

SACRAMENTALISM THE TRUE REMEDY FOR
SACERDOTALISM.

II.

WE are robbed of some due sense of the true place of Communion by our misuse of the word symbol. The elements alone are not symbolical. Symbol, at its best, is something that not only *reminds* us of reality in the significate, but by its living nature *passes us on* to the reality. Then Communion is organic, and not arbitrary—not a mere matter of association. It is not through the mere elements that we touch the reality, else Rome were right, and we are lost in all the metaphysics in which transubstantiation has smothered faith. The elements are but the material which the true symbol employs in passing us on to the reality. That reality is in the region where all reality must accrue at last, and be found for ever at home with itself, in the region of will and of action. It is, of course, the person and work of Christ. Now the elements are not so symbolical of this as is the action performed on them. It is the breaking, the pouring out, the partaking that are the true symbols. That is to say, the true symbol is not an element, but an act. It is only thus that it can be a symbol of the great act which is its reality, the act of the cross. It was so at the Last Supper. It is so in our Sacrament. The symbolism is in the Church's act. It is therefore a symbol which itself belongs to reality. It has the reality of will—of our will, and of Christ's dying will acting through ours.

There is no fear of any superstition in emphasizing *this* real presence, so long as we urge that it is a reality of present act and will, and not of mere substance. We renew our first decisive dedication of ourselves to Christ, and Christ renews His first decisive offering of Himself for us.

It is a real renewal of the devoted act ; and it is equally real on both sides.

Much of the strife that has arisen about the Last Supper might have been avoided, and much may be laid, by a true grasp of the principle by which the Old Testament explains the New. The Old Testament explains the New as the New Testament lights up the Old. The Old Testament interprets the New ; the New Testament reveals the Old. We cannot understand the Old Testament without the New, and we cannot account for the New Testament without the Old.

The best clue to this act of Christ is in the Old Testament ; and it is in that part of the Old Testament which was most in Christ's own thoughts, and is therefore most fertile for understanding Him and His work. It is not in the law, where it has been sought to excess and to strife, but in the prophets. The New Testament men altogether were not priestly, but prophetic in their strain.

The key to Christ's intent will therefore be best found perhaps in the method, used so often by the prophets, of symbolical action. The overlaid thought passes beyond the power of words (as thought inspired by love and passion must at its height always do), and is driven into the symbolism of an act. It craves an enacted instead of a spoken symbol ; a parable in startling deed instead of stale word. Love surcharged passes through the broken alabaster into silent sacrifice for its full vent ; and inspiration at its height forsakes the word and takes up the work. Signs become more eloquent than speech. To threaten calamity and captivity, with a force for which words had failed, Jeremiah lays a yoke on his shoulder, and Isaiah goes barefoot. To express victory another puts on horns, the symbol of power. To represent the rending of the kingdom, Ahijah rends his garment and gives ten pieces to Jeroboam. In like fashion the events and calamities of the prophet's domestic life

cease to be private, and become prophetic symbols of public affairs, as with Hosea and Isaiah. The cases are numerous enough, and not unfamiliar. We only move along the same path when Mary meets us with her costly spikenard and her tears. We go farther, and find the Saviour Himself kneeling in masterful humility to wash the disciples' feet. And at the end we look into the upper room and behold the Last Supper, the incipient Passion, and the symbolic act in which the burthen of His gathering agony found relief. This was, as has been said, "Christ's last parable." It was a parable translated now from word to deed—a twin parable (as the Lord was used to group His parables in pairs) by the action with the bread and with the wine. The word that constitutes the Church was a deed. *Im Anfang war die That*. The divine Teacher had done His work, and was rising into the divine Doer, the Redeemer. The lesson, taught but unlearned, must now be conveyed by an action which will not fail. The great act of the Cross was impending, of which only another act, and not a word, could be the symbol. The central point, therefore, in the Last Supper is not the symbolism of the elements, but the symbolism of the action. It is on this line only, perhaps, that we can hope for a happy issue from the vast controversies that have gathered here.

The symbolism does not lie in the elements, but in the act. That is the exact point. To remember Him was to "do this," to "take and eat." The stress of the situation falls not on "body," but on "broken"; not on "blood," but on "shed." What was symbolised on the occasion was not a mere manifestation on the cross, but a decisive act there; something not only exhibited, but done. Revelation is Redemption. Wherever our thought wanders from this aspect of the cross, and sees in it only a declaration, or an epiphany, of the love of God, the Sacrament shares in the loss of tone. A theology of mere revelation produces a

Church of mere sympathies. It fails in faith, sanctity and power. And amid a disillusioned world the Church sinks, sweetly vapid and witlessly content, to its amiable, ignoble end.

(1) We note first, then, that it was an action that was to be symbolised. It was the work done for us by Christ—our Redemption. The eternal Christ, who is an everlasting Now, anticipates in the Supper His finished work, and in symbol says "it is done." The value of our Lord's actual flesh and blood was little before God. It was in no symbols of these that the sanctity lay. It is only metaphysical theories that have made them of such account. *The* precious and sacred thing was His holy, God-beloved will and its complete obedience of faith. There is the nerve of personality, there is the seat of sanctity. There the great, eternal, final Redemption transpired. The value of the cross lies in its value as an act of Christ's soul and will. That act was the thing to be symbolised.

(2) It was, therefore, an act which symbolised it: it was not the elements. An act is a spiritual thing. Its truest symbol is another act. The elements are no more than materials to enable the symbolic act to be done, as the body itself is but a finer material in the service of that act. When shall we take it fully home that as the Incarnation was not a physical act in the first place, so neither was the Atonement? The accent falls neither on the physical entrance of Christ into the world in the one case, nor on His physical sufferings of exit in the other. The secret of the Incarnation lies in the personality of Christ, whose centre is the holy Will.

And we may illustrate thus. A spoken word is the symbol of a thought: the visible letters only enable us to convey the symbol. They are not the symbol itself. What the letters are to the word, that the bread and wine are to the Sacrament, *στοιχεῖα*, *litteræ*, *elementa*. What the

word is to the thought, that is the Sacrament to the cross. Only that the Sacrament, as it symbolises not a truth or thought, but an act, is an *acted* word, a deed, the community's response in kind to the act that made a community of it; and being an act, it has a reality in it, symbol though it be, which no material elements could have.

We repeat the word often; the thought is there once for all. The music is performed often: the composer's work stands there as a spiritual totality of achievement, render it as often as you will. We repeat often the symbolic act, but the work of Christ which is rendered in it is done once and for ever. That work, in a true (if guarded) sense, repeats itself in us when we obey in the memorial act. It is misleading to speak of the action in the Sacrament as merely symbolical, and not reiterant at all. It is not symbolical in any sense that would impair its relative reality. As the Romanists, with their false start from the elements, are forced to place under them the Lord's real body, so, starting from the true base of the action, we must own in it the real acting of the ever present Christ, the real operation of His work and cross, the real self-utterance of His undying death. It was the same will, in the same effort, that both died and enacted at the Supper the symbol of His death. And it is the same death which acted backwards, if we may so say, in the *institution* of the Sacrament, and which acts onwards in our *observance* of it. The Last Supper and Gethsemane forefelt and foredid the cross; rehearsed it, if such a word may fitly be applied to anything so absolutely real and so little dramatic in each case. Neither was a mere rehearsal, any more than our observance is, a mere repetition or commemoration. It is the same act and will uttering its fundamental reality in both, in its preludes as in our aftersong.

(3) We have, therefore, really a symbol behind a symbol. The broken bread stands for the broken body; the broken

body stands for the broken, bowed, but invincible will. The ultimate reality is the will's act. The great symbolism and sanctity, therefore, must be sought in the *breaking* of the bread and the *breaking* of the body, and the *partaking*, not in the bread or the body as elements *per se*. The true vehicle and symbol of an act is not an element, but a living body capable of acting. A substance might symbolise a substance, as bread the body. But only an act can symbolise an act, the material act the spiritual. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, but that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit. But every act is a spiritual thing. It is an act that the symbolism ends in, and therefore action is the region it all moves in. The acted symbol, especially at the first supper, is thus more than a symbol. It is part of the reality symbolised. It is the utterance of the same act of will. It was the same will that broke the bread and bowed on the cross. And it did both in the strain and exercise of the one spiritual act that redeemed, the *actus purus* extended through Christ's total personality as its characteristic energy. The symbolism of the occasion, I repeat, lies in the action, not in the elements; and the real presence is the present action of the Saviour's will, not of His substance. It is there not for contemplation or adoration so much as for communion. We all hold to Christ's real presence in Communion; but if it is not in the substance, it must be in the act. The real presence of Christ is not in the elements nor in the air, but it is His act within our faithful act. Christianity means nothing if spirit cannot thus interpenetrate spirit, and act act. It is not on the altar He dwells, but in the common will surrendered and united to Him. It is not in the temple space, but in the community of the obedient Church. This points to a Sacramentalism which is much other than commemoration, and yet is the deathblow to Sacerdotalism. It ends the worship of the elements, and the monopoly by the priest of the consecrat-

ing function of the community. It is the faith of the present community that completes the act. The essence of the Sacrament is the common act of the common indwelling Lord, and the symbolic act ceases to be symbolic merely. It is profoundly real, and therefore alone profoundly religious. Our worship is no more subjective and sentimental, as commemoration must become. It is positive and objective. It is the act of God in its return to God; the Holy Spirit in sublime death returning to God that gave it. Every act of a revealing God is reflex, and is incomplete till it return in congenial response. The finished work includes a Church and a Church's acts.

The action is real on both sides. It is a real assignment of ourselves to Christ crucified; and it is a real assignment by Himself of Christ crucified for us, as I shall shortly show. I quite accept the old illustration given by Dr. Dale, and the validity of its distinction between a surrender of the keys by the governor of a besieged town, and a ceremony in which the forces of the besieger present him with keys emblematic of those he has won or is to win. It is a case of real offering and surrender in the Sacrament, both on our side and on Christ's. It is not dramatic, not ceremonial, not commemorative alone. As Christ *was* God's act of grace, and did not merely announce it, so our central worship is a real offering in return, and not the mere expression of surrender effected somewhere and sometime else. We offer ourselves anew. We utter in a solemn detail and special function the compendious act of consecration, which is the standing and decisive relation of our soul to God in Christ.

(4) But we do more. Such a view is still too subjective; it tends to be too introspective, and ends by being too sentimental. We make a more objective offering. Something in our hands we bring—something not ourselves which makes our righteousness. We bring Christ, and

offer Him far more truly than is done in the Mass. The great hold and power of that rite is due to the objectivity of the offering. This overrules for many a soul its falsity in that which is offered. Well, we do not offer His body and blood, but we do offer Himself and His act of death. We make His *soul* an offering for sin.

Men once offered Him up on the altar of their rage and hate. Man will go on now to offer Him for ever on the altar of his repentance, gratitude, and adoration. We have nothing else to give, and worship is giving. We can but bring to God what He has provided. What is the value of our sin-stained thanks in themselves to Him? What is the worth of our mere emotions, our faltering resolves? The broken, contrite mood is not necessarily the contrite heart which has broken with self and sin. What at least is the value of these things as a return for all that is meant by grace, forgiveness, redemption? We are not worthy even to thank Him but in a worthiness He Himself gives. That worth is Christ in us, in our praises, thanksgivings, Eucharists. It is only Christ in our praises and prayers that makes them worship. This is a truth which may seem to æsthetic, literary, or (most odious of all) stagey piety both narrow and inhumane. And, indeed, to a religion which is in the first place humanist and only sympathetic it must so seem. The sorrow of Christ is the agony of a strait gate. But it is mankind's only avenue to the Kingdom of Heaven; and it is this kingdom, and not Humanity, that is the ideal and principle of Christian faith. And the kingdom of God draws its value from Christ and Christ's death. The prophet was hallowed by the kingdom, but the kingdom is hallowed by the Christ. It is He in us who consecrates any feelings or deeds of ours to God. We have nothing to offer God but Christ and His Cross. It is not our warmth of feeling towards God that makes it welcome to Him, nor our obedience of act, nor our

sincerity of intention. This *is* the work of God to believe in Jesus Christ. It is our warmth, strength, or reality of faith that wings our worship. And faith makes us feel that no penitence, praise, prayer, or sincerity of ours is worth anything to God as worship except in the midst of them there is the Sacrifice of Christ once offered in time, and in the world of spirit continually being offered, especially in the life of souls dead in His death. In all our worship we are but giving Christ back to God. We are making His soul an offering who first offered Himself as God's offering. We are not simply remembering Him, but renewing in our spiritual experience that perpetual experience of His in which by faith we share. Our union with Him aspires to share His spiritual experience to-day, an experience in which the cross of Calvary is surely something much more integral and potent than a reminiscence; while its expression by us is for Him who acts through us surely far more than a memorial. His intercession, as the prolongation of His redeeming act, is surely more than that He—

“ Still remembers in the skies
His tears, His agonies, and cries.”

All this is especially so in partaking of the Sacrament of His death. We are made priests unto God. We take Christ's offered soul in our hands, as it were, and offer Him to God, in no material fashion but in our redeemed experience as wills united with Him. All communicants have not come to realise this height of the matter as yet. They have stages to run, and initiations to undergo. But such is the goal and idea of the Church's Communion. We make His offered soul our soul's offering. We hallow into worship all our subjective experience by His objective work and its real presence. He not only stirs our emotions by His memory, but being in us, mingled with our experi-

ence, He consecrates them and carries them to God. He makes worship of them by creating them, and by incorporating our act with its parent act, with the sole, sufficient, and all-hallowing act of worship ever done to God, namely, His own soul's obedience, agony, victory, and praise. No religious excitement or energy is worship till sanctified thus, either within our knowledge or beyond.

(5) But I would go farther still, and say that in the Sacrament we have a real offering from Christ's part also. We can never, never hold against the sacerdotal churches till we are sacramentarian enough in our worship to go beyond them in the reality of the offering by exceeding them in its truth. We must offer, as I have said, not ourselves only to Christ, but Christ Himself to God. But also, going farther, we must furnish opportunity for Christ's renewed offering of Himself through us to the world. We have to do more than announce His gospel. We must transmit it. We have not only to preach Him, but give Him effect. We cannot redeem men to God, but we can do much to reconcile. That is a great sacramental function. It is Christ acting through His Church on the world. And with most Christians and many churches life is so little sacramental in its tone and reconciling in its effects because we are so far below the sacramental in our central worship. Our weakness before Rome and all that is Romeward lies in the poverty and subjectivity of our sacramental faith. Our churches are not in earnest with a sacramental view of life because we are nervous about a sacramental view of worship. We are more afraid of the priest than sure of the Presence. Mere protest is conducting us through Zwinglian attenuation to Socinian negation. We do not act in worship or life as if we were men in whom Christ crucified is offering Himself to the world, through the Church as its hope. We turn often from the sacraments with an impatience so rugged that it is more self-willed than honest,

and we say we will not observe them but live them. And certainly we succeed so far as that our living of them is without observation.

The Communion is an act of the Church moved by Christ in its midst. But if He is present in the act to which He inspires His Church, then He is acting by His Church, He is doing something. And on such an occasion that something can only be in some real sense the act of the Cross. The Cross is the central energy of His spiritual world, the focus of all the influences that constitute the kingdom of God. It is the real point of departure for the Holy Spirit, even if the resurrection was the point of emergence, and Pentecost the point of attachment for the Church. In such an act of the Church, therefore, Christ is in a real sense offering Himself. He is at least offering Himself continuously to the world as the Crucified, who was once, but for ever, offered for it. The Sacrament is always some real function of His Sacrifice—that is, of Himself in sacrifice, and not simply of us in response. It is a great act of preaching by the Church, which is the hierophant of an undying inspiration. It is practical preaching in the great sense of the term—which (as I have said) is not, in the day's phrase, preaching "conduct," but preaching by a great act, by a word which is really a deed, as the gospel word in its essence is. We do not repeat His Sacrifice as the Mass professes to do, but we do re-echo it in the only way an act can be re-echoed—by another act in which the initial act returns upon itself in kind as a real act of spiritual will, and not of institutional ritual. The priest *offers* a real sacrifice in each Mass. We in each Communion but *proffer* the real sacrifice offered once and always by Christ alone. But it is His offering all the same that is the active and efficient element in our proffering. His action is our real presence and power. We are not mere participants but factors in

the mighty act. It is by an act which is ours, but also and still more, Christ's own act in us. It is the living Christ re-asserting by act, through the Church which His death made, that one unique, infinite, sufficient death, never to be repeated even by Him, yet never to cease acting and reproducing itself in our will and deed. His death is, in our act as a Church, not simply recalled, not simply related, not simply witnessed to by us, as a report of old, forgotten, far-off things. To show forth the Lord's death, is, in a sense we are too timid about grasping, to re-enact it, to let it re-present itself in us as real action within real action, a real presence in real effect where the last reality lies—in the spiritual will. It is an act and energy of Christ Himself if He be His Church's life, if the outgoing focus of His life in the redeemed community be the act of redemption, and if the ingathered focus of our worship be the rite in which we act purely and only as souls redeemed. It is a function of Christ's ever vibrating act of present, undying death ever offered through the Church in the heart's region of spiritual reality to the soul, to the world, and to God.

The acting subject in the Sacrament, then, is first, Christ, and, second, the Church. "It is God that baptizes us," says the Apology for the Augsburg Confession, "and the minister only in His name." And the like applies to the real agent in the other Sacrament. But the Church acts as a community of individual believers. And on the part of each soul there is action which, symbolic as it is, is not prophetic or predicative, as the act of the community is, but appropriative. In the act of consuming the elements there is a symbol of that union between the person of Christ and the believer which is the soul of Christian faith. And it is a symbol which is not mere symbol, but such a function of loving union that in the act of commerce the reality is consummated and deepened. Here, again, it is

not so much the elements that are symbolic but the act. It is not the substances that meet—the spiritual substance of Christ under the elements and the spiritual substance of our soul. Such an idea is really materialist, however refined. It turns sacramental grace into something that can be infused in a sense too literal for spiritual safety. It opens the way to believe in an infusion of grace which incorporates it with our nature in a sub-conscious region independent of any intelligent spiritual activity of ours. The mysticism then becomes magic. We are transmuted without being converted, consecrated without being sanctified. It is not thus that grace works. It is not the Saviour's corporeity that is conveyed, however glorified. It is His Person and work acting from the eternal world on our person in its responsive work and receptive energy. Spirit with spirit meets, life with life. His flesh means His personality, His blood its distinctive native energy, namely, His redeeming work. It is on these we feed. His spirit and energy pass into ours in conscious communion. What meets is here again two wills in an act, two personalities in blended function. We may call this union mystic if we will, but it has none of the dangers of a mysticism conceived as the blending of two substances, however ethereal. It is intelligent, interpersonal, not fusion but interpenetration, the union of two moral beings in an act which is none the less a moral act that it transcends the limits of such a term. It is spiritual in the sense in which only beings of a moral nature destined for love and trust can be spiritual. It has the spirituality possible only to living persons. We appropriate Christ in the Sacrament, therefore, in no other way or measure than as we appropriate the gospel, the work of Christ for the conscience and on the conscience. The Sacrament of the word is the key to each Christian Sacrament. They exist for the sake of the word of the gospel. They have value according to the extent to which

they are charged with that and give it effect. And what the Lord's Supper conveys is not only the word made flesh, but still more made sin for us, the word as a living, acting, redeeming personality, in contact with our faith. What it effects is this union with the like personality in those who partake, who are forgiven, and who become the righteousness of God in Him.

It is the gospel which interprets the Sacraments, not the Sacraments the gospel. That is the grand principle of a Protestant sacramentarianism. The Sacraments depend on our idea of Redemption, on our kind of faith.

If we thus fix our symbolism on the proper point, and find it in the act rather than the elements, we gain two things. We transcend the jejune idea of a mere commemoration, upon which no Church can live, however a school, sect, or society may perpetuate it. And we escape from the evil sacramentalism which historically goes hand in hand with priestly prerogative, and which philosophically materialises heavenly things by spiritual ideas really drawn from the qualities of substance. It is impossible in course of time to escape the dangers of either extreme. Commemoration dries into lean Socinianism and a piety of parched commonsense. And the veiled materialism of the Mass appears in the general soul as a paganism and superstition which are a correct translation of the false sense underlying all.

A profound sacramentalism is the only exit from a false sacerdotalism.

And the writer cannot veil his conviction that much objection to it is more polemical than positive, more protesting than informed, and that it proceeds, in many pious cases, not from spiritual freedom, volume, or vitality, but from the autodidact's lack of spiritual depth, seriousness, and sequacity of thought.

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