THE NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CEREMONY OF SACRIFICE, ACCORDING TO HUBERT AND MAUSS.[1]

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The sacrificial ceremony has long been recognized by anthropologists and students of the history of religion to be a basic one in the evolution of religious rites. There have been a number of theories offered to account for the origin and purpose of this significant rite. E. B. Tylor traced its evolution through the piacular, homage and renunciation stages. Robertson Smith distinguished the honorific, piacular, sacramental and communion rites in sacrifice. Frazer held that sacrifice was designed as a group defence-mechanism against the disasters of death, and as a symbolic aid to the spirit of fertility. Marillier traced the development of sacrifice through the stages of magic rite, piacular sacrifice and communion sacrifice. Westermarck recognized in sacrifice the substitution by man of a non-human victim designed to save man from death, and also the function of the scape-goat to whom, in sacrifice, a curse upon the group had been transferred. While all of these attempts to explain the sacrifice possess some degree of validity, they were scarcely in full accord with the modern dynamic theory of religion and its evolution, based on the concept of *mana* and the sacred, which was postulated by Codrington and elaborated and confirmed by Marett. In the following theory of Hubert and Mauss we have the first thorough effort to explain the phenomena associated with sacrifice in terms of the newer developments in the history of religion. Aside from any theoretical significance, the essay possesses great importance for its lucid and penetrating description of the rite and its execution. It is one of the classic products of the Durkheim School.

[1] Translated from the *Mélanges d'Histoire des Religions*. Par H. Hubert et M. Mauss. Paris, Alcan, 1909.

I. Sacrifice: The General Nature and Significance

WE PROPOSE to define the nature and social function of sacrifice. Our work has already been prepared for us by the researches of Tylor, Robertson, Smith, and Frazer. Other studies, however, allow for a different and more comprehensive theory than theirs. Our theory is only a provisional hypothesis; new facts may cause modification in future, for the subject is vast and complicated.

Theories of sacrifice are as old as religions, but only those of recent years have a scientific color. The English school of anthropologists is responsible for these scientific theories. The first is that of Tylor: according to him, sacrifice is originally a gift, given by the savage to a supernatural being in order to bring favor upon him. When the gods expanded and became more distant, the necessity of continuing to transmit to them this gift gave birth to sacrificial rites, designed to convey the things spiritualized to the spiritual beings.

Next came sacrifice in the form of homage, the sacrificer not expecting anything in return. Thence there was only one step to sacrifice or self-abnegation and renunciation; the evolution lay in the change from the presents to the sacrificer himself as the thing offered.

If Tylor's foregoing theory described the phases of the moral development of the phenomenon, it did not explain its mechanism. It only reproduced in a definite language the old popular conceptions. Without a doubt, it was partially true historically. It is certain that sacrifices were generally in some degree gifts conferring upon the faithful certain claims upon their gods. They also served to nourish the gods. But it was not sufficient merely to establish the fact; it was necessary to give an explanation.

Robertson Smith was the first one to attempt a rationalized explanation of sacrifice. He was inspired by the recent discovery of totemism. Just as the organization of the totemic clan had explained for him the Arabian and Semitic families, so he sought in the practices of the totemic cult the antecedents of sacrifice. In

totemism, the totem or god is the father of his worshippers; they are of the same flesh as he and the purpose of the rite is to guarantee this common life. If need be, it re-establishes unity. Alliance by blood and the common meal are the simplest means of attaining this result. In the common meal, the sacrificers are assimilated into the totem and the totem is assimilated in them. From communal sacrifice Smith derived expiatory or piacular and honorific sacrifices. Expiation consists in the re-establishment of the broken alliance—totemic sacrifice had all the traces of an expiatory rite. Smith finds this virtue in all sacrifices, even after the disappearance of totemism.

It remains to explain why the victim, originally divided up and eaten by the faithful, was generally completely destroyed in the piacular sacrifice. The fact is, from the time when the ancient totems were supplanted by domestic animals in the cults of pastoral peoples, they figured very rarely in sacrifices and only under grave circumstances. As a result, they appeared too sacred to be touched by profane hands; only the priests ate them, or else they were done away with.

In this case, the extreme sanctity of the victim was finally turned into impurity. On the other hand, when the kinship between men and animals ceased to be intelligible to the Semites, human sacrifice replaced the animal, for it was henceforward the only way of establishing a direct exchange of blood between the clan and the god. But then, the ideas and customs which protected the life of individuals in society by proscribing anthropophagy, caused the sacrificial meal to fall into disuse.

On the other hand, the sacred character of domestic animals, profaned daily by the nurture of man, gradually relapsed. Divinity detached itself from its animal forms. The victim, in drawing away from the god, approached man, owner of the flock. Then arose the custom of representing the offering made from the flock as a gift from man to the gods, and thus gift sacrifice took birth.

To Smith's researches the works of Fraser and Jevons are allied. With a little more caution about certain points, the latter's theories are generally the theological exaggeration of Smith's doctrine. While Fraser does not accept the totemic hypothesis, he adds an important development. The explanation of the sacrifice of the god had been rudimentary with Smith. Without misjudging its naturalistic character, he made it out to be a piacular sacrifice of a superior kind. The ancient idea of the kinship of the totemic victim and the gods survived to justify the animal sacrifices:

they communicated and re-enforced a drama in which the god was the victim. Fraser recognized the similarity existing between these sacrificed gods and the rural demons of Manhardt ("Cult of Forest and Field," *Studies in Mythology*).

The totemic sacrifice and the ritualistic murder of the spirits of the vegetable world were brought together; he showed how from the sacrifice and the communal feast came the agrarian sacrifice in which, in order to be allied to the gods of the field at the close of his animal life, the victim was killed and eaten. He establishes at the same time the fact that often the old god thus sacrificed appeared, perhaps on account of the tabooes with which he was charged, to carry away with him sickness, death, sin, and play the part of the scapegoat. But although the idea of expulsion was pronounced in these sacrifices, the expiation appeared to come out of the communion. Fraser proposed to complete Smith's theory rather than to dispute it.

The great fault of this system is the attempt to bring together multifarious forms of sacrifice under one arbitrary principle of unity. In the first place, the universality of totemism, the point of departure of the whole theory, is a postulate. Totemism in its pure state appeared only in the less numerous tribes of Australia and America. Besides it is hard to find sacrifices properly totemic. Fraser himself has recognized that often the victim was that of an agrarian sacrifice. In other cases, the assumed totems are the representatives of a species of animals upon which the life of the tribe depends, whether they be domesticated, likeable animals or particularly wild ones. In any case, a minute description of a certain number of these ceremonies would be necessary and that is precisely what is lacking.

But let us assume that the hypothesis of the universality of totemism is true, however doubtful that is. The delicate point of the doctrine is the historical succession and logical derivation that Smith pretends to establish between communal sacrifice and other types of sacrifice. Nothing is more doubtful. All attempts at a comparative chronology of the Arabian, Hebraic and other sacrifices, which he studied, are fatal. The facts of history and ethnography show that the piacular sacrifice existed side by side with the communal sacrifice.

Besides, this vague term of piacular sacrifice permits Smith to describe under the same title and in the same terms purifications, propitiations and expiations, and it is this confusion which prevents

him from analyzing expiatory sacrifice. These sacrifices were generally followed by a reconciliation with the god; a sacrificial meal, a sprinkling of blood, an anointment re-established the alliance. Only, according to Smith, it is in these communal rites themselves that the purifying virtues of these types of sacrifice reside; the idea of expiation is thereby absorbed in the idea of communion. Without a doubt, he establishes, in some extreme or simple forms, something which he does not dare connect up with communion: a sort of exorcism, expulsion of a bad character. But according to him these are magical processes which have nothing of the sacrificial about them and he explains with much erudition and ingenuity their (tardy) introduction into the mechanism of sacrifice. It is precisely that which we cannot grant. One of the purposes of this work is to show that the elimination of a (sacred) character, pure or impure, is a primitive mechanism of sacrifice, as primitive and as irreducible as communion. If the sacrificial system has a principle of unity, it must be sought elsewhere.

Smith's error has been especially an error of method. Instead of analyzing in its original complexity the system of the Semitic ritual, he has rather engaged himself to group the facts geneologically according to the points of analogy which he thought he perceived among them. We do not wish to compile an encyclopaedia which would be impossible for us to make complete and which, coming after those of the English anthropologists, would be useless. We shall try to study typical facts. These facts we shall borrow particularly from Sanskrit texts and from the Bible.

We are far from having documents of the same value for the Greek and Roman sacrifices. We can only build up a separate ritual on the sparse evidence furnished by inscriptions and authors. On the contrary, in the Bible and in the *Hindu* texts we have a body of doctrines which belong to a determined period, the document is direct, edited by its actors themselves, in their language, and in the same spirit in which they accomplished the rites.

Doubtless, when it is a question of distinguishing between the simple and elementary features of an institution, it is unfortunate to take as a starting point rituals which have been probably deformed by a learned theology. But with this species of facts, all research purely historical is vain. The antiquity of texts or of reported facts, the relative barbarism of peoples, the apparent simplicity of rites, are deceiving chronological indexes. It is useless to search in verses of the Iliad for an image approximating the sacrifice of

the primitive Greeks—they do not suffice even to give an exact idea of the sacrifice in Homeric times. We gain a picture of ancient rites only through literary documents, vague and incomplete and falsified. Neither can one expect much from ethnography except by facts generally warped by hasty observation or made false by the preciseness of our languages.

We do not propose a history and genesis of sacrifice. Neither will we refrain from the use of classical texts or of ethnography to enlighten our analyses and to govern the generality of our conclusions. Instead of concentrating our study on a group of artificially formed facts, we shall have in the definite and complete rituals which we shall study natural systems of rites which project themselves for observation. Thus constrained by the texts, we shall be less exposed to omissions and artificial classifications. Since the two religions are different, one verging on monotheism, the other on pantheism, it is hoped by comparing them that some general conclusions might be aimed at.

The word "sacrifice" suggests immediately the idea of consecration and one might be led to believe that the two notions blend. It is certain that the sacrifice always implies a consecration: in all sacrifice an object passes from the common domain into the religious; it has become consecrated. But all consecrations are not the same. There are some which expend their effects on the consecrated object, whatever it may be, man or thing. That is the case with unction. Is a king made sacred? Only the religious personality of the king is modified; outside of that, nothing is changed. In sacrifice, on the contrary, the consecration goes out beyond the thing consecrated; it reaches among others the person who stands the expenses of the ceremony. The faithful one who furnished the victim, the object of consecration, is not at the conclusion of the operation what he was at the beginning. He has acquired a religious character which he did not have, or he has got rid of an unfavorable character with which he was afflicted. He has risen to a state of grace, or he has come out of a state of sin.

By the sacrificer, we mean the subject that receives the benefits of the sacrifice or submits to its effects. This subject is now an individual and now a group: family, clan, tribe, nation, secret society. When it is a group, it comes about that the group fills collectively the office of sacrificer; that is to say, it takes part in the ceremony. This is true particularly in the case of sacrifices truly totemic and of those where the group fills the role of sacrificer: kill-

ing, tearing and devouring the victim—sometimes it delegates one of its members to act in its place. Thus, it comes about that the family is generally represented by its head, society by its magistrates.

There are cases where the radiation of the sacrificial consecration does not make itself directly felt in the sacrificer himself, but in certain things which belong more or less to his person. In the sacrifice which takes place previous to the construction of a house, it is the house which is affected, and the quality which it has thus acquired may survive in its actual owner. In other cases, it is the fields of the sacrificer, the river which he must cross, the sermon which he preaches, the alliance he concludes, etc. We shall call the objects of sacrifice those sorts of things by reason of which the sacrifice takes place. The sacrificer himself is affected by his very presence at the sacrifice. The radiating action of the sacrifice is here particularly felt; for it produces a double effect: one on the object for which it is offered and on which it is intended to act, the other on the person who desires and provokes that effect. Sometimes it is efficacious only on condition that it has this double result.

We can see what is the distinctive trait of consecration in the sacrifice; it is that the consecrated thing serves as intermediary between the sacrificer, or the object which is to receive the useful effects of the sacrifice, and the divinity to whom the sacrifice is generally addressed. The man and the god are not in immediate contact. Thereby sacrifice is distinct from most of those facts designated by the name of *alliance through blood* whereby, through an exchange of blood, a direct fusion of the human and the divine lives is produced. There are also certain cases of offerings where the subject who sacrifices is in direct communication with the god. Doubtless there are points of connection between these rites and sacrifice; they must, however, be distinguished.

But this first characteristic is not sufficient, for it does not allow for a distinction between sacrifice and those poorly defined acts which are called offerings. Indeed, there is no offering where the consecrated object is not interposed equally between the god and the one offering and where the latter is not affected by the consecration. But if all sacrifice is, indeed, an offering, there are different kinds of offerings. In some offerings, the objects offered are not destroyed; in others, the offered objects are destroyed, e. g., animals. It is evidently for offerings of the latter type that we ought to reserve the name of sacrifice.

Under these conditions one ought to designate as sacrifice all offerings, even of vegetables, whenever the thing offered or a part of the thing offered, is destroyed, although usage seems to reserve the word sacrifice to describe bloody sacrifices only. It is arbitrary to thus restrain the meaning of the word. All things being equal, the mechanism of the consecration is the same in all cases; there is no reason for making a distinction between them. Thus the minha is an offering of flour and cakes; it accompanies certain sacrifices. The same rites are observed. A portion is destroyed in the fire on the altar; the rest is eaten in whole or in part by the priests. In Greece, certain gods admitted to their altars vegetable offerings only there were no animal sacrifices at all. As much can be said of libations of milk, wine or any other liquid. In Greece, these are subject to the same distinctions as sacrifices; sometimes they take the place of them. The identity of these different operations was so often felt by the Hindus that the objects offered in these different cases were identified with each other. They were all equally considered as living and treated as such. Thus when the grains were being crushed during a sacrifice that was sufficiently solemn, they were exhorted not to avenge themselves on the sacrificer for the injury that was done them. When the cakes were put on the potsherds to be baked, they were entreated not to break; when they were cut, they were implored not to hurt the sacrificer and the priests. When a libation of milk was made (and all Hindu offerings were made with milk or one of its products) it was not something inanimate which was offered, it was the cow herself.

Thus we come in the end to the following formula: The sacrifice is a religious act which, through the consecration of a victim, modifies the condition of the person who accomplishes it or the condition of certain objects which said person is interested in.

For the sake of brevity, we shall designate as personal sacrifices those where the personality of the sacrificer is directly affected by the sacrifice, and objective sacrifices those where the objects, real or ideal, receive directly the sacrificial action.

This definition limits not only the object of our research, it fixes for us a very important point; it supposes, indeed, the generic unity of sacrifices. When we criticized Smith for reducing expiatory sacrifice to communal sacrifice, we did not intend to establish the original and irreducible diversity of sacrificial systems. The fact is that their unity is not such as he pictured it. But this first result appears contradictory to the infinite variety which the forms of sac-

rifice seem to present. The occasions of sacrifice are numerous, the effects desired are very different and the multiplicity of ends implicates that of the means. The Germans have taken a particular fancy to arranging sacrifices in a certain number of distinct categories like expiatory, votive, etc. But these categories are indefinite. We shall not make use of any classifications currently employed—in our opinion they do not result from a methodical research. We shall borrow one of the classifications given in the Hindu text.

Perhaps the most instructive one is that which divides sacrifices into the constant and the occasional. The occasional sacrifices are first of all the sacramental sacrifices, that is to say, those which accompany the solemn moments of life, usually of a domestic nature; birth, marriage, etc. Others are concerned with the unction of the king, and the conferring of religious and civil quality which was considered superior to all others. In the second place, there are votive sacrifices, in which the character of the occasional is more marked; finally, there are curative and expiatory sacrifices.

Constant or periodical sacrifices are attached to certain fixed moments, independent of man's will and circumstances. Such are the daily sacrifice, the sacrifice of the new and the full moon, the sacrifices of seasonal and pastoral festivals, first fruits.

One can see on how many different occasions the Brahmins made use of sacrifices. But at the same time they comprehended the unity of them all. Nearly all the texts of the solemn ritual have the same order: the exposition of a fundamental ritual, which they diversify progressively to make it respond to different needs; seasonal celebrations; offerings to the new and full moon, votive sacrifices (offerings of cakes figure in all of them). The same flexibility is found in animal sacrifices. They are isolated or combined with others in most diverse cases: periodical nature festivals and domestic sacrifices.

The Hebrew ritual furnishes no less striking examples of the complexity of the rites and the identity of their elements. The book of Leviticus reduces all sacrifices to four fundamental forms: ola, hattat, shelamim, minha. The hattat was the sacrifice which served particularly to expiate the sin which is described in Leviticus, iv., 2, unfortunately vague:

"And the Lord spoke unto Moses and said: 'Speak unto the children of Israel and say to them: If anyone unintentionally sins against any of the commandments of the Lord, in which something is forbidden, and thereby does something which is forbidden." . . .

The Shelamim is a communal sacrifice, votive sacrifice, alliance, vow. The other two terms are descriptive. Each of them refers to one of the particular operations of the sacrifice: the second, to the presentation of the victim, when it is a vegetable; the first, to despatch of the offering to the divinity.

This simplification of sacrificial systems is doubtless the result of a classification which is too arbitrary to serve as the basis of a general study of sacrifice. But the four typical forms are not real types of sacrifice, but rather kinds of abstract elements where one of the organs of sacrifice is particularly developed and can always enter into more complex forms. Sacrifice for the purification of lepers harmonizes with rites analogous to those of the consecration of the priest. Here are two sacrifices, one expiatory and the other communal, which border on similar rites. Even these two irreducible ideas of expiation and of communion, of the communication of a sacred character or the expulsion of a contrary character, cannot furnish the basis for a general and vigorous classification of sacrifices. Perhaps we would search in vain for examples of expiatory sacrifice where no element of the communal would slip in, and vice versa.

The same ambiguity is found in the elementary sacrifices of the pentateuch. The *Zebah shelamim* is a communal sacrifice; however, certain parts of the victim (blood, fat) are always reserved or destroyed. One member is always eaten by the priests. The victim of the hattat may be delegated entirely to the priests; the sacrificer lacking, the participants eat in common. In the hattat, celebrated for the consecration or the purification of the temples or of the altar; the blood of the victim serves to anoint the doors and walls. This gives them consecration.

These examples show what an affinity is presented by practices which by the nature of their object and of their results seem to be the most opposite. There is continuity between the forms of sacrifice. They are at once too diverse and too similar to make it possible to divide them into groups very accurately labeled.

II. The Program of Sacrifice

The Entrance.

We cannot think of sketching here an abstract scheme of sacrifice complete enough to cover all known cases; the variety of facts is too large. All that can possibly be done is to study determined forms of sacrifice complex enough for all the important moments of the drama to be united, and known well enough for a precise analysis to be made. The sacrifice which seems to respond best to this condition is the Vedic Hindu animal sacrifice. We do not know of any whose details are better explained. All the characters presented to us from the time of their introduction to their leaving the ceremony.

Sacrifice is a religious act which can only be accomplished in a religious atmosphere, and through the intermediary of agents essentially religious.

Now, in general, before the ceremony neither the sacrifiant nor the sacrificatur, nor the place, nor the instruments, nor the victim, have this religious character in the necessary degree. The object of the first phase of the sacrifice is to give it to them. Rites which introduce them into the sacred world and affect them more or less profoundly, according to the importance of the part they will then play, are necessary.

The Sacrificer-(sacrifiant).

Let us take as an example an extreme case which does not belong in the ritual of ordinary animal sacrifice but in which the common rites are exaggerated, and for this reason more easily observable. It is that of the diksa, that is to say, of the preparation of the sacrificer for the sacrifice of the soma: plant sacrifice.

As soon as the priests are chosen, a whole series of symbolic ceremonies begin, progressively despoiling the sacrificer of the temporal being which he has, and causing his rebirth into an entirely new species. All that concerns the gods must be divine; the sacrificer is obliged to become god himself in order to be in a position to

act upon them. For this purpose they build him a special hut, all closed in, for the diksita is a god and the society of gods is separated from that of men. He is shaved, his nails are cut (but in the way the nails of the gods are cut; that is to say, in the inverse order to that which men usually follow). This rite, which is found expanded in most religions, is excellently interpreted in the Hindu texts: the hair, eyebrows, beard, the nails of hands and feet are the impure dead parts of the body. They are cut off in order to confer purity. After taking a purifying bath, he puts on clothes of new linen indicating thereby that he is going to begin a new existence. Then after different unctions, he is covered with a black antelope skin. It is the solemn moment when the new spirit is awakened in him. He has become an embryo. He veils his head and closes his fists, for the embryo in its development has closed fists; he comes and goes around the fireplace just as the embryo moves in the womb. He stays in this condition until the grand ceremony of the introduction of the soma. Then he opens his hands and takes off the veil. He is now born into a divine existence, he is god. (The term *soma* is untranslatable, for it means at one and the same time the plant victim, the god which the sacrifice concerns, and the sacrificial god.)

But this divine nature once proclaimed confers upon the sacrificer the rights and imposes upon him the duties, of a god, not those of a saint. He must not have relations with men of impure castes, nor with women; he answers no questions; he is not touched. He takes only milk for nourishment. And this existence lasts for many months until his body has become *diaphonous*. Then, as if having sacrificed his old body, having reached the last degree of nervous excitation, he is ready to sacrifice and the ceremonies begin.

It is true that this complicated initiation extending over a long period of time and required for ceremonies particularly solemn, is only an exaggeration. But it is found, though in less exaggerated forms, in the rites preparatory to the ordinary animal sacrifice. In this case it is not necessary that the sacrificer be deified; but he must always be made sacred. That is why, in this case, too, he shaves, bathes, abstains from sexual intercourse, fasts, watches, etc. In rites more simple still, the sacrificer becomes pure by cleansing his mouth, the water being pure.

These rites are not peculiar to the Hindus; the Semitic world, Greece and Rome furnish us examples of them. A certain degree of kinship is at first required of those who wish to be admitted to

the sacrifice. Thus the stranger is generally excluded; also, courtisans, slaves, often women. Besides, momentary purity is required. The approach to divinity is doubtful to whoever is not pure; the people must wash. The sacrifice is preceded by acts of purification more or less long in duration, consisting principally in sprinklings of water and in baths; sometimes the sacrificer must fast and be cleansed. He must put on his own clothes again, or even special clothes which give him the beginnings of sanctity. The Roman ritual prescribed the use of a veil, the sign of separation and consecration. The crown which the sacrificer wore on his head as he dispersed bad influences marked him with a sacred character. The sacrificer completed his toilet sometimes by shaving his head and eyebrows. All these purifications, sprinklings, consecrations prepared the profane one for the sacred act by eliminating from his body the vices of his lax character, by drawing him from the vulgar life, and by introducing him step by step into the sacred world of the gods.

(To be continued.)