God, and to appease his demand of justice. Like prayer, sacrifice originates in the inner freedom and at the same time it translates the innate necessity of self-surrender, obedience, purification, reparation, and divine adoration. If not allowed to devotedly sacrifice to God, humans would all be tempted into idolatry or agnosticism.

Rivetingly, there is total silence of Holy Scripture with regard to the beginning of sacrificial activity, in remarkable contrast with the distinct reference made to the origin of the Sabbath (Gen 2:2-3), and yet the language and the idea of sacrifice pervade the whole Bible. In the pre-diluvian age, sacrifices were offered, possibly imitating the primordial immolation of animals by Elohim himself to clothe Adam and Eve with skins (Gen 3:21). Abel, likely taught by Adam through his familial priesthood, offered the firstlings of his flock (Gen 4:4). A similar practice is continued down through the patriarchal age by Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Job (e.g., Gen 12:7), and in the Mosaic period of Old Testament history, more definite laws were prescribed by Yahweh regarding the different kinds of sacrifices that were to be offered and the manner in which the offering was to be made. Among the Hebrews, it was an offering made to God on his altar by the hand of a lawful priest, as laid out in minute detail especially in the Book of Leviticus.

Bloody sacrifice differed from unbloody oblation, in that the former involved an animal's slaughter, whereas an oblation was but a simple offering, gift, or meal. In the post-Mosaic economy, these were the main public form of worship, distinguishing diverse types, such as the burnt-offering or holocaust, grain offering, peace or praise or thank-offering, and sin or trespass offering. Oblationary offerings on the golden altar included libations, first-fruits, and frankincense. Sacrificiality was also expressed in the showbread, tithes, and vows. All of these sacrifices had the purpose and value of either thanking the

Lord for benefits received, or of propitiating him because of sins and errors.²⁰ Undeniably, this sacrificial system of the Old Dispensation was a means of grace by which the relationship between God and humanity began to be restored.²¹ Ultimately, however, and despite its unceasing repetition down the centuries, it turned out to be inadequate and ineffectual, as denounced forcefully by many a prophet (e.g., Mal 1:8), since none could repay the debt of life that was owed until Christ defeated death once and for all (Heb 10:10). Thus, after having secured some of the philosophical and biblical connotation of sacrificial victimhood, let us probe into the five most common types of Old Testament sacrifice, as reflected in the New Testament, making a start with the “slain victims” of Acts 7:42.²²

2.1. Sphágion: *the slain victim*

As mentioned above, Acts 7:42 is the only occurrence of the word *victima* in the Nova Vulgata’s New Testament. To put it into a wider scriptural perspective, it first occurs in Gen 22:7-8, where Isaac is inquiring of his father Abraham about the victim for the holocaust to take place on Mount Moriah. Revealingly, the Latin *victima* on this occasion renders the original Hebrew *sēh* (שֶׁה) and the Greek *próbaton* (πρόβατον) for “lamb”, foreshadowing the future Paschal sacrifice of Christ himself (Exo 12:27). Moreover, the very last recurrence of “victim” in the Old Testament is Amos 4:4, where the prophet chastises Israel for its irrepentance. All three passages form a bridge of expectation and anticipation toward the one true sacrifice of Jesus as *Sacerdos et Victima*.

Briefly reverting to the Greek original of Acts 7:42, viz., the noun *sphágion* (σπάγιον), one realizes that, just as the Latin *victima*, it is a *hapax legomenon*, that is, spoken only once in the New Testament²³: it is a neuter derivative from the feminine noun *sphagé* (σφαγή), meaning “slaughter, sacrifice, butchery.”²⁴ The latter stems from the prime verb *sphāzo* (σφάζω), indicating “to kill, slay,

20 See KURTZ, *Offerings, Sacrifices and Worship in the Old Testament*.

21 See ANDERSON, *Sacrifices and Offerings in Ancient Israel: Studies in Their Social and Political Importance*.

22 Cf. RAINEY, “The Order of Sacrifices in Old Testament Ritual Texts”, 485-98.

23 See also its five mentions in the Old Testament, namely, at Lev 22:23; Amos 5:25; Eze 21:10.15.28.

24 Rendered as *occīsiō* (“killing, slaughter, massacre, murder”) at Acts 8:32; Rom 8:36; Jas 5:5.

slaughter, put to death by violence, maim, wound mortally.”²⁵ And hence, the lexical signification of *sphágion* is “a victim destined for slaughter, slain beast.”

After having ascertained the etymological and glossarial value of the word “victim” and its linguistic correlatives, it will be opportune to investigate its equivalent prototype within the ritual system of the Old Testament. As hinted above, when it came to all cultic sacrifice, the Israelites observed a general distinction between a bloody offering, considered superior, called *zebach* (זֶבַח), and an unbloody one, termed *minchah* (מִנְחָה). *Zebach* is mentioned one hundred and sixty-two times, whereas the more common *minchah* recurs two hundred and eleven times. The New Testament *victima* (*sphágion*) falls into the former category. In Hebrew, the masculine noun *zebach* signifies “a sacrifice, a victim, or the act of slaying of a sacrificial animal”, and its essential rite entailed the shedding of the victim’s blood, and the eating of its flesh as a symbol of communion with God. Naturally connected is the idea of expiation and impetration.

What is more, from *zebach* emanates the word for “altar”, namely, *mizbeah* (מִזְבֵּחַ), properly “a place of slaughter or sacrifice.” It is recorded for the first time in Gen 8:20, where Noah, having just exited the saving ark with his family following the subsiding of the flood, erects an altar to sacrifice burnt-offerings, and prompting Elohim to ratify his first covenant with humanity in a rainbow (Gen 9:9-17).²⁶ There are several kinds of *zebach* involving officiating priests and Levites, and they can be itemized as Covenant-sacrifice²⁷, the Passover-sacrifice or *Pesah*²⁸, Annual-sacrifice or *HaYamim*²⁹, Thank-offering or *Todah*³⁰, and Peace-offering or *Shelamim*.³¹ Evidently, all of these ritual sacrifices were intended to glorify the Lord, to maintain peace and prosperity among the pilgrim people under Yahweh’s providential care, and to implore his mercy and forgiveness for trespasses committed. And even more consequentially, all of them were a thinly veiled prefiguration of the sacrificial death or victimization of Christ Jesus that would remove guilt from the human heart, and finally grant serenity to the individual conscience.

25 Said of Jesus as the Lamb of God (Rev 5:6.9.12), of Christian martyrs (Rev 6:9; 18:24), of Cain (1 Jn 3:12), and of the apocalyptic red dragon (Rev 13:3); additionally, there is a single occurrence of the cognate compound verb *katasphāzo* (κατασφάζω, “to kill off”) at Lk 19:27.

26 Other altars were built by Abraham (Gen 12:7; 13:4.18; 22:9), by Isaac (Gen 26:25), by Jacob (Gen 33:20; 35:1-3), by Moses (Exo 17:15), and by Saul (1 Sam 14:35).

27 E.g., Gen 31:54; Exo 24:5; 1 Sam 11:15; Psa 50:5.

28 E.g., Exo 12:27; 23:18.

29 E.g., 1 Sam 1:21; 2:19; 20:6.29.

30 E.g., Lev 7:12; 22:29; Pss 107:22; 116:17; 2 Chron 29:31.

31 E.g., Lev 7:13.15; Psa 27:6.

2.2. *Thysía: the sacrifice*

However, by far the most comprehensive term for bloody sacrifice in the Bible, and also the most common Greek translation of the Hebrew *zebach*, is *thysía* (θυσία), recurring no less than three hundred and forty-nine times in the Old Testament, and twenty-nine times in the New Testament. Given such vocabular preponderance, *sphágion* turns out to be a mere sub-category of it. As a feminine noun, *thysía* conveys both, the abstract idea of “sacrifice” as well as the concrete “act of immolation.” In the Septuagint, it generically refers to eight different Hebrew words (chiefly *zebach*, *minchah*, and *olah*) for various kinds of bloody and unbloody sacrifice, whereas in the New Testament it points to the fulfillment of specific Old Testament sacrificial regulations³², to Christian living or giving³³, and, most significantly, to Christ’s death on the Cross (Eph 5:2). Incidentally, St. Paul on one occasion also employs the correspondent verb *thúo* (θύω, “to sacrifice”) to illustrate the same oblation on Calvary (1 Cor 5:7). Furthermore, the New Vulgate renders the Koinē Greek New Testament *thysía* mainly with *hostia* (“victim”) but also with *sacrificium* (“sacrifice”). Again, and needless to say, all these bloody types of oblation await their realization in their divine antitype, Christ Jesus.

2.3. *Prosporá: the offering*

Continuing to take stock of the sacrificial terminology in the New Testament that mirrors Israelitic precedents, we come across the Greek term *prosporá* (προσφορά), which recurs nine times (e.g., Acts 21:26), making it the third most frequent word for sacrifice in the New Testament, in every instance translated by the Neo-Vulgate as *oblatio*, meaning “gift, offering, oblation.” In English translations, *prosporá* is mostly rendered as “offering”, although “sacrifice” also occurs. Flowing as it does from the verbal root *pros-phero* (προσ-φέρω), literally, “to bring forward, to present, to tender, to lead to, bear toward, offer up”, its lexical denotation is the very act or activity of offering, but also the object offered as a gift. That compound verb *prosphero* (Mt 2:11), together with its cognate verb *anaphero* (ἀναφέρω; Heb 13:15) is cited about fifty times in the New Testament in the religious sense of offering sacrifice to God.

32 E.g., Mt 9:13; 12:7; Lk 2:24; Acts 7:41; 1 Cor 10:18.

33 E.g., Rom 12:1; Phil 2:17; 4:18; 1 Pt 2:5.

Prospchorá is the preferred Septuagint rendition for the Hebrew noun *minchah* (מִנְחָה; Psa 39:7), that is, the unbloody sacrifice, as opposed to the blood-sacrifice or *zebach*. It originates in the obsolete verbal root *mani* (מָנָה), “to give, offer”, and communicates the Old Testament notion of sin-offering, expiatory sacrifice, grain-offering, meal-offering, meat-offering, oblation of living animals, or tribute made to God. Its first mention is at Gen 4:3-5, where it depicts the offerings of Cain and Abel, although in the case of the latter it was a bloody sacrifice. It is also noteworthy that both, *thysía* and *prospchorá* are at times compared to sweet fragrance or aromatic incense in the Scriptures, symbolizing the offerer’s devotion to God.³⁴ In any event, *prospchorá*, too, signposts the perfect self-gift of Christ, the divine Victim, in the fullness of time on Golgotha³⁵, as well as in the eschatological age of the Holy Eucharist.

2.4. *Holokaútomá: the whole burnt-offering*

Moving on to what was regarded as the highest among all biblical sacrifices, because the most complete outward expression of human reverence to God, namely, the whole burnt-offering or “holocaust.” By definition a bloody oblation, it stands in contrast to all other forms of sacrifice where the victim was only partially burnt. Its Koinē Greek name is *holokaútomá* (ὁλοκαύτωμα), rendered by the New Vulgate as *holocaustoma*, a composite noun derived from the adjectival prefix *holos* (ὅλος), “whole, complete, entire”, and the verb *kaío* (καίω), “to kindle, burn, ignite, light, consume with fire.” Hence, the meaning of a “wholly-consumed” victim or “totally burnt” offering, where the sacrificial animal was entirely consumed or burned up by the fire on the altar. This term is the Septuagint’s translation mostly of the Hebrew noun *olah* (עֹלָה), which is formed from the active participle the verb of the verb *alah* (עָלָה), meaning “cause to ascend, to go up (to heaven in an oblationary flame).”³⁶ It recurs two hundred and eighty-nine times in the Old Testament, underscoring its religious importance, while its Greek equivalent occurs one hundred and eighty-eight times, but is cited only three times in the New Testament.³⁷

Practiced among the people of Israel, but also by some pagan nations of antiquity, the *holokaútomá* was performed on a daily basis, especially on Sabbaths and feastsdays like the Day of Atonement as the liturgical climax of the Old Testament cultic system. But it was also prescribed for the consecration of

34 Cf. Eph 5:2; Phil 4:18; see also Gen 8:21; Exo 29:18; Lev 1:9; 2:2; 3:5.

35 Cf. Eph 5:2; Heb 10:10.14.

36 E.g., Exo 10:25; 18:12; Lev 1:3.

37 Cf. Mk 12:33; Heb 10:6.8.

a priest, at the purification of women, at the cleansing of lepers, at the purgation of ceremonial uncleanness, and also in connection with the Nazarite vow. It stipulated that only animals could be offered in holocaust, taken either from the herd like bullocks, or from the flock of sheep, lambs, or goats. To be acceptable, that is, to comply with laws of ritual cleanness, the victim was required to be an unblemished male. In public sacrifices, it was the priest's duty, assisted by the Levites, to preside over the holocaustic ceremony, to bring the animal to the door of the tabernacle, to impose his hands on its head, and to carry out the slaughter of the victim. As the principal offerer, he would sprinkle its blood about the altar, and burn the offering. Any inspection of the entrails, or haruspicy, customary with many pagan sacrifices, had no place in the Mosaic rite. At the end, the priest and other offerers would eat a sacrificial meal as a sign of communion with the fruits of the offering.

Thus, the primary purpose of the burnt-offering was an unconditional surrender and destruction of a pure victim that was valuable to the offerer, to vividly re-acknowledge Yahweh's dominion over his creatures and servants. And thereby it inspired in the sacrificing individual or community sentiments of inner purity, self-surrender, and devotion to the divine Majesty. Tellingly, the Nova Vulgata's *holocaustum* appears for the first time at Gen 8:20, where Noah offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving right after the deluge. It is followed by Abraham's preparedness to offer his own son Isaac as a burnt-offering to God (Gen 22:2).³⁸ Both instances are emblematic of the perfect sacrifice which the Lord Jesus, the divine High Priest of the New Covenant, the true Lamb of God, was to offer in fulfillment of all the bloody and burnt sacrifices of old (Heb 9:12).

2.5. *Dōron: the gift*

Completing the list of New Testament sacrificial terms that echo Old Testament antetypes, we encounter *dōron* (δῶρον), that is, the Septuagint's choice translation of the Hebrew unbloody offering or *minchah* (Gen 32:13), although also rendering *qorban* (Lev 1:2). This Greek neuter noun springs from the verb *didomi* (δίδωμι), "to give", and carries the lexical meaning of "gift, present, sacrifice", with focus on the voluntary predisposition of the donor. It is an offering that is not coerced but spontaneous, and as such it is rendered as *donum* ("gift") or *munus* ("present, office, service") by the Neo-Vulgate. Occurring

³⁸ Although the Septuagint here reads *holokárposis* (ὁλοκάρπωσις), a noun exclusive to the Old Testament and commonly translated as "burnt-offering."

nineteen times in the New Testament, it mainly designates sacrificial gifts to God.³⁹ Just as in the previous types of sacrifice, so also *dōron* is a constitutive part of public worship and private piety, presented to God as a means of reconciliation, as well as obtaining supernal blessings, which must be considered as the one thing needful to live a godly life on earth. It is again Abel who is shown as the first to offer it (Heb 11:4), becoming pleasing and acceptable to the Lord God, and soon after suffers a violent death, due to his brother Cain's envy. This biblical episode is the earliest prefiguration of the perfect self-gift of Christ Jesus.

But before advancing into the third chapter with its contemplation of how Jesus the Messiah realized all these prophetic forms of sacrifice as Priest and Victim, let us make mention, in a descending order of frequency, of some additional sacrificial glossary present in the New Testament, beginning with *haima* (αἷμα, *sanguis*), “blood”: it often symbolizes the sacrificial death of Christ to secure humankind's salvation (e.g., Rom 3:25). Numerous are also the citations of the *pascha* (πάσχα), highlighting Jesus' Passion in the figure of the ancient Passover lamb (1 Cor 5:7). Next, there is the prominent reality of *thysiastērion* (θυσιαστήριον, *altare*), “altar”, that is, the elevated place where the victim was offered (Mt 5:23). It is followed by a trifecta of nouns that capture the idea of redemption, ransom, and release, all rendered as *redemptio* in the New Vulgate, i.e., *lutron* (λύτρον; Mt 20:28), *apolútrōsis* (ἀπολύτρωσις; Heb 9:15), and *antilutron* (ἀντίλυτρον; 1 Tim 2:6). It gives us the key to the philosophy of atonement and paying the price of deliverance from sin by Christ's Victim-death. Closely linked to this is the verb *exagorázo* (ἐξαγοράζω, *redimere*; Gal 3:13), accentuating the way he effected the divine purchase, like a spiritual commerce, to buy us back.

Another allusion to this is a second triplet of correlated words, namely, *hilastērion* (ἱλαστήριον, *propitiatorium*; Rom 3:25), rendering the Hebrew noun for “mercy seat”, *kaporet*; Exo 25:19), *hiláskomai* (ἱλάσκομαι, *repropitiare*; Heb 2:17), and *hilasmós* (ἱλασμός, *propitiatio*; 1 Jn 2:2), all conveying the concept of Jesus' sacrifice of propitiation, or appeasing God's wrath and granting forgiveness for the sins of the world. Moreover, *aparché* (ἀπαρχή, *primitia*) perpetuates the Old Testament reality of “firstfruits”, now applied to the Lord himself, who was the first to rise from the dead in completion of his Paschal sacrifice, transforming all of his brethren into the firstfruits of creation.⁴⁰ Intimately tied to this, too, is his attribute as *protótokos* (πρωτότοκος, *primogenitus*), the “first-

39 E.g., Mt 2:11; 5:23; Heb 5:1; 11:4.

40 Cf. 1 Cor 15:20; Jas 1:18.

born” of the dead (Rev 1:5). And yet another innuendo to sacrifice is *thumíama* (θυμίαμα, *incensus*), the “incense offering or frankincense” (Rev 5:8), as well as *libanotós* (λιβανωτός, *turibulum*), a metaphor for the prayers of the saints (Rev 8:3.5). Lastly, one should mention the verb *apodekatóo* (ἀποδεκατώω, *decimare*), describing the “paying tithes” in a spirit of oblation (Heb 7:5).

3. CHRIST AS THE ONE TRUE *VICTIMA*

After having scrutinized the diverse Old Testament offerings as reflected in the New Testament, and how they point forward to Jesus’ own sacrifice, in this chapter the concept of *victima* will be applied to him. As divine High Priest, he fulfills all ancient sacrifices; indeed, his immolation on the Cross is the culmination of and answer to all previous offerings: “O God, who in the one perfect sacrifice brought to completion varied offerings of the law, accept, we pray, this sacrifice from your faithful servants and make it holy, as you blessed the gifts of Abel, so that what each has offered to the honor of your majesty may benefit the salvation of all.”⁴¹ Thus, Jesus as Priest, Victim and Altar centralizes, spiritualizes and replaces all sacrifice of the old covenant. Henceforth, all religious cultus can only be Christocentric.

Although the Lord during his earthly life accepted the entire sacrificial system of the Old Testament as of divine origin, there is no record that he himself ever worshipped by offering the regular sacrifices. Yet he prayed in the Jerusalem temple and in synagogues, never attacking the sacrificial system as he did the oral law (Mk 7:6). On the other hand, he prophetically critiqued the ancient offerings by teaching that ethics transcends ceremony (Mt 5:23-24; Jn 4:24) and that love and mercy transcend sacrifice (Mt 9:13; Mk 12:33). By instituting the Sacrament of his Body and Blood in a new, superior, and eternal Covenant, he implied not merely the inferiority of sacrifice to the moral law, but also the discontinuance of the old sacrifice (Mk 14:24). Also, Jesus emphasizes his voluntary spirit in making the sacrifice (Jn 10:11), opposed to the compulsory ones in the Old Testament.

To be sure, a priest offers sacrifice and holy gifts to God on behalf of all, as suggested by the etymology of the Latin word *sacerdos*.⁴² In the Gospels, all

41 ROMAN MISSAL, *Prayer over the Offerings* (Sunday of the Sixteenth Week in Ordinary Time).

42 Deriving from the adjective *sacer*, “holy”, and the verb *dare*, “to give”; literally, therefore, the giver of sacred things; as such it is related to the deverbal noun *sacrificium*, stemming from the adjective *sacer*, “holy”, and the verb *faciō*, “do, make”, literally, “to make holy, sanctify”; as such these two terms reflect the generic Greek word for “priest” in Scripture, namely, *hiereús* (ἱερεύς), meaning, “a saintly man, a man of the Sacred.”

of the God-Man's *gesta et verba* ("actions and words")⁴³ fulfilled the function of the Messianic High Priest, although he neither referred to himself nor to his disciples as "priests." To mention but a few instances, he justified his Sabbath activity on the basis of the priestly exemption (Mt 12:5), he comforted Simon Peter with the assurance of priestly intercession on his behalf (Lk 22:32), and he prayed for himself, for his disciples and for the world in the upper room (Jn 17). The Epistle to the Hebrews compares Christ to Melchizedek, a mysteriously superior priest in the Old Testament who blessed Abraham. And because he is both divine and human, Jesus is the perfect Mediator, the greatest High Priest, and the perfect Victim (Heb 5:5-10), the worthy Lamb "that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing" (Rev 5:12). But let us first reflect on the incarnational stages of Jesus' victimhood, and then on the concept of vicariousness and ransom, and third, on how his victimization truly redeems us, and brings us to Christian perfection.

3.1. *Rendering self-oblation*

In the New Testament, the practice of sacrifice is much less prominent, but its language regarding the death of Christ and its saving value for humanity is dominant. In fact, it overshadows and spiritualizes every other aspect of Old Testament sacrificial rituals.⁴⁴ Sacred authors, especially St. Paul, make metaphorical and ethical use of sacrificial language.⁴⁵ Yet the sacrifice and Victimhood of Jesus could be portrayed in stages, presupposing that as a divine person in two natures "he offered up himself" (Heb 7:27) as the innocent Servant of God for many (Isa 53:12).

A.) *Incarnation*: Since every priest has to be taken from among humanity (Heb 5:1), the first stage of his sacerdotal Victimhood was his Incarnation. Hence, in the basilica of the Virgin Mary's womb, so to speak, the God-Man was made a priest forever.⁴⁶ In true exercise of his priestly *munus* ("office"), he sacrificed himself in expiation at that very first moment of being enfleshed in human form (Heb 10:5-10). From that world-historical moment, that is, from the first beat of his Sacred Heart and from his first act of will, his Victimhood was absolutely perfect as to comprise all worship due to God, all praise, thank-

43 SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Dei Verbum*, no. 2.

44 FREEDMAN, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, "Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings", 882-83.

45 For instance, "aroma" (2 Cor 2:15), "fragrance" (Phil 4:18), and "acceptable sacrifice" (Rom 12:1).

46 Cf. MARMION, *Christ – The Ideal of The Priest*, 20.

fulness, self-surrender, expiation, supplication, and love. From the first moment of his existence as a creature, Jesus turned towards his Father, contemplating his infinite perfections such as his eternity, his immensity, his immutability, his holiness, and he desired to render priestly homage to all this greatness. As the eternal *Verbum* (“Word”), or Second divine person, in the Trinity in heaven, he could not have this desire, because he was in all things co-equal, that is, consubstantial⁴⁷, to the Father. But now that he is inferior to the Father in his humanity, he is able to honor him fully, as it were, as a Victim of adoration. And he adores the Father from the depths of complete self-abasement or *kenōsis* (Phil 2:7), looking up to him from the utmost limit of littleness and servanthood. In this his selfless love for the will of his Father from the first moment of incarnation (Heb 10:7), he becomes also a Victim of atonement as the most salient note of his self-sacrifice.⁴⁸ By surrendering his free will in obedience, Christ becomes Priest and Victim of his own sacrifice.

B.) *Infancy and public life*: Although the God-Man’s outward state was that of an infant, following his birth in Bethlehem, his intellect was that of a divine Victim in all its plenitude. All his suffering and humiliations, therefore, are voluntary, and consequently, meritorious, and as such they effect our salvation. And as he is a Victim of adoration, so he is also a Victim of thanksgiving, supplementing our insufficiency. It is his hypostatic union, his sanctifying grace, and his beatific vision, that allow him to redeem us. He does so with a simple sigh of supplication since being in the womb of his Blessed Mother (Heb 7:25). And after his birth, his crib becomes an altar to carry on his mission of Victim by his state of rejection, dependence and helplessness as the Holy Child. Moreover, his circumcision signals the earliest shedding of his precious Victim-blood, followed by the mystery of his self-oblation in the Temple externally and publicly.⁴⁹ Then there is the victimhood of his separation from his parents at age twelve, his submission to them in Nazareth, and his sacrificial hidden life in work, silence and prayer (Lk 2:41-52). It is also possible that Jesus made a Nazirite vow, suggested by his baptism, i.e, purification by immersion in water, by his abstaining from wine before his crucifixion (Lk 22:18), as well as his refusal to drink of the wine mixed with gall on Calvary.⁵⁰ These speculations stem from the lexical ambiguity of the

47 Cf. The NICENE-CONSTANTINOPOLITAN CREED.

48 See MORRIS, *The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance*.

49 Cf. GIRAUD, *Jesus Christ, Priest and Victim*, 193-202

50 In addition to the traditional nazirite requirements of refraining from cutting the hair on his head, and to avoid ritual impurity by contact with corpses or graves, even those of family members.

Greek noun *Nazoraïos* (Ναζωραῖος)⁵¹, that can mean both “Nazorean” (sometimes spelled “Nazarene”), implying the concept of a “Nazirite” (alternatively spelled “Nazarite”)⁵², or simply “hailing from Nazareth.” Be that as it may, Jesus’ entire public life with its countless deprivations and confrontations, meant a continuation of his self-sacrifice and victimization.

C.) *Paschal Mystery*: The God-Man’s self-oblation culminates in his sacrifice on the Cross where he offered up himself perfectly (Heb 7:27-28). As Origen states that even though various animals were offered up in the Old Testament, the daily sacrifice, which was offered up morning and evening, was a lamb (Num 28:3-4), signifying that the offering of the true Lamb, that is, Christ, was the culminating sacrifice of all.⁵³ In his hypostatic union, and since there was found no other priest worthy of offering such a sacrifice, Christ became both Priest and Victim; and there was no unblemished sacrifice he could offer except himself, so he offered himself: “For at the Last Supper with his Apostles, establishing for the ages to come the saving memorial of the Cross, he offered himself to you as the unblemished Lamb, the acceptable gift of perfect praise.”⁵⁴ That is to say, Jesus voluntarily agreed to be the Victim for this wondrous sacrifice: “With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to you” (Psa 54:6). Old Testament priests and levites had to drag the bullocks and drive the sheep to the altar; they had to bind the calves with cords to the altar’s horns, lest they escape. Yet no one forced Christ to die; on the contrary, he laid down his life voluntarily⁵⁵, for he had power to lay it down, and to take it again (Jn 10:18). And he did so as the Pioneer and Perfecter of our faith, for the sake of the eternal joys set before him (Heb 12:2). His whole nature as Son of Man was offered up in death as an atonement for us, a perfect and sinless nature indissolubly united with his Divine nature. He freely gave his spotless body for you and for me, but also his spiritual nature, that is, his soul with its will, understanding, imagination, and every spiritual faculty. When his body was broken on the Cross, his soul like divine perfume was poured out upon our broken humanity (cf. Lk 10:34).

51 Rendered by the New Vulgate as *Nazareus*, or once as *Nazaraeus* (Mt 2:23).

52 From the Hebrew masculine noun *nāzīr* (נָזִיר), cf. Num 6:2.

53 Cf. *Commentary on John*, 1:29.

54 ROMAN MISSAL, *Preface II Most Holy Eucharist*.

55 Cf. HILARY OF POITIERS, *Tractatus in LIV Psalmum*; PL 9: 345.

His victimhood is pure, that is, free from every contagion or debt of sin, not only because it was infused with the sanctity of the *Verbum*, but also because, although his human nature was derived from Adam, it was assumed without the stain of original sin. He is also a rational victim, viz., gifted with reason, offering himself willingly and lovingly. The burden of our sins was not placed on him by the Father, but it was the Son himself who took up the burden out of love, desiring to act as our Priest and to surrender himself as our Victim. Hence, in his oblation, the Lord made himself the bearer of our sin and its ensuing punishment, including him being excommunicated by his own people outside the city (Heb 13:12). And even though he could have avoided his enemies or prevented them to harm and kill him, he submitted to pain and to the law of death: “Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth” (Isa 53:7). Nevertheless, this act of will in itself does not constitute a sacrificial offering: To be a true victim, Christ had to intentionally direct his self-oblation to his Father, and this he did by offering himself in the Eucharist on Holy Thursday, becoming Priest and Victim in one person.⁵⁶ “This is the perfect Lamb, for in it the High Priest concealed in his Victim by reason of the mystery, today gave to God the Man whom he offered in sacrifice.”⁵⁷

The God-Man qualifies to be the ultimate Victim since he has all three elements of a sacrifice: the offering priest, the sacrificial altar, and the victim’s immolation.⁵⁸ This union of priest, altar, and sacrifice in his person is alluded to in the image of the slain Lamb at Rev 5:6. In the Fourth Gospel, he suffers death on the cross on the day before Passover at the same hour the lambs were slaughtered for the *pesach* meal in the forecourt of the temple. As *priest* he ministers comfort from the Cross to his Mother and to his beloved disciple entrusting one to the other. With priestly authority he proclaims that all is finished (Jn 19:30) and commits his spirit into the Father’s hands (Lk 23:46). As *victim*, and as the orphaned Immanuel, he cries out in utter dereliction: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46), and as our Passover sacrifice he experiences thirst (Jn 19:28). But his very body nailed to the Cross becomes his mystical *altar*, upon which he lifts up his *prosphorá* (*oblatio*, Heb 10:10), the well-spring of universal redemption.⁵⁹ The biblical altar represented the divinity and those who desired to offer sacrifices to God had to do so necessarily

56 Cf. AMBROSE, *De fide ad Gratianum Augustum*; PL 16: 607.

57 ZENO OF VERONA, *Tractatus LV, De Exodo II*; PL 11: 511.

58 See HORVATH, *The Sacrificial Interpretation of Jesus’ Achievement in the New Testament*.

59 Cf. AUGUSTINE, *Quaestiones Evangeliorum*, lib. I, c. 24; PL 35: 1329.

through an altar; but Jesus approached God through himself, and hence he was also the altar of his own sacrifice.

For this higher purpose, Jesus “consecrated” himself (*hagiázo*, ἀγιάζω) like on Yom Kippur (Jn 17:19), becoming the grain of wheat that falls into the earth and bears much fruit (Jn 12:24). St. Ephraem the Syrian adds these praises: “The Lamb of truth, knowing that a rejected priesthood and polluted sacrificers did not suffice for him, became for his own Body the Priest and the Prince of sacrificers. Our Sacrificer, become Victim by his own sacrifice, abolished the victims and showered his grace all over the world.”⁶⁰ And this his Paschal victimhood reaches its lowest point by his descent into hell on Holy Saturday⁶¹, to announce deliverance to the forefathers and foremothers.⁶² But the Paschal Mystery is concluded only by Christ’s Ascension and Session at his Father’s right hand: Henceforth he remains with his brethren in the Church as a Eucharistic Victim, that is to say, a Victim of thanksgiving in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar (Acts 2:46).⁶³ He will be sacrificed on the altars in our churches until the consummation of this age, allowing his followers to eat his Body and drink his Blood (Jn 6:53). Thus, after having discussed these various stages of his Victimhood on earth, let us now explore another crucial aspect of his being *Victima*.

3.2. *Paying vicarious ransom*

The sacrificial provisions in the Book of Leviticus taught the Israelites, priests and laypeople alike, that God can be ritually approached through the blood of an animal as a worthy substitute (e.g., Lev 4:3.14). They were relieved in knowing that instead of paying the penalty for sin themselves, Yahweh would accept a substitute in their place. But when the Son of God incarnated into this world, he rendered himself a Victim in fulfillment of that substitutionary logic: “We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us [*hypér hemōn*, ὑπὲρ

60 *Hymnus Azymorum 2*: quoted from LAMY, *Sancti Ephraem syri hymni et sermones*, 576.

61 APOSTLES’ CREED.

62 Hans Urs von BALTHASAR in his book *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter* (1970) offers a creative reflection on that momentous day, opining that Jesus suffered not only physical death on the Cross, but also spiritual death in hell as the farthest reach of his vicarious suffering. Nevertheless, theologians have typically argued that the Lord did not enter the actual precincts of hell but stopped short at a place called the “limbo of the fathers”, where the Old Testament righteous men and women resided at a safe distance from the burning flames, awaiting their admittance into heaven.

63 See FEINGOLD, *The Eucharist: Mystery of Presence, Sacrifice, and Communion*.

ἡμῶν, *pro nobis*]” (1 Jn 3:16). Likewise, John the Baptist, who presents Jesus as the coming Judge in the Synoptic Gospels (Mt 3:7.10), refers to him as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29), referring to him as the Passover Lamb and as the suffering Servant of the Lord (Isa 53:7). Both designations, Lamb and Servant, convey the ideas of vicarious suffering, of patient submission, of sacrificial meekness, and of redemption. Hence, Christ lives and dies in substitution, meaning, that as the Old Testament animal whose blood ratified the covenant was slain instead of the people, so the God-Man is slain in the place of sinners.

Intimately linked to this principle of vicariousness is the concept of ransom which suggests captivity in sin and deliverance by payment of a price, namely, the death of Christ. And although the Lord has not elaborated on the theoretical truth of how exactly his sacrificial life and death purchase humanity’s redemption from sin, he does insist on the practical verity that “this is my Blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many” (Mk 14:24). Hence, the idea in ransom must be of sacrificial significance. Paul in his pastoral letters teaches us that the Savior gave “himself a ransom for all” (1 Tim 2:6). This is the only biblical passage in which occurs the expressive word *antilytron* (ἀντίλυτρον)⁶⁴, deriving from the prefixed *antí*, that is, “corresponding to, instead of, exchanging”, and the noun *lytron*, signifying the “purchasing money for manumitting slaves, a ransom.” It points especially to the sacrifice by which expiation is effected. Its Latin translation in the Neo-Vulgate, i.e., *redemptio*, is similarly a compound of *re-*, “back”, and *emere*, “to purchase, gain, obtain, acquire”, meaning, “to buy back, transfer.”⁶⁵ Thus, Jesus properly pays the complete liberty-price to secure our freedom or “redemption” from all slavery to sin. Put differently, he exchanges his eternal righteousness for our sin (Rom 3:26; 2 Cor 5:21). Regarding this very redemption or deliverance from the curse of sin he proclaimed: “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45). After the fall of Adam, humanity is in bondage to sin, and so the heavenly Father sent his Son to pay the ransom price for the deliverance of the captive, and the Son’s death, foreshadowed in Isaac⁶⁶, is the price paid in the place of the many who were unable to pay the price themselves.

64 Identical in connotation with the more frequent New Testament noun *apolytrosis* (ἀπολύτρωσις), meaning “redemption, release, ransom, deliverance” (cf. Rom 3:24; 8:23; 1 Cor 1:30; Eph 1:7.14; 4:30; Col 1:14; Heb 9:15; 11:35).

65 Related to the lexical value of the Greek verb *exagorázo* (ἐξαγοράζω), “to buy up at the marketplace, redeem, ransom, buy away from”; cf. Gal 3:13.

66 TERTULLIAN writes: “Isaac, led as a victim by his father, and carrying the wood for

That notion of ransom also mirrors the meaning of the Hebrew Old Testament verb *kaphar* (כָּפַר)⁶⁷, literally “to cover for protection, purge, atone, reconcile”, in that Christ’s death, like a covering, delivers us by inspiring us to lead the life of sacrificial service as he himself did. While the idea of ransom places all emphasis upon the God-pleasing work of his Son in securing our salvation, it also suggests the immutability of the covenant on the basis of Christ’s death implying the permanent ratification of the union between God and man. Involved, too, is the fact that the Lord’s sacrifice was the offering of a perfect, acceptable life to God, and that we communicate with his death by sharing the sacrificial banquet of the Eucharist. And not least, there is the divinely-purposed propitiation or expiation which Christ made in his death.⁶⁸

This exhibition of divine righteousness signals the vindication of that side of his just nature that demands the remission of guilt due to human sin and its punishment. It had not been shown in former generations prior to the coming of the Redeemer, when his forbearance passed over men’s sins (Acts 17:30). We were under God’s wrath (Rom 1:18), that is, our sin made us liable to punishment, while at the same time his love for the sinner was grieved. The human heart seems to know, in the sanctuary of its conscience, that it must bring a sacrifice if it would appear before God; sin must be punished, atoned, and purified to re-possess redemption and procure justification. The Son of Man by his death on the Cross became a curse for us (Gal 3:13) and thereby delivered us from the curse incurred by the breaking of the law. Hence, he saved us by vicariously enduring the penalty to which we were exposed. However, his propitiatory sacrifice (Rom 5:8) does not simply soften God, or assuage his wrath, but by his atoning Blood, Christ made it possible for his Father to show his righteousness, reconciliation, and love at the same time.

himself, thus early foreshadowed the death of Christ, given as victim by the Father, and carrying the wood of his own Passion” (*Adversus Judaeos*, ch. 10).

67 At the root of the expression *Yom Kippur*, “day of atonement”, and of *Kapporeth* (כַּפֹּרֶת), “atonement seat, mercy seat”, resting upon the Ark of the Covenant (Exo 25:17-22); it is reproduced by the Greek noun *hilastérion* (ἱλαστήριον; cf. *Nova Vulgata propitiatorium*) as the place of forgiveness or propitiation (Rom 3:25; Heb 9:5).

68 JUSTIN MARTYR calls the second goat, offered at the same time as the emissary goat that was sent into the wilderness, a figure of Christ, who “was an offering for all sinners willing to do penance” (*Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 40).

3.3. *Effecting perfect redemption*

Jesus and the New Testament writers regarded the Old Testament sacrificial system as of divine origin and so obligatory in its day⁶⁹, but inefficacious, and only an antetype of his perfect sacrifice, and so to be supplanted by it in the fullness of time. The former sacrifices were imperfect due to the arbitrary choice of substitutionary victims, to the ineffective human sacrificer or mediator, and to their inability “to clear the conscience of the worshipper” (Heb 9:9). All they could do was to be a reminder of sin (Heb 10:3) and to symbolize and anticipate the God-Man’s offering of himself on our behalf. Even the prophets had cautioned already against their inability of taking away personal sin or of producing moral transformation, which caused a bitter controversy between them and the priests of their epoch.⁷⁰ And while Jesus explicitly honored the Mosaic sacrifices, he was also in accord with that prophetic critique.⁷¹ Their unprofitableness and lack of ultimate value was proven by the necessity of repeating the offerings, foreshadowing the one great sacrifice by Christ “offered once for all to bear the sin of many” (Heb 9:28). At that juncture they would be abrogated and fall into oblivion, inadequate in satisfying the Most High God or removing human guilt. Nevertheless, these ancient oblationary rituals did demonstrate that the way to God is not just open to anyone on any terms. To please God, there must be a qualified priest and an acceptable sacrifice offered in a suitable way, and humanity must not presume: “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb 10:31).

Typified in the various sacrifices of the Old Testament, the oblation made by Christ on the cross is the final efficacious sacrifice for the atonement of sin and the salvation of humankind. Doing away with the shadows, the incarnate Lord as the divine representative of the whole human race offered no arbitrarily chosen victim, but the willing Victim of his own flesh and blood. He had been consecrated by God and by a solemn oath to be the High Priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek. Susceptible to earthly infirmities and trials, yet, at the same time, he is the true Son of God, exalted far above all created things, and ever living to make intercession in heaven, now that his sacrifice is over. In him, the barrier between man and God is removed by his conciliation, and the most holy place in heaven once for all opened to us. In the old covenant the law was written on tablets of stone, but in the New and

69 Cf. Mt 5:23-24; 8:4; 15:5; Mk 1:44; 7:11; Lk 5:14; 17:14.

70 See ONORIODE-BOLOJE, “Prophetic Criticism of Temple Rituals: A Reflection on Malachi’s Idea about Yahweh and Ethics for Faith Communities.”

71 See LAFFERTY, *The Prophetic Critique of the Priority of the Cult*.

Eternal Covenant it is engraved on the tablets of human hearts (2 Cor 3:3). Hence, it functions by the power of the Holy Spirit who works in the human heart and transforms the conscience. And that is to say that Jesus' sacrifice is the "original" after which were patterned the prospective sacrifices of Aaron and his sons. The Good Tidings or *Evangelium* of the New Testament is that the sacrifice of Christ was of such value that it needed to be offered only once for all (Heb 7:27), finished on Calvary (Jn 19:30). From then on the forgiveness of sin is truly effected, and with that the definitive gift of salvation.

Since the Lord is "truly God, truly Man" (*Perfectus Deus, perfectus homo*)⁷², his Victimhood logically possesses perfection as well. Only unblemished animals were to be offered in the Old Testament (Lev 1:3), since they were a shadow of Christ who was unblemished by sin. Thus, there was found no other priest more worthy and no other offering more fitting, and so he himself became both Priest and Victim. Even so, he willingly took our sins on himself and paid the penalty we deserve (1 Jn 3:5), and as a result he became perfect himself (Heb 2:1; 5:9; 7:28) and leads us to perfection, too (Heb 10:1.14; 12:23): "We praise You with greater joy than ever in this Easter season, when Christ became our paschal sacrifice. As he offered his body on the cross, his perfect sacrifice fulfilled all others. As he gave himself into your hands for our salvation, he showed himself to be the Priest, the Altar, and the Lamb of sacrifice."⁷³ And this his sacrifice is expressive of insuperable love and mercy (Jn 13:1).

Among the most salient aspects of this perfectly efficacious Victimhood are spiritual reconciliation (Rom 5:10), overcoming the primeval estrangement and tensions between the all-Holy God and unrepentant humanity, giving us full access to the Father: "Look, we pray, upon the oblation of your Church and, recognizing the sacrificial Victim by whose death you willed to reconcile us to yourself, grant that we, who are nourished by the Body and Blood of your Son and filled with his Holy Spirit, may become one body, one spirit in Christ. May he make of us an eternal offering to you, so that we may obtain an inheritance with your elect."⁷⁴ Such reconciliation necessarily implies the remission of our sins as another outcome of his perfect sacrifice.⁷⁵ Furthermore, true forgiveness includes the cancellation of all personal guilt of the offender. That guilt is the direct consequence of sin and means that the sinner owes satisfaction to God; until such penance is done, we remain exposed to his wrath and liable to tempo-

72 Cf. COUNCIL OF CHALCEDON, Act V; see also the ATHANASIAN CREED.

73 ROMAN MISSAL, 5th Preface of Easter.

74 ROMAN MISSAL, *Eucharistic Prayer III*.

75 Cf. Mt 26:28; Rom 3:21; 4:7; 5:21; Eph 1:7; Col 1:14; 1 Jn 1:7-9.

ral or even eternal punishment. Yet Jesus' sin-offering has removed all guilt and its grace is received through the holy sacraments of the Church. Right standing with God or justification is also implied in the preceding idea. If forgiving sin and canceling guilt are the negative part, then the soul's sanctification is the positive aspect of the same transaction (2 Cor 5:21). And lastly, divine sonship of the believer by adoption can also be traced to the sacrificial death of Christ, *Sacerdos et Victima* (Rom 8:17).

4. VICTIMHOOD IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

It is clear from the above that the notion of sacrificial victimhood is a complex one, involving substitutionary, propitiatory, dedicatory, and eucharistic elements.⁷⁶ But the theme of Christ's own sacerdotal Victimhood also takes us to the heart of the Gospel and to the essence of the Christian faith; indeed, in a very genuine sense, it constitutes Christianity, differentiating it from other world religions. And if the self-oblation of the God-Man, offered once for all, was accepted in heaven itself, effecting forgiveness and gaining access to God, then the members of his Mystical Body can be bold and confident in approaching the divine throne of mercies. But for the Lord's objective redemption to be efficacious, it must be subjectively applied by the reception of the sacraments, by repentance, by faith, and by obedience. With unwavering trust, his followers on earth must persevere through any difficulty and encourage one another to the same, setting their hope on final salvation. Since the Church consists of hierarchy and laypeople, let us first reflect on living Christ's Victimhood among the Catholic clergy, and then on ways how to live it as lay-faithful.

4.1. Sacerdotal self-offering

While the priests of the Old Dispensation sacrificed animals like lambs, bulls, goats, and turtle doves, in the priesthood of Jesus, the priesthood of the New Covenant, the priest offers himself as the victim (Heb 9:14). Bishop Fulton Sheen spoke about "the great divorce of priest and victim", however.⁷⁷ He implied that every generation of priests must rediscover and recover the absolute spiritual necessity of self-surrender and victimization in imitation of Christ. Otherwise the priest seems to be a mere presider at Holy Mass, "hosting" (wel-

⁷⁶ Cf. YOUNG, *The Use of Sacrificial Ideas in Greek Christian Writers from the New Testament to John Chrysostom*.

⁷⁷ Cf. *Those Mysterious Priests*, ch. 2.

coming) the “hosts” (crowds) without ever becoming the “host” (Eucharistic *hostia*) himself. In which case he would be comparable to Cain, who unlike his brother Abel, refused to please the almighty God with a victim-offering. On the contrary, he is to be both Offerer and Offered, Priest and Victim. Only in this way will his priesthood be transformative of souls in the power of the Cross. This presupposes an ongoing spiritual battle and conquest that each priest must first win alone, and within himself, before he can repeat that victory in the lives of those entrusted to his sacrifice.

Suffering is precious to Christ, for through it he unites all to himself. Anyone aspiring to be his disciple must take up his cross daily and follow him (Lk 9:23). Yet, the secret of the Suffering Servant (Isa 53:3) he entrusted to a select few, his Apostles, and his future priests, who he calls to be suffering servants, too. It must be kept in mind that this vocation to suffering has two opposing dimensions since the vertical Cross-beam of a life of holiness conflicts with the horizontal Cross-beam of sin and death. And so, just as the unblemished victim of old was to be altogether destroyed by the fire, and the smell of its burning would rise like fragrance towards God, so also the priest has a duty of becoming a victim in the image of Jesus. On this depends the fruitfulness or failure of his ministerial efforts. And herein also lies the secret of his sacramental victimhood, namely, that conjoined with the crucified Paschal Lamb he becomes a holocaust for love in all its plenitude. In that sense, every priestly sacrificer ought to reproduce in his own soul the reality effected upon the altar, that is, the sole adequate worship due to God, the Eucharistic oblation of the Son of God.

Illuminative of this concept is the intriguing etymology of the related word “immolation”, signalling the sacrificial killing and offering up of the victim. In most ancient societies such immolation of animals was a customary ritual used to gain favor with the gods.⁷⁸ The noun is assimilated from the Latin word *immolātus*, which in turn is a compound of the preposition *in-*, “into, in, on, upon”, and the noun *mola*, “flour, meal.” The latter stems from the verb *molēre*, derivative of the Proto-Into-European root *mele-*, “to crush, to grind, crumble, destroy with a millstone.” This *mola* is the abridged version of *mola salsa* (from the Latin word *salsus*, “salted”), meaning “sacred flour seasoned with salt.” It was a mixture of coarse-ground and toasted emmer or spelt flour and salt, prepared by the vestal virgins⁷⁹ and used in every official sacrifice. According to the cultic practice of classical Roman religion, this sacrificia meal

78 See SMITH, *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*: “Immolation.”

79 Their guild would make *mola salsa* during the annual Vestalia, the chief Roman festival of the hearth-goddess Vesta.

was sprinkled on the forehead and between the horns of animal victims before they were sacrificed, as well as on the altar and into the *flamen* (“sacred fire”).⁸⁰ *Mola salsa* was such a common offering at the household-hearth that “to put on the mola”, or Latin *immolare*, came to mean “to sacrifice”, and hence the English term “immolation.” In addition to the spiritual notion of being crushed in victimhood, the priest should also be mindful that in ancient Rome, the *mola salsa* eventually became a wafer that was consumed in the oven as a sacrifice itself, possibly inspiring the leavened or unleavened sacramental bread of the Eucharistic host.

What is more, the priest, by divine election and by personal consent has publicly chosen as his own the perfection of Christ, Priest and Victim. He perpetuates, therefore, the Victimhood of the Lord throughout the *eschaton* (“end-time”) for the salvation of souls. It is in such profound charity that he readies himself to be a perfect victim with him, particularly at the moment of consecration at the Sacrifice of Holy Mass. It is there, on that altar, that the most perfect embodiment of the priesthood is found in the total destruction of the Victim, sacramentally re-enacting Jesus’ death on the Cross. And since that oblation is total, it demands a correspondingly total holocaust on the part of the sacrificing priest. Thus, there are two paramount features of the priesthood, namely, its sacrificial nature and its absolute victim-subordination as a perfect instrument to the spiritual power of Christ. That one flawless holocaust suffered on Golgotha in reparation for all sin is made alive again in the person of the priest at the altar. Yet it is the inner disposition of the will, or intention, on the part of the celebrant where the perfection of the victimhood of the priest is achieved as a unifying force in the Church. In his self-donation, he becomes a Eucharistic victim, one with Christ, called to embrace a celibate life of renunciation and of pastoral charity. But let us finally explore the ways in which the lay-faithful live the victimhood of the Lord.

4.2. *Laical union with the Hostia*

When St. Paul emboldened the Philippian church to “have the mind of Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5), he was really incentivizing them to take part in his Victim-humility and self-Sacrifice and to be completely emptied out in the service of the heavenly Father. As laity, we are invited to pour ourselves out in a kenotic experience, to spend ourselves in humble service to God and neighbor, which will never be painless, no passion ever was. It also involves the realization that

80 Cf. MAURUS SERVIUS HONORATUS, *Commentary on the Eclogues of Virgil*, 8.82.

the God-Man, in the name of the whole human family, brings our prayers and religious acts before his eternal Father, and he does so as Victim substituting himself for sinners. Lay men and women deny themselves as the Gospel commands, that freely and of their own accord they do penance and that each detests and makes satisfaction for his sins.⁸¹ Their oblation in the Lord Jesus binds them also to offer themselves wholly to him, most especially by embracing his Cross as the principal symbol of sacrifice. They concretely detach themselves from the overly selfish use of earthly possessions, ready provide for the needs of the Church (2 Cor 8-9).⁸²

All the effects of redemption are ascribed to the blood and death of Christ the obedient Victim.⁸³ This insight is essential for all Christians who share in the royal priesthood of Christ bestowed on them in baptism. They follow him, *Sacerdos et Victima*, by imitating him in his love for the Father and his compassion for others, and thereby they contribute to the building of the Kingdom of heaven. And the needful appropriation of victimhood in each individual soul is brought about by the Holy Spirit, to offer the pure eschatological sacrifice from the rising of the sun to its setting (Mal 1:11). The goal is to offer their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God in spiritual worship (Rom 12:1). Since we know the Father accepts his Son's sacrifice, we place our lives on Christ himself; he is the one through whom we sacrifice our lives. Like living stones, we allow ourselves to be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through the Lord (1 Pt 2:5) as a sweet-smelling aroma (Eph 5:2): "If we now offer ourselves to be shorn with that silent humility and patience in which he offered himself for us, he will take on himself the burdens of our fleeces, and will not disdain to carry the wool of his sheep."⁸⁴

Such living sacrifice, such unreserved devotion to God, such whole-hearted dedication of all our thoughts, will, heart and actions can spring only from inner faith and obedience. And that interior offering will enable us as laypeople to confidently enter the very presence of God. Strengthened by that intimacy, we will also gladly endure any marginalization within contemporary culture. God willingly became the victim of his own rejection in this world so that we could belong to him. So let us then go to him "outside the camp" and bear the victimization he endured (Heb 13:13). As *Totus Christus*, "the Whole

81 Cf. PIUS XII, Encyclical Letter *Mediator Dei*, nos. 35-81.

82 See the Fifth Precept of the Catholic Church.

83 Cf. PRAT, *Theology of Saint Paul*, 180-88.

84 PAULINUS OF NOLA, *Letter 11, To Severus*, no. 8: quoted from WALSH, *Letters of St. Paulinus of Nola*, 98.

Christ”, Head and members, we offer our sacrifices on his altar.⁸⁵ And we do so with “a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart” that God will not spurn (Psa 51:17). Summit and source of this spirituality of victimhood will always be the participation in the Holy Eucharist.⁸⁶ By receiving the sacred *Hostia* (“Victim”), Christ himself, we insert ourselves in that universal logic of cultic sacrifice as the only path to holiness and salvation.⁸⁷ The Eucharistic Jesus will envelop the soul in this mystical dialogue: “This is my Body broken for you”: Will you let your body be broken for me and for others today? “This is my Blood poured out for you”: Will you let your blood be poured out for me and for others today?

Before concluding these reflections on the biblical framework of Jesus’ victimhood, it seems fitting to paraphrase Saint Thérèse of Lisieux’s Act of Oblation as a victim of Divine Love, found after her death in the copy of the Gospels which she carried day and night close to her heart: “O my God, I offer you the love and the merits of the Blessed Virgin, to her I commit this oblation, praying her to present it to you. In order that my life may be one act of perfect love, I offer myself as a victim of holocaust to your merciful love, so I may become a martyr of your love. O my Beloved, I desire at every beat of my heart to renew this oblation an infinite number of times, until everlastingly I can tell you my love face to face.”⁸⁸

CONCLUSION

This study started out by inquiring whether or not there is a biblical background to the notion of Christ being Priest and Victim. And now we can attest that it is indeed deeply rooted in the Sacred Scriptures, both in the Old and New Testaments. In the former, however, the priest and the victim were distinct entities, while in the offering of Christ it is not so, but by an astonishing and unique prerogative of his priesthood, in his sacrifice the priest and the victim are united in one person.⁸⁹ As a spiritual inference then,

85 AUGUSTINE, *In Psalmos 25, Ennar.* 2, no. 10; PL 36, 193.

86 Cf. CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, no. 1324.

87 See GIHR, *The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass*.

88 She had signed this prayer on June 9, 1895, the feast of the Most Blessed Trinity, about two years before she died; cf. O’MAHONY, *St. Thérèse of Lisieux by Those Who Knew Her*, 128-29.

89 Cf. MARMION, *Christ – The Ideal of The Priest*, 20-22.

ordained priests and all baptized members of his mystical Body, offer Jesus in the Mass, as is expressed by the offertory invitation that the celebrant extends to the partaking community during the Eucharistic celebration, “Pray, brethren, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.” On the other hand, as victims we make self-oblation of ourselves with Christ especially during the Holy Eucharist; in fact, our ministerial and baptismal priesthood is best illumined in the fires of victimhood, redounding to more priestly and religious vocations, too. In this present study, therefore, we have demonstrated how the Lord, in perfect fulfillment of Old Testament prefigurations, is at the same time Priest, Victim-Lamb, and the Altar of sacrifice. To do so, we had recourse to its sources in the Scripture, the soul of all Theology, recognizing that the concept of priest and victim is implicit in much of the New Testament’s depiction of the God-Man and of his Church. That is to say that it is the same Christ as High Priest that offered himself as the Lamb of sacrifice on the altar which is still himself. And so, let us close by encouraging a renewed emphasis on the crucial importance of Christian victimhood, both among clergy and lay faithful. The general exercise of all our gifts and graces should be viewed as a participation in the Lord’s self-gift. By uniting ourselves to him, he will be able to build us up like living stones into a supernatural house, into a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifice (1 Peter 2:5). And thus, Lord Jesus, thank you for not only being our Great High Priest, but also the willing Victim of the cruelty of man so that we may know forgiveness and hope, truly God’s central act in human history. As with numerous other tenets of our faith, let us allow ourselves to be profoundly embedded in and surrounded by the pivotal paradox of Christ, *Sacerdos et Victima*.

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